

# Louis Watson Chappell (1890-1981), Folklorist, Research Papers, Sound Recordings, and Other Material A&M 2480

Louis Watson Chappell (1890-1981), Folklorist, Research Papers, Sound Recordings, and Other Material  
1815-1980



## Title Statement

Louis Watson Chappell (1890-1981), Folklorist, Research Papers, Sound Recordings, and Other Material A&M 2480

**Author:** Staff of the West Virginia & Regional History Center

## Publication Statement

**Publisher:** West Virginia and Regional History Center

1549 University Ave.  
P.O. Box 6069  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6069  
Business Number: 304-293-3536  
wvrhcref@westvirginia.libanswers.com  
URL: <https://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu>



## Profile Description

**Creation:** This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-04-28 18:01:47 -0400.

**Language Usage:** Description is written in: English, Latin script.

**Descriptive Rules:** Describing Archives: A Content Standard

## Descriptive Summary

**Unit ID**

A&M 2480

**Unit ID**

[Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

[Previous Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

[/repositories/2/resources/479](#)

**Unit Date**

1815-1980

**Language**

English .

**Abstract**

Research papers and sound recordings compiled by Louis Watson Chappell, an English Professor and folklorist at West Virginia University who collected, documented, and preserved West Virginia's folk music and folk traditions. He was born in Belvidere, North Carolina and educated in English Language and Literature at Wake Forest University (B.A.), and the University of Virginia (M.A.). Receiving a faculty appointment at West Virginia University in 1922, Chappell embarked upon a career dedicated to documenting and preserving West Virginia's folk music, which proved to be highly significant.

**Creator**

Chappell, Louis W. (Louis Watson)

**Extent**

29.71 Linear Feet 44 document cases, 5 in. each; 6 flat storage boxes, 3 in. each; 1 small collection file folder, 0.25 in.; 7 blue notebooks, 1.5 in. each; 3 ft. 2 in. of acetate discs; 4 pieces of disc recorder equipment, 66.5 in. total; 3 reels of microfilm, 1.75 in. each

**Extent**

36.7 Gigabytes 160 .wav files

**Physical Location**

West Virginia and Regional History Center / West Virginia University / 1549 University Avenue / P.O. Box 6069 / Morgantown, WV 26506-6069 / Phone: 304-293-3536 / URL: <https://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu/>

**Repository**

West Virginia and Regional History Center

## Administrative Information

**Conditions Governing Access**

Special access restriction applies.

Part of this collection is stored offsite. Please make an appointment prior to visiting.

Researchers may access digitized materials by requesting to view the materials in person by appointment or remotely by contacting the West Virginia & Regional History Center reference department at <https://westvirginia.libanswers.com/wvrhc>.

**Conditions Governing Use**

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. For more information, please see the Permissions and Copyright page on the West Virginia and Regional History Center website.

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Acquired from Chappell, Louis Watson, 1977/03/24

Gift of Chappell, Louis Watson, 1978/07/06.

Gift of Chappell, Louis Watson, 1987/08/05.

Gift of Dolive, Louis, 2010/03/01.

**Preferred Citation**

[Description and date of item], [Box/folder number], Louis Watson Chappell (1890-1981), Folklorist, Research Papers, Sound Recordings, and Other Material, A&M 2480, West Virginia and Regional History Center, West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia.

## Biographical / Historical

Louis Watson Chappell was born in Belvidere, North Carolina and educated in English Language and Literature at Wake Forest University (B.A.), and the University of Virginia (M.A.). Subsequent study was undertaken at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and New York University. Receiving a faculty appointment at West Virginia University in 1922, Chappell embarked upon a career dedicated to documenting and preserving West Virginia's folk music, which proved to be highly significant. He began his study of traditional music a decade or so earlier as a ballad hunter in the North Carolina-Virginia tidewater region in which he had spent his youth. Some years later the results of his collecting in the area were

published in a book entitled "Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle" (Morgantown: Ballad Press, 1939). The folklorist's first major contribution to West Virginia folklore was an exhaustive investigation into the controversy surrounding the ballad "John Henry" and its distinction from "John Hardy." In 1933 the publication of a full-length study "John Henry: A Folk-Lore Study" (Jena. Frommansche Verlag) placed the celebrated steel driver at the Big Bend Tunnel in late 19th-century West Virginia. In 1937 Chappell purchased a disc recording machine similar to the one employed at the time by his colleague and friend, John A. Lomax.

## Scope and Contents

### Initial Acquisition of 1977/03/24:

undated; 3 reels of microfilm; Transcriptions in musical notation of performances recorded and collected by Louis Watson Chappell of West Virginia folk musicians. The recordings from which these transcriptions were derived can be found in the folk music collection of the West Virginia and Regional History Center, in collection numbers 1-88 (see link to collection page in Instances).

**Addendum of 1978/07/06:** ca. 1930-1950; 9 ft. and disc recorders (14 five in. document cases; 3 ft. 2 in. of acetate discs; three pieces of disc recorder equipment: Triplett Model 321, and two unknown types); 646 aluminum discs and a corresponding set of copies on acetate discs containing original field recordings by Louis Watson Chappell of West Virginia folk musicians. Reformatted masters and user copies can be found in the folk music collection of the West Virginia and Regional History Center, in collection numbers 1-88 (see link to collection page in Instances). The original disc recorder equipment used to make these recordings is also in this addendum.

