

Finding Aid – West Virginia State Folk Festival Collection: “Fern Rollyson Papers” 1956-1979

Title: West Virginia State Folk Festival Collection: “Fern Rollyson Papers” 1956-1979
Donor: Collection found in RFK Library storage area. It was most likely donated by Fern Rollyson or by the Fern Rollyson estate in the 1980’s. There was no Deed of Gift or any other type of donor information included with the materials.
A & M Box #: GSC20100504
No. of Boxes: 10
Inclusive Dates: 1956-1979
Bulk Dates: 1960-1978

Description: This collection is made up of 10 different boxes. It was found in a storage area of the Robert F. Kidd Library in April of 2010. It was most likely given to the college by Fern Rollyson upon her retirement as the West Virginia Folk Festival Association President in 1978 or donated by her estate upon her death in 1988 and placed in storage because there was no definitive Glenville State College Archive at the time. Biographical, organizational, and processing information is included in the Biographical Page below.

This collection was processed by Archives Staff member, Jason Gum, in May of 2010 and is divided into several different categories. Therefore, a description of each is included below within the Box Contents Page. Much of the organization of the collection remains in its original form.

Source: GSC Archives
Dates: 1956-1979
Size: 10 boxes, 48 in. (4 linear feet)
A & M Box#: GSC20100504

Index Names:

Fern Rollyson, Patrick Gainer, Byron Turner, Mark Moore, Esther Davis Beadnell, Beers Family, “Cousin” Thelma Boltin, Jim Bush, Jenes Cottrell, Russell Fluharty, A. L. Greynolds, Ruth Hathway, Katherine Lewis, Harry S. Truman, H. E. Matheny, Buddy Griffin, Julie Matthews, Jerry Pocius, Mack Samples, Sabra Tate, Ruth Ann Musick, Frank George, Shapenote Singers

Index Terms:

West Virginia State Folk Festival, WV State Folk Festival, West Virginia Folk Festival Association, WV Folk Festival Association, West Virginia Folklore Society, Council of the Southern Mountains, Folk Festival Belles, early lifestyles, sustainable living

Box Contents:

Box #: GSC20100504A & GSC2010504B

Correspondences & Biographical Information

Box A: Beadnell to Matheny

Box B: Matthews to WV State Departments

Description: These files contain Fern Rollyson’s correspondences and biographical information associated with the West Virginia State Folk Festival from 1956-1979. Fern Rollyson had filed these letters in relation to whom the WV Folk Festival Association was communicating with. Some of these files hold communications from other members of the association to an outside party. The original order of these correspondences was changed very little to apply preservation techniques. This original information was alphabetized to help future researchers locate items of interest.

Box #: GSC20100504A

File Folder 1: Esther Davis Beadnell
File Folder 2: Bob Beers
File Folder 3: "Cousin" Thelma Boltin 1
File Folder 4: "Cousin" Thelma Boltin 2
File Folder 5: "Cousin" Thelma Boltin 3
File Folder 6: "Cousin" Thelma Boltin 4
File Folder 7: Jim Bush
File Folder 8: Jenes Cottrell
File Folder 9: Council of the Southern Mountains 1
File Folder 10: Council of the Southern Mountains 2
File Folder 11: Council of the Southern Mountains 3
File Folder 12: Farmer's Almanac
File Folder 13: Russell Fluharty
File Folder 14: Patrick W. Gainer
File Folder 15: Frank George
File Folder 16: A. Lester Greynolds
File Folder 17: Ruth Hathway
File Folder 18: Kathrene Lewis
File Folder 19: H. E. Matheny
File Folder 20: H. E. Matheny 2 (Correspondence with Harry S. Truman)

