

OBITUARY

ANNE GEDDES GILCHRIST

(December 8th, 1863–July 24th, 1954)

The deliberate collection of folk song in England, viewed historically, can be seen as falling into two parts, the 75 years prior to the foundation of the Folk-Song Society, when the animated interest in the life of our forefathers was sporadically combined with an interest in the music of the past, and the period overlapping it, of concern with “the folk” and with folk music as an art *sui generis*. In the overlapping years, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the two interests can be seen combined in the numbers of collectors who were serious without being professional, objective rather than romantic, and who sought to unite rather than to divorce the library and the field.

Of these none excelled Anne Gilchrist, who, born of a family whose distinguished talents inclined to music and painting, of Lancashire up-bringing and Scottish descent, turned her sound musical education towards the study of melody for its own sake, so that in the course of a very long life she acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of tunes, their variant forms, their occasions and associations, and the whereabouts of their record in field-notes, manuscript and print. In this she was undoubtedly furthered by the similar interests of Frank Kidson with whom, and with the niece who survived him, she maintained a friendship, a correspondence, and an exchange of material mutually annotated until 1948. And it was probably at his instance that she entered the Folk-Song Society in 1905 and began her renowned association with its *Journal*.

Her comparative study of tunes was not, however, confined to England and the Scottish Lowlands. With Miss Broadwood she edited and annotated Miss Tolmie’s collection of tunes and Gaelic songs from the Western Islands,* and the Manx collections of Dr. John Clague,† and she assisted in the editing of the Bunting collections for the *Journal* of the Irish Folk Song Society. Her acquaintance with sacred and secular *contrafacta* and her generosity to all correspondents of like interests gained for her many friends in the Continent of America.

How wide was her circle of correspondents, how manifold her interests (she was an active member of numerous national and local archaeological societies) may not be revealed until the bequest of her books and papers to the English Folk Dance and Song Society has been examined. But her many correspondents and, above all, those who were privileged to have some personal acquaintance cannot but recall with gratitude and affection the light wearing of her learning, the unfailing interest and vitality, the integrity and humanity and the humorous gratification with which she regarded her public honours—admission as Fellow to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1935 and appointment to the Order of the British Empire “for services to folk music and folk song” in 1948.

MARGARET DEAN-SMITH.

OLIVE DAME CAMPBELL

(1882–1954)

In America there has been no greater force in restoring the love, knowledge and practice of folk song in a healthy and natural atmosphere than the John C. Campbell Folk School at Brasstown, North Carolina, founded in 1925 by Olive Dame Campbell. For over a quarter of a century the school has included in its diversified programme, designed, in the phrase of the Danish Bishop Grundtvig, for “the enlightening and enlivening” of country life, the collecting, teaching, and especially the practice of folk song and dance. Never academic in pointing out its values, Mrs. Campbell gave to everyone who knew her in the Southern Appalachians a sense of her own keen pleasure, her taste, and her expert critical ability, thus communicating everywhere a love of folk song in its proper proportions.

* *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, 16 (1911).

† *Ibid.*, 28–30 (1924–6).

Olive Campbell came to this seasoned artistic wisdom in the best way: as amateur collector, then as scholar, and finally—a happiness given to few—as the central figure in a community where folk music was a part of the philosophy of rural education, which builds on inherited culture. No empty sentiment lay behind her choice of the school motto, “I sing behind the plough.” The story of her part in the recovery of American folk song is well known: how she began to collect casually, as her husband’s companion on his trips to mountain schools (he was for ten years Director of the Southern Highland Division of the Russell Sage Foundation); how she became increasingly aware of what should and could be done by the right editor; how her interview with Cecil Sharp led him to work in the Appalachians, and how, as the result of most happy collaboration, her name appears with his on the title page of *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917).

But to-day, although we talk about Mrs. Campbell’s tangible accomplishments—her long direction of the folk school, her publishing, her directorships and committees, her founding of the Southern Handicraft Guild and her development from infant to major proportions of the Council of Southern Mountain Workers, we know that they are not enough to explain her influence. It is to her person that we pay tribute. We remember, through countless contacts, our dependence upon her wisdom, our confidence in her judgment and common sense, our admiration of her courage, our enjoyment of her humour. We remember her unflinching appreciation of whatever troubled or interested us. We sorrow that we shall not meet her again, but we know that we have been most truly enlightened and enlivened by knowing her.

E. K. W.

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER

(1901–1953)

The death of Ruth Crawford Seeger at 52, in November, 1953, interrupted a career of unique fertility.

As a young woman in Chicago and New York, Ruth Crawford established easily the most distinguished reputation among the few women in the United States who have been composers of fine-art music, and she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for musical composition, among other honours. After her marriage to Charles Seeger, who had been her teacher in New York, she joined him in his efforts to bridge the gap between traditional American country music and American composers.

Mrs. Seeger’s attention was first called to folk song and the problems of relating it to conventional music when, about 1925, Carl Sandburg invited her to join other young composers in the Middle West in writing piano accompaniments for the folk songs he was publishing in *The American Songbag*. She did four of these, but later felt she had gone at them in the wrong way for lack of familiarity with the traditions out of which they grew. This lack her subsequent work as music editor for several of the Lomax folk song collections was to remedy: she transcribed thousands of authentic field recordings during the 1930s, playing and replaying some of them a hundred times. She met the problems of folk song notation by pointing out that *all* music notation is imperfect, and so more than one compromise between the eye and the ear is possible, each legitimate in its way. This is illustrated in her series of transcriptions for the old shaped-note hymn “Amazing Grace” (interleaved with George Pullen Jackson’s book *White and Negro Spirituals*).

The instant attraction that the songs she was transcribing had for her own children and their friends, and the children’s urgent demands for more such songs to sing, gave Mrs. Seeger new confidence in the appeal of authentic folk song and turned her energies to the problem of circulating it outside its generating environment. After some years of experiment with school groups in the use of folk song, she devised a fresh manner of presenting her material in print, one that does not change nor obscure the significant character and beauty of the musical vernacular and yet is acceptable to teachers to whom our authentic native traditions are unfamiliar. Her wealth of creative suggestion for making folk song part of children’s lives, and her contagious delight in the musical variety