### Addendum of 1987/08/05:

1815-1980; 14 ft. 10 1/2 in. and 9 in. item (30 five in. document cases, 6 three in. flat storage boxes; seven 1 1/2 in. blue notebooks; Meissner Radio Phono Recorder [Model 9-1065]); The papers of Chappell contain correspondence, folk music and folklore research papers, and other material. The Chappell correspondence regards the collection of Appalachian folk music and the publication of his book "Traditional Songs of West Virginia". Folk music research papers include information regarding ballad texts, and transcriptions from field recordings he and others made of West Virginia folk musicians (including transcriptions in music notation of vocal and instrumental performances, and in text of ballad lyrics). Folklore includes superstitions, folk medicine, word origins, proverbs and sayings, place names, children's games and dances, riddles and jokes, folktales; and his research papers (notes and typescripts with handwritten corrections) regarding John Henry, a steel driver at the Big Bend railroad tunnel. *Paper copy of folder-level container list for this addendum available in control folder.*

### Addendum of 2010/03/01:

-1941; 1/4 in. (25 pages in 1 folder); Outgoing letters by Louis Watson Chappell to Fletcher Collins regarding folk song collection and publication.

### See also WVRHC oral history collection 319:

319. JEANETTE SHULZ. Hundred, Wetzel County, WV, 27 March 1980.

An interview with Mrs. Shulz, daughter of Scott Phillips, conducted by John A. Cuthbert. Mrs. Shulz's gives her recollections of her father's musical activity -- stringbands, radio performances, and recordings made by L.W. Chappell. One reel (5") 3 3/4 ips, quality good. (R374)

### Folk Music Recordings:

In 1937, Chappell purchased a disc recording machine, and over the next eleven years amassed an archive of West Virginia folk music of more than 2000 items, performed by over 90 different people. Of particular interest are the twenty-five discs of the legendary fiddler Edwin "Edden" Hammons, who performed for Chappell in August, 1947.

These recordings have been digitized and may be accessed remotely or in person by appointment.

## Separated Materials

Separated to the Rare Book Collection:

*The British Minstrel: A Collection of the Most Esteemed and Popular English, Scottish and Irish Songs, the Best Duets, Catches, Chorusses, Glees, and Comics Recitations including All Dibdin's Admired Productions Vol. I;* Sherwood, Jones and Company, 1824.

*The British Minstrel: A Collection of the Most Esteemed and Popular English, Scottish and Irish Songs, the Best Duets, Catches, Chorusses, Glees, and Comics Recitations including All Dibdin's Admired Productions Vol. II;* Sherwood, Jones and Company, 1824.

*The British Minstrel: A Collection of the Most Esteemed and Popular English, Scottish and Irish Songs, the Best Duets, Catches, Chorusses, Glees, and Comics Recitations including All Dibdin's Admired Productions Vol. III*; Sherwood, Jones and Company, 1825.

Aikin, J. B. *The Christian Minstrel, A New System of Musical Notation, with a Collection of Psalm Tunes, Anthems, and Chant*, 1846.

Campbell, Dame Olive and Cecil J. Sharp, editors. *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, 1917.

Bradbury, William B. *The Singing School, Musical Notation, Plain Simple and Progressive*, undated.

Brewster, Paul G. *Ballads and Songs of Indiana*, 1940.

Brown, Jessie H., Mattie M. Boteler, R. M. McIntosh, and H. R. Christie, editors. *Songs of Service*, 1896.

Griggs, John, editor. *Grigg's Southern and Western Songster*, 1832.

Hall, J. H. and J. H. Ruebush and E. T. Hildebrand. *The Messenger of Song*, 1893.

Mason, Lowell and Timothy B. Mason. *The Sacred Harp*, 1844.

Sargent, Child Helen and George Lyman Kittredge, editors. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1904.

Seward, Theodore, assisted by Dr. Lowell Mason and William B. Bradbury. *The Temple Choir*, 1867.

Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Vol. 5, 1935.

## Related Materials

Collection referenced in West Virginia University, and John A. Cuthbert. *West Virginia Folk Music : A Descriptive Guide to Field Recordings in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection*. West Virginia University Press, 1982.

## Keywords

Belvidere (N.C.)

North Carolina

Virginia

Academies (Private schools)

Folk music -- West Virginia

Columbia College (Columbia University)

New York University

University of Chicago

University of Virginia.

Wake Forest University

Booth, Billie W.

Brown, Tom.

Chappell, Louis W. (Louis Watson)

Collins, Fletcher, Jr., 1906-2005

Cuthbert, John A.

Gainer, Patrick W.

Hardin, Benjamin Franklin.

Hardy, John.

Henry, John.

Lomax, John A. (John Avery), 1867-1948

Parkinson, George, 1943-

Royall, Anne Newport, 1769-1854

Wilcox, James.