

THE P. J. THOMAS COLLECTION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA FOLK SONGS

JON BARTLETT

The P. J. Thomas Collection is now deposited in the Oral History Division of the Public Archives of British Columbia in Victoria. The following will serve as a brief introduction to its contents.

At the present time the collection consists of some 499 items recorded on seventy 600 ft. tapes at 7½ ips. for a total duration of some 18½ hours; a transcription of each item; and a set of index cards bearing the name and location of the informant, the date collected, the title of the item, and the first line of text, together with the item number and a type classification.

The great majority of the items are songs, the rest being interviews (sometimes broken into two items for ease of handling), musical pieces without words, and short recitations. Each song has its own item number (except in two cases, where the song is immediately repeated by the informant in a variant form).

The type classification does not follow any standard classification system, but strives to be internally consistent. The classifications and the number of items by which each is represented are as follows:

Song Type	Description	No. of Items
1.(a)	Traditional Child ballads	3
(b)	Traditional broadsides and songs	23
2.	Occupational songs	
(a)	Logging	28
(b)	Mining	27
(c)	Sea and Fishing	28
(d)	Farming, ranching, and cowboy	27
(e)	Transportation	14
(f)	Settling, frontier, and migrant/hobo	19
(g)	Other	3
		<hr/>
		146
3.	Socio-political and union	146
4.	Religious	68
5.	Children's songs and skipping rhymes	5
6.	Songs of place	47
7.	Armed services	18
8.	Folk lyric, including some non-folk in oral tradition	13
9.	Folk lyric, including some non-folk in oral tradition	46
10.	Humorous and bawdy	60
11.	Other (toasts, squibs, shouts, fragments, and oral recitations)	26
12.	Music only	25
	Introductions and interviews	19
		<hr/>
		499

Types 2, 3, 6, and 7 call for some further comment. Song-types 2(a), (b), and (c) reflect the major industries and occupations of British Columbia. They are often modelled after older songs, frequently "pop" songs of the 1890-1920 period. As Phil Thomas observed in last year's *Journal*, Tin Pan Alley's "Where the River Shannon Flows" spawned Joe Hill's parody about the Fraser River, which itself gave birth to variants for the Skeena and Lardeau rivers. The local parody of "When You Wore a Tulip" (known on both sides of the border), "The Hard Rock Miner," occurs in seven different forms in the collection.

Song-type 2(d) runs from well-known western pieces such as N. Howard Thorp's "Little Joe the Wrangler" and Curly Fletcher's "Yavapai Pete" through broadside-like songs such as "Cowboy Jack" to such traditional items as "The Dying Cowboy" (of which there are five examples in the collection). The "transportation" type is represented by several American-derived railroad songs (e.g. "Casey Jones" and "The Wreck of the No. 9") and some indigenous trucking songs by K. M. Papov of Nakusp. Type 2(f) brings together well-known hobo ballads of the turn of the century and genuine "settling" songs of British Columbia from the same period.

The song-type entitled "Socio-political and union" is a ragbag of union and picket-line songs and shouts (the earliest arising out of the 1912-13 strike of Vancouver Island coal miners), anti-Doukhobor songs, contemporary comments on the political scene, topical songs of the Depression — songs made generally for a purpose other than sheer entertainment. Included in this section is an interesting collection of songs for and against dams.

In Song-type 6, "Songs of place" — the two favourite topics are "rain" (e.g. songs from Ocean Falls and the northwest coast) and "beauty" (e.g. the Nicola Valley and the Rockies).

"Songs of the armed services" range from such curios as "We Are the Boys of the Old *Rainbow*," collected over the phone from an anonymous informant, after Phil Thomas had appeared on a Victoria radio show and had asked for songs; scurrilous pieces about Sam Hughes and the Ross rifle; and songs made and sung by Canadians in action during the first world war.

A selection of the songs in the collection, together with some literary pieces put to music, will appear in Phil Thomas's forthcoming book which is designed for publication in 1977. He is to be congratulated for the depth of material obtained from his hundred or so informants over the course of the last twenty-three years, and folk-song enthusiasts, both singers and scholars (especially in B.C.), look forward to the publication of what will be a major contribution to the practice and study of folk song in Canada.

Vancouver, B.C.

Résumé: *Jon Bartlett fait une description de chants de la Colombie Canadienne collectionnés par Philip J. Thomas depuis les vingt-trois dernières années et en dresse une liste avec indications du nombre de chants appartenant à différentes catégories. La collection est actuellement déposée dans la Section de l'Histoire orale des Archives publiques de la Colombie Canadienne.*