Box #: GSC20100504B

File Folder 1: Julie Matthews
File Folder 2: Miscellaneous Correspondences
File Folder 3: "Minstrel" Mark Moore 1
File Folder 4: "Minstrel" Mark Moore 2
File Folder 5: "Minstrel" Mark Moore 3
File Folder 6: Ruth Ann Musick
File Folder 7: Jerry Pocius
File Folder 8: Fern Rollyson "Belle" Committee
File Folder 9: Fern Rollyson "Public Relations" 1
File Folder 10: Fern Rollyson "Public Relations" 2
File Folder 11: Fern Rollyson "Public Relations" 3
File Folder 12: Fern Rollyson "Public Relations" 4
File Folder 13: Marilyn Rosenthal 1
File Folder 14: Marilyn Rosenthal 2
File Folder 15: Mack Samples
File Folder 16: Sabra Tate 1
File Folder 17: Sabra Tate 2
File Folder 18: Sabra Tate 3
File Folder 19: Sabra Tate 4
File Folder 20: Byron J. Turner
File Folder 21: West Virginia State Departments

Box #: GSC20100504C

Folk Festival Association Produced Materials: Pamphlets, Booklets, and Newspapers

Description: These materials were produced by the West Virginia Folk Festival Association to better promote the festival and explain each day's events. These promotional materials were produced in three different forms over the years: booklets, pamphlets, and newspapers. Booklets were produced during some years that held

detailed information on the history of the festival, festival activities, listings of committee members, and listings of previous Belles. During some years small folded pamphlets were used that held brief summaries of historical information, a schedule of each day's events, and Glenville State College Folklore class information. More recently tabloid sized newspapers have been utilized. These newspapers held specific articles detailing festival events, musicians, belles, and the history. The newspapers also displayed several photographs from prior festivities. Some years, more than one type of promotional material was produced. As of 2010, the newspaper format is still being used.

Box #: GSC20100504C

File Folder 1: Folk Festival Pamphlets (1962, 1967-1976, 1978-1982)

File Folder 2: Folk Festival Booklets 1 (1958-1960)

File Folder 3: Folk Festival Booklets 2 (1961, 1963)

File Folder 4: WV State Folk Festival News 1964

File Folder 5: WV State Folk Festival News 1965

File Folder 6: WV State Folk Festival News 1966

File Folder 7: WV State Folk Festival News 1967

File Folder 8: WV State Folk Festival News 1968

File Folder 9: WV State Folk Festival News 1969

File Folder 10: WV State Folk Festival News 1970

File Folder 11: WV State Folk Festival News 1971

File Folder 12: WV State Folk Festival News 1972

File Folder 13: WV State Folk Festival News 1973

File Folder 14: WV State Folk Festival News 1974

File Folder 15: WV State Folk Festival News 1976

File Folder 16: WV State Folk Festival News 1977

File Folder 17: WV State Folk Festival News 1978

File Folder 18: WV State Folk Festival News 1979

Box #: GSC20100504D

Folk Festival Belle Photographs and Information

Description: The Folk Festival Belle tradition was started in 1956. Fern Rollyson's first festival leadership position was as the first chair of the Belle Committee that year. This box holds listings of the Belles, personal information, and photographs from throughout the years. Information concerning the Belles can also be found in Fern Rollyson's Belle Committee Correspondence Folder, which is located in Box#GSC20100504B, File Folder 8.

Box #: GSC20100504D

File Folder 1: Belles List 1957-1976

File Folder 2: Personal Information for 1973

File Folder 3: General Belle Information

File Folder 4: Identified Photographs Organized by Year

File Folder 5: Unidentified Photographs

Box #: GSC20100504E

Photographs > Performers & Festival Personnel

Description: This box holds photographs of performers and other people associated with the West Virginia State Folk Festival. These individuals include residents of Gilmer County, folk music enthusiasts, school affiliated organizations, professional entertainers, and WV Folk Festival Association members. These

photographs were collected by Fern Rollyson during her time as President of the West Virginia Folk Festival Committee.

