

Jacob D. Elder Papers, Folklore Archives

4006

Finding aid prepared by Adun Oluwa Laniya and Jody Rodgers.

Last updated on October 27, 2016.

University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

9/26/2016

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Elder, Jacob D., 1913-2003
Title	Jacob D. Elder Papers, Folklore Archives
Call number	4006
Date [bulk]	1962-1965
Date [inclusive]	1949-2003
Extent	5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Born in Trinidad in 1913, Jacob Elder was a primary school teacher and community development officer before attending Penn to study for his doctorate in folklore. Elder specialized in the traditional music of Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to his scholarly studies, Elder worked to develop the Steel Band and song competitions in his native land to encourage the restless youth to find purpose and fulfillment. Manuscript holdings include approximately two linear feet of cultural material, research, working manuscript and dissertation, song, lyric and interview transcriptions, folktales, stories and scripts. The West Indies Recordings contain approximately 160 hours of recorded sound collected in Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, and St. Vincent between 1959-1965, during Elder's dissertation fieldwork.</p>

Biography/History

Jacob Elder (1913-2003) a native of Trinidad, was persuaded by MacEdward Leach and Tristram Coffin to pursue a doctoral degree in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania. Elder had already been in communication with Charles Seeger, Alan Merriam, and Alan Lomax, who enlisted him to work on the Cantometric project at Columbia University, using his Eastern Caribbean materials. He began his studies at Penn in 1963, and in 1966 he completed his dissertation entitled "Evolution of the Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago: a Socio-Historical Analysis of Song Change." According to letterhead on correspondence he wrote during his time at Penn, Elder served as archivist for the "University of Pennsylvania Caribbean Archive." After teaching at Universities in Nigeria for four years, Elder returned to Tobago, where he became the Minister of Culture.

In addition to his scholarly and musical studies, Elder spent his early years as a primary school teacher and community development officer. He encouraged the growth of the steel bands of Trinidad as a way for the local youth to channel their energy and express frustration with the status quo. Exciting band competitions became a part of the annual carnival and other festivals. Cash prizes were an incentive and encouraged experimentation.

Elder helped to develop the Best Village Folklore competition and the Trinidad Heritage Festival movement in Tobago.

Elder was honored with the Humming Bird Medal of 1981 for his contribution to cultural research and development and in 1988 he was named an Officer Des Palmes Academiques, awarded by the government of France.

At the time of his death in 2003, Elder was working on a book on black oral ceremonies as symbolic weapons of resistance.

Scope and Contents

The Jacob D. Elder Collection consists of five linear feet of manuscripts, correspondence, notes, research, transcriptions, photographs, books, and realia, as well as approximately 160 hours of recorded sound. The Elder Collection is part of the University of Pennsylvania Folklore Archives. The Folklore Archives was originally formed around the 1950s recordings from Jamaica and Newfoundland by J. Granville Leach, founder of the Folklore graduate program. The permanent archives of the Folklore Department were later established in 1970 and were active until the last students completed coursework in 2006. In 2010, the archives were transferred to the Penn Museum Archives.

There is significant digitized material associated with this collection. Metadata for Elder's sound recordings and manuscript collections, representing individual sound tracks and manuscripts, have been digitized. These documents are now accessible as PDFs and EndNote libraries. Also available is a copy of Elder's dissertation (.PDF) and various biographical sources (.PDF and .DOC).

Manuscript holdings include approximately two linear feet of cultural material, research, working

manuscript and dissertation, song, lyric and interview transcriptions, folktales, stories and scripts. Correspondence from Elder regarding tea meetings and Christmas plays is contained in the papers of Roger Abrahams (Folklore Archives Coll. 4007), who during 1968 conducted fieldwork in Nevis and St. Vincent on these and other customs.

The West Indies Recordings contain approximately 160 hours of recorded sound collected in Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, and St. Vincent between 1959-1965, during Elder's dissertation fieldwork.

The collection required some organization with the exception of the card files which may have been placed in boxes by the folklore department before the files came to the museum archives. Elder's notes were often on small or odd pieces of paper amid those on lined or unlined larger sheets. The order could be chaotic due to the number of loose song lyrics or musical notation. Elder's research for his dissertation was found in many folders and did not always reflect a central concept. The organization of series easily solved most of these problems.

Administrative Information

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

The Jacob D. Elder collection contains reel-to-reel tapes which are catalogued separately in the Audio-Visual database.

Correspondence from Elder regarding tea meetings and Christmas plays is contained in the papers of Roger Abrahams (Folklore Archives Coll. 4007), who during 1968 conducted fieldwork in Nevis and St. Vincent on these and other customs.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Dissertations

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Trinidad and Tobago

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Cloak, F. Theodore, 1938-1998
- Elder, Jacob D., 1913-2003
- Hill, Errol, 1921-2003
- Lomax, Alan, 1915-2002

SUBJECT(S)

- Ethnology
- Folklore

Collection Inventory

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

	Box
Steel Band Association 1953-1958.	1
Carnival Committee.	1

	Box
RESEARCH.	1
	Box
Historical (1 of 6).	1
Historical (2 of 6).	1
Historical (3 of 6).	1
Historical (4 of 6).	1
Historical (5 of 6).	1
Historical (6 of 6).	1
Cultural.	1
Book excerpts (1 of 2).	1
Book excerpts (2 of 2).	1

WRITINGS.

	Box
Calypso notes (1 of 2).	1
Calypso notes (2 of 2).	1
Carnival History.	1
Carnival Ephemera.	1
Working Ms (1 of 6).	1
Working Ms (2 of 6).	1
Working Ms (3 of 6).	1
Working Ms (4 of 6).	1
Working Ms (5 of 6).	1
Working Ms (6 of 6).	1
Working Ms notes.	1

	Box
MANUSCRIPT-"EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITIONAL CALYPSO OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SONG-CHANGE" (1 OF 3).	1

	Box
MANUSCRIPT-"EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITIONAL CALYPSO OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SONG-CHANGE" (2 OF 3).	1

	Box
MANUSCRIPT-"EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITIONAL CALYPSO OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SONG-CHANGE" (3 OF 3).	1

Reprints (1 of 2).	1
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Reprints (2 of 2).	1
Typed articles.	1
Illustrations.	1
Folklore archives.	1

TRANSCRIPTIONS.

	Box
Song Data Sheets (1 of 4).	1
Song Data Sheets (2 of 4).	1
Song Data Sheets (3 of 4).	1
Song Data Sheets (4 of 4).	1
Song Graphs.	1
Sheet Music.	1
Sound Recording-Song Lists.	1
Sound Recording-Lyric Lists.	1
Song lyrics and translations.	1
Song background.	1
Miscellaneous song notes.	1

Songs, dialogue, stories.	1
Interviews.	1
Scripts, stories, plays.	1
Folktales.	1
Correspondence.	1
Song and Tape card file.	2