

Various Small Flames

<https://varioussmallflames.co.uk/2022/11/17/derek-piotr-fieldwork-archive/>



Derek Piotr Fieldwork Archive

[Liam Doyle](#) 17th November 2022

Folklorist [Derek Piotr](#) began archiving folksong, poetry, memories, interviews and tales in 2020. The focus of this collection is on the “non-singer”; in other words, someone with no background in musical performance but who can still relate a song or folkloric memory. However, this collection features a wide variety of informants, including professional singers, descendants of musicians, laypeople, and ballad scholars. The vast majority of the recordings in the [Derek Piotr Fieldwork Archive](#) showcase unaccompanied vocal performances. Below, he selects five highlights and outlines the stories behind them.

Averil Lund – The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo

<https://fieldwork-archive.com/45.html>

Averil was one of the residents of Hempland Lane, a retirement community in York, UK, that I visited in 2021. At the spry age of one hundred and two (b. 1919), she was the community’s oldest resident, and I met with her privately in her room after a general assembly with several dozen residents. This was the only “traditional” song Averil could recall—a music hall song, but curious because she was not allowed to attend any musicals in her youth, so she picked this song up from someone else’s singing. This song is not often documented in fieldwork so it was a joy to find it, particularly one the lips of someone from The Greatest Generation.

Amy Michels – The Old Devil

<https://fieldwork-archive.com/159.html>

Amy is a native of Indiana, but moved to western North Carolina in 1977, where she got “taken in” by the Hicks Family (similar to my experience being taken in by Lena Turbyfill’s Family). This version of The Little Devils is undoubtedly from the Hicks family, and reminds me of ‘[Three Little Devils](#)’ from Harmony Korine’s movie *Trash Humpers*—definitely something Harmony heard from his father, Sol. Sol Korine had [documented oral tradition](#) in the American South in the 1980s, and had very possibly met Amy along with his visits with the Hickses. Although I sing a different version of this ballad, I really adore the way Amy delivers this variant.

Shirley Glenn – Seven Nights Drunk

<https://fieldwork-archive.com/196.html>

Shirley and Charlie Glenn are Old-time musicians living in Beech Creek, North Carolina. I have met them several times—on one occasion I purchased a fretless banjo from Charlie. Charlie is a man of stout faith and decries any songs that “meddle” too much with the Lord’s intentions—including the song above—“Satan is not something you should take lightly”. ‘Seven Nights Drunk’ falls under the category of songs Charlie disapproves of, so Shirley waited until he had left the house to sing this ballad for me, which she learned from her grandmother, Hattie Presnell. You can hear the mischievous joy in Shirley’s voice, given the opportunity to sneak in a song she often doesn’t sing, and honor her grandmother in this way.

Fran Hendrickson – Old Dan Tucker

<https://fieldwork-archive.com/288.html>

I met Fran through a network of Traditional and Old-time musicians in New England. I have stubbornly been looking for folk traditions in my home state of Connecticut—a state not necessarily thought of as rich in these expressions—and a lot of beautiful encounters have resulted. Fran honestly reminds me of a character from Harmony’s films, maybe *Gummo*, and I say that with the highest joy and reverence. She is a trip! Fran showed up at my house with her accordion, and played instrumental versions of several well known ballads and folk songs—‘Old Roger is Dead’ and ‘Alabama Gal’ among them—as well as this romping take on ‘Old Dan Tucker’.

Jill MacLaughlin and John MacLaughlin – Wait ‘Till the Sun Shines, Nellie/You Are My Sunshine/Down by the Old Mill Stream

<https://fieldwork-archive.com/315.html>

This was one of the first donations I accepted for the DPFA—in other words, a recording made on my behalf by someone else. I had gotten in touch with Alex MacLaughlin over Instagram, and he shared with me that he remembered a medley of songs his mom would sing, which she got from her father. I asked him if he would be willing to record this memory and share it with my archive, and he graciously obliged. I find this particular entry so moving—Jill outlines the connection she had to her mother on her last day alive, through singing these songs. It is nothing short of miraculous to me that strangers are so willing to share such deeply personal family and song-memories with me, and with the world. By hosting and preserving these memories, I dearly hope that others might come forward with memories of what their ancestors sang to them. I see the DPFA as an ever expanding project that could (hopefully) touch every corner of this world.

If you, or one of your friends or relatives has a story, song, fragment, poem, memory, or adage to share with Derek, please reach out to him at d@derekpiotr.com. He would love to hear from you!



Photography by Kenneth Roper