Box #: GSC20100504E

File Folder 1: Beers Family
File Folder 2: Basil Blake
File Folder 3: "Cousin" Thelma Boltin
File Folder 4: Jim Bush
File Folder 5: Church singers
File Folder 6: Noah Cottrill
File Folder 7: Dwight Dillen
File Folder 8: Lawrence Fluharty
File Folder 9: Russell Fluharty
File Folder 10: Patrick Gainer
File Folder 11: Frank George
File Folder 12: Gilmer High School Band
File Folder 13: A. L. Greynolds
File Folder 14: Buddy Griffin
File Folder 15: Glenville State College Choir 1960
File Folder 16: "Tiny" Hodges
File Folder 17: Stella Holliday
File Folder 18: Peter Hoover
File Folder 19: Wilda Kuhl
File Folder 20: Homer Lawson
File Folder 21: Madrigal Singers of Clarksburg, West Virginia
File Folder 22: Phyllis Marks
File Folder 23: Benny McAdams
File Folder 24: Darrell McCumbers
File Folder 25: *first name unknown* McWhorter
File Folder 26: Jim Meads & Judy Meads
File Folder 27: Espy Miller
File Folder 28: Jerry Milnes
File Folder 29: Miscellaneous Unknown
File Folder 30: Dave Molefski
File Folder 31: "Minstrel" Mark Moore
File Folder 32: Dave Morris & John Morris
File Folder 33: Ira Mullins
File Folder 34: Phoeba Parsons
File Folder 35: Fern Rollyson
File Folder 36: Mack Samples
File Folder 37: Mike Seeger
File Folder 38: Shape Note Singers
File Folder 39: Larry Shirkley
File Folder 40: Woody Simmons
File Folder 41: Keith Simons
File Folder 42: Sara Singleton
File Folder 43: Glen Smith
File Folder 44: Lee Triplett
File Folder 45: Byron Turner
File Folder 46: Dave Varney
File Folder 47: Lex Vorela
File Folder 48: Max Ward

File Folder 49: Peter Welker
File Folder 50: Vivian West
File Folder 51: Doc White
File Folder 52: Ann Williams
File Folder 53: Aunt Jenny Wilson
File Folder 54: Melvin Wine

Box #: GSC20100504F

Photographs > Festival Activities > Dancing & Vending

Description: This box holds photographs of certain activities at the festival. The activities include everything from dancing to street scenes. Other activities include different types of contests, sustainable living demonstrations, vendors, and early lifestyle exhibits for attendees to enjoy.

Box #: GSC20100504F

File Folder 1: Dancing
File Folder 2: Fox Hound Show
File Folder 3: Fox Hunting Horn Blowing
File Folder 4: Contests: Nailing
File Folder 5: Contests: Shooting
File Folder 6: Contests: Spelling Bee
File Folder 7: Contests: Unknown
File Folder 8: Demonstrations: Apple Butter Making
File Folder 9: Demonstrations: Broom Making
File Folder 10: Demonstrations: Candle Making
File Folder 11: Demonstrations: Cooking Meat
File Folder 12: Demonstrations: Ice Cream Making
File Folder 13: Demonstrations: Instrument Making
File Folder 14: Demonstrations: Furniture Making
File Folder 15: Demonstrations: Jewelry Making
File Folder 16: Demonstrations: Picture Frame Refurbishing
File Folder 17: Demonstrations: Pottery
File Folder 18: Demonstrations: Spinning & Wool Working
File Folder 19: Demonstrations: Wood Working
File Folder 20: Exhibits - Country Store
File Folder 21: Exhibits - Early Lifestyles
File Folder 22: Exhibits - Horse Trading
File Folder 23: Exhibits - Mechanical
File Folder 24: Exhibits - Musical
File Folder 25: Exhibits - Puppetry
File Folder 26: Exhibits - Quilting
File Folder 27: Parade
File Folder 28: Street Scenes - Groups
File Folder 29: Street Scenes - Individuals
File Folder 30: Theatre
File Folder 31: Vending

Box #: GSC20100504G

WV Folk Festival Association Meeting Minutes: 1956-1978

Description: On September 26, 1956 and on October 18, 1956, several Gilmer County citizens came together for the purpose of organizing a “Gilmer County Folk Festival Association.” During more of these first meetings of 1956, the association purposed that the festival be called the West Virginia State Folk Festival. They also changed their official association name to the West Virginia Folk Festival Association and started the “Festival Belle” tradition that Fern Rollyson oversaw. These steps would guarantee that the festival would become an annual event that Gilmer County could claim as its own, Glenville State College would always have the ability to partner and assist with the festival, each West Virginia county could easily participate by sending a Folk Festival Belle, and that this specific yearly event would now take the lead as the main folk festival in West Virginia. This box contains the original meeting minutes for this organization from 1956-1978.

Box #: GSC20100504G

File Folder 1: Meeting Minutes 1956
File Folder 2: Meeting Minutes 1957
File Folder 3: Meeting Minutes 1958
File Folder 4: Meeting Minutes 1959
File Folder 5: Meeting Minutes 1960
File Folder 6: Meeting Minutes 1961
File Folder 7: Meeting Minutes 1962
File Folder 8: Meeting Minutes 1963
File Folder 9: Meeting Minutes 1964
File Folder 10: Meeting Minutes 1965
File Folder 11: Meeting Minutes 1966
File Folder 12: Meeting Minutes 1967
File Folder 13: Meeting Minutes 1968
File Folder 14: Meeting Minutes 1969
File Folder 15: Meeting Minutes 1970
File Folder 16: Meeting Minutes 1971
File Folder 17: Meeting Minutes 1972
File Folder 18: Meeting Minutes 1973
File Folder 19: Meeting Minutes 1974
File Folder 20: Meeting Minutes 1975
File Folder 21: Meeting Minutes 1976
File Folder 22: Meeting Minutes 1977
File Folder 23: Meeting Minutes 1978

Box #: GSC20100504H

Miscellaneous Festival Materials, Contest Winners, & Songs

Description: This box includes materials that could not be filed within any other part of the collection. These items were in no specific order when found but hold some valuable information associated with the festival that Fern Rollyson saved. Many materials from the Florida Folk Festival are included in these materials because Fern Rollyson had developed contacts with a “Cousin” Thelma Boltin, who was in charge of this festival. Throughout the years, Fern used her as a resource for ideas. This helped Fern Rollyson learn about what was being done in other parts of the country. Newspaper clippings associated with Dr. Patrick Gainer are also a part of this box.

Box #: GSC20100504H

File Folder 1: Contest Winner Information
File Folder 2: Florida Folk Festival Information
File Folder 3: Newspaper Clippings: Photocopied
File Folder 4: Newspaper Clippings: Originals

File Folder 5: News Releases and Schedules

File Folder 6: Parade Information

File Folder 7: Folk Songs

Box #: GSC20100504E & Box# GSC20100504F

Box E: Country Store Inventory Project

Box F: Information & Card Catalog of Items

Description: These two boxes contain Country Store information that was assembled during a six-month period in 1978. The Country Store was purchased by the WV Folk Festival Association as a permanent home for the artifacts that had been collected and to be the epicenter of the WV State Folk Festival. In 1977, funding was sought out from the National Endowment for the Humanities to organize and classify the folk collection. The main purpose of this grant was to improve accessibility of the collection by designing and implementing necessary improvements to the folk museum. The cataloging system that was implemented divided the collection into seven categories, being farm tools, craft tools, household items, Country Store items, entertainment, furniture, and toys.

Box #: GSC20100504E

File Folder 1: Introduction and Store History

File Folder 2: Little Kanawha Valley Bank History & Move

File Folder 3: Reed Organ History & Specifications

File Folder 4: Loom History

File Folder 5: Switchboard & Telephone

File Folder 6: Spinning Wheel & Reels

File Folder 7: Surrey & Broom Machine

File Folder 8: Bank Cage & Counter

File Folder 9: Oak Basketry

File Folder 10: Pottery

File Folder 11: Inventory Photographs 1

File Folder 12: Inventory Photographs 2

File Folder 13: Inventory Photographs 3

Box #: GSC20100504F

File Folder 1: Country Store Inventory Card Catalog 1

File Folder 2: Country Store Inventory Card Catalog 2

File Folder 3: Country Store Inventory Card Catalog 3

Biographical Page:

Organizational & Processing Note

This collection was found in a storage area of the Robert F. Kidd Library in April of 2010. It was most likely given to the college by Fern Rollyson upon her retirement as the West Virginia Folk Festival Association President in 1978 or donated by her estate upon her death in 1988 and placed in storage because there was no definitive Glenville State College Archive at the time.

These materials were in three-ring binders and were made up of correspondences, photographs, West Virginia Folk Festival Association Minutes, Country Store Museum inventories, press releases, and other materials that had been produced for the West Virginia State Folk Festival. Many of the materials had been put in three-ring binder sleeves but were not of archival quality. These original preservation efforts had helped preserve the materials greatly, but some of the photos had become adhered to the protective sleeves. This, however, had caused only some minor damage to the photographs. All photos were removed from their original sleeves and placed in acid-free protectors. All metal objects, such as staples and paperclips, were removed to prevent further rusting and damage to the materials. All newspaper clippings were copied to preserve the information because of the fast deterioration of newspaper print. Protective, acid-free, boxes and file folders were used in the processing of this collection and the three-ring binders were discarded.

Correspondences had been separated originally and were filed according to whom Fern Rollyson or other people associated with the West Virginia State Folk Festival were corresponding with. This order of the correspondences was kept during the processing of the collection because it was most likely how Fern had originally filed them. Along with many of the correspondence files is biographical information about the individual or organization. The correspondences and the WV Folk Festival Association meeting minutes hold valuable information that explain the early origins of the festival. These correspondence files include several letters associated with Patrick Gainer, Byron Turner, "Cousin" Thelma Boltin from the Florida Folk Festival, "Minstrel" Mark Moore from Colorado, many regional publications, and several other folk enthusiasts. Another interesting correspondence is a letter from President Harry S. Truman, in which he thanks a Mr. Matheny for a book he had sent him. Mr. Matheny was a historian and instrument maker that participated in the folk festival activities. The WV Folk Festival Association minutes and an indexing project of the Country Store Museum were also kept in their original order. Photographs were in no specific order and were rearranged to benefit future researchers during the processing of the collection.

Biographical Note: Fern Rollyson

Fern Rollyson was born July 8, 1904, in Ritchie County, the daughter of Dorsey E. and Vicky Stansburry Huff. She came to Glenville as a student, graduating from Glenville State in 1927. After her marriage to Ernest Rollyson she became a permanent resident of Glenville. She gardened, cooked, organized, and volunteered for all worthwhile activities. Her home was located in the center of town. She welcomed, guided, and helped countless students. When Patrick Gainer's first Folk Festival seemed that it might become history, she helped to revitalize the event by participating in making it the West Virginia State Folk Festival and then serving as its president from 1960 to 1978. In 1978, she was awarded Glenville Rotary's Service Above Self Award. Fern passed away in 1988. She left a legacy of support for both the college and the community. Some of the furnishings from her house are located in the Glenville State College Alumni Center.

Historical Note: West Virginia State Folk Festival

The Gilmer County Folk Festival was started by Dr. Patrick Gainer in 1950 as part of a summer folklore course that he was instructing at Glenville State College. Dr. Gainer, with the help of his students, organized the event for the first six years with very little assistance from the community. In 1956, compensation for Dr. Gainer's services at Glenville State College had become somewhat of an issue and, according to him, other parts of the state, including Beckley, were being considered for the festival.

On September 26, 1956 and on October 18, 1956, several Gilmer County citizens came together for the purpose of organizing a "Gilmer County Folk Festival Association." Those present at these first meetings were John E. Arbuckle, Harold Orendorff, Billy Bennett, Walter Rhodes, Earl Gainer, Jack Cawthon, E. I. Singleton, Mary Lee Massey, Jerry Gass, James Singleton, Paul Stalnaker, S. E. Coleman, GSC President Harry Heflin,

Charles Harold, Clark James, Patrick Reale, Rubert Stump, Fern Rollyson, E. G. Rollyson, Robert Flesher, Rex Hardman, Elizabeth Cooper, Jesse Marks, Guy Stalnaker Jr., Dewey Howes, Clayton Furr, C. U. Cunningham, Herman Post, V. E. Hoefler, Byron Turner, David Arbogast, Margy Jack, Ruddell Reed, and Mrs. E. M. Taggart. During more of these first meetings of 1956, the association purposed that the festival be called the West Virginia State Folk Festival. They also changed their official association name to the West Virginia Folk Festival Association and started the "Festival Belle" tradition that Fern Rollyson oversaw. These steps would guarantee that the festival would become an annual event that Gilmer County could claim as its own, Glenville State College would always have the ability to partner and assist with the festival, each West Virginia county could easily participate by sending a Folk Festival Belle, and that this specific yearly event would now take the lead as the main folk festival in West Virginia.

The last time that Dr. Gainer taught the Glenville State College folklore class was the summer of 1957. He had been a full-time West Virginia University faculty member since the end of World War II. In 1958, his responsibilities at WVU kept him from continuing his partnership with Glenville State College. He had been assigned to teach a summer folklore course in Beckley for WVU. At the request of the Gilmer County Folk Festival Association, Dr. Gainer did return to Glenville for the sole purpose of directing the West Virginia State Folk Festival for two more years from 1958 to 1959. Dr. Gainer wrote a letter to the association on January 8, 1960 explaining that he could no longer dedicate much time to the festival in Glenville.

During 1960, Fern Rollyson was named as the President of the West Virginia Folk Festival Association because of her willingness and the dedication that she had showed during her participation in the prior festivals. The desire for dedicated leadership was finally satisfied, and Fern held this title for 18 years.

By the 1960's, the West Virginia State Folk Festival had attracted the interest of many folk enthusiasts from all over America because of the national publicity it had received on television and radio. Although Dr. Gainer was no longer responsible for the festivities, his advice was still sought out by Fern Rollyson and the rest of the committee. Dr. Gainer was very weary of these "outside" folk enthusiasts. His main concern was that they would not only come to the festival to learn about West Virginia heritage, but they would also contribute some of the information and "mainstream" songs that they had collected from places other than West Virginia. Dr. Gainer felt that the festival could easily develop into something that was not authentic if these other folk enthusiasts were permitted to provide their "mainstream" influence. He felt that some of these artists, such as The Minstrel Mark Moore, fell into a beatnik stereotype that Dr. Gainer seemed to fear the most. Ironically, many of these outsiders were actually looking toward achieving the same authenticity as Dr. Gainer, but during their travels, they had soaked up some of the bad with the good. Years later, The Minstrel Mark Moore shaved his beard and changed his dress because he realized that the stereotypical look that he had picked up only hurt his cause of being an authentic folk enthusiast.

In May of 1963, Dr. Gainer felt that the task of helping with the festival and striving towards authenticity had become too daunting, and he removed himself from his advisory standpoint to focus on the West Virginia University sponsored events, such as Beckley's Mountain State Folk Festival. These turbulent times proved that many citizens, including Fern Rollyson, were dedicated to preserving our heritage by continuing this yearly event.

During Fern Rollyson's 18 year reign as president of the festival, she strove to preserve the true traditional folk culture of West Virginia that Dr. Gainer was so dedicated to, but she was also very open to learning from others who were professionally involved in the folk music business and early American lifestyles. Historical exhibits, demonstrations, food, dancing, music, and Glenville State College participation have remained part of the festival throughout the years. Through Fern Rollyson's and the WV Folk Festival Committee's hard work, many artifacts from our past were collected and a permanent museum was setup in Glenville. This monument to our heritage is known as The Country Store and is still in existence as of May 2010. It is still a very popular location during each year's festivities. Through Fern's leadership, the West Virginia State Folk Festival grew in popularity and became the lasting tradition that it is today.