Today in History - June 15

The Twenty-Fifth State

On **June 15**, 1836, Arkansas became the twenty-fifth state. Native Americans first inhabited the state and created a thriving culture along the Mississippi River around 500 A.D. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both the Spanish and the French explored the region. The United States acquired the land from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

Panoramic View #2, Little Rock, Ark.. Haines Photo Co., c1910. Panoramic Photographs. Prints & Photographs Division

Arkansas' image has been shaped by many different forces; its physical geography probably had the greatest impact during the state's early development. Major migration routes to the West Coast bypassed the area so that Arkansas remained less densely populated, predominantly rural, and without a major urban area for the first 150 years of its existence as a territory and state. It came to be viewed as a rustic and underdeveloped region. This view was reinforced by a folktale, tune, and drawing all known as "The Arkansas Traveller," which depicted an encounter between a wisecracking, fiddle-playing hillbilly and a sophisticated city slicker. Plays, newspaper columns, books, and radio programs utilizing this theme perpetuated the image into the early 1950s.

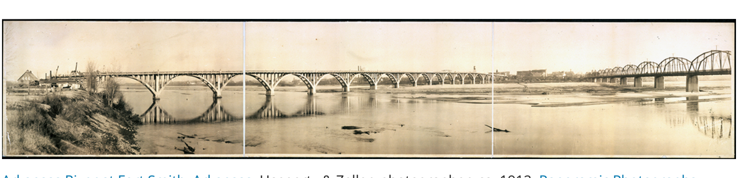
Efforts to promote an image appropriate for economic growth and development resulted in marketing strategies using state nicknames that business leaders hoped would evoke positive responses. Arkansas' first unofficial nickname was the Bear State—an attempt to paint Arkansas as a sportsman's paradise. This nickname was used from the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries but instead only strengthened the already entrenched view of the backwoods hillbilly.

"The Wonder State" became the official state nickname in 1923. Former Governor Charles H. Brough, an adept public speaker, was charged with promoting this new image. This campaign also met with little success. Again, the image of a state populated by backward hillbillies prevailed. Around this time, two Arkansans, Chester Lauck and Norris Goff, seized the opportunity to create characters that dispensed advice, jokes, and rural philosophy from the Arkansas hill country. Their radio program, the *Lum and Abner* show, was an immediate hit with an audience looking for humor during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In the 1940s, another group of Little Rock businessmen sought to change the state's image in order to encourage economic development. They chose "Land of Opportunity" as the state nickname to align with their efforts to recruit major corporations to relocate to Arkansas. This nickname became official in 1953 and under the leadership of Winthrop Rockefeller, the state began to reap benefits from outside corporate investors. Negative publicity once again interfered, as Little Rock's Central High School desegregation crisis erupted. This latest nickname weathered the crisis in Little Rock, however, and remained intact as the state began to experience population growth as a result of the "Sunbelt Movement" in the 1970s. Retirees as well as people seeking less populated regions with seasonal climates found what they were looking for in Arkansas. Tourism became an important aspect of the state's economy.

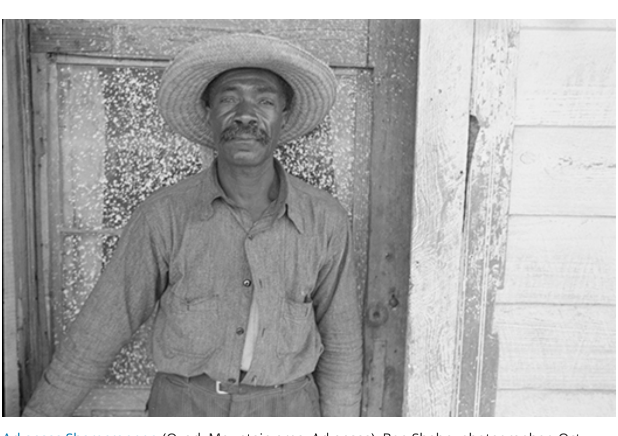
Business leaders once again sought an opportunity to promote a new identity for the state. This time, the state's scenic parks, rivers, wildlife, folklore, and music took center stage. In 1987, the General Assembly approved the nickname "The Natural State"—and promotional efforts came full circle.

The accomplishments of Arkansans in a wide variety of endeavors are the defining parameters for the state's image. From Arkansas natives such as Scott Joplin, the King of Ragtime; Louis Jordan, R&B performer and composer; Maya Angelou, poet and author; Jerry Jones, philanthropist and Dallas Cowboys owner; and Bill Clinton, 42nd president of the United States, to Arkansas transplants such as Hattie Wyatt Caraway, first woman elected to the U.S. Senate; Vance Randolph, folklorist; and Winthrop Rockefeller, philanthropist and politician; the state has made an impressive contribution to U.S. history and heritage.



Arkansas River at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Haggerty & Zeller, photographer, ca. 1912. Panoramic Photographs. Prints & Photographs Division

Lake Dick, Arkansas. Farm Security Administration(FSA) Cooperative Farm... Dorothea Lange, photographer, Aug. 1939. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division



Arkansas Sharecropper. (Ozark Mountain area, Arkansas). Ben Shahn, photographer, Oct., 1935. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

Learn More

- Search on *Arkansas* in the Cities and Towns section of the Map Collections. View the Perspective map of Van Buren, Ark. and use the zoom feature to see churches, factories, railroads, steamboats, and much more in remarkable detail.
- Search the African American History collections and the Library's Online Exhibitions to find items documenting Arkansas' civil rights struggles. For example, read about Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine during the desegregation crisis at Little Rock's Central High School. This item is found in the online exhibit, The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship
- Digital collections from the Library's Archive of American Folk Song (now the Archive of Folk Culture) and New Deal agencies such as the Farm Security Administration and Works Progress Administration amply represent Arkansas. Search on *Arkansas* in the following collections to find photographs, recordings, and narratives:
  - Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White-Negatives
  - Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938
  - California Gold: Northern California Folk Music From the Thirties
  - Southern Mosaic: the John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip
  - Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940 to 1941
  - American Folklife Center Collections: Arkansas
- Learn to play a version of The Arkansas Traveller or listen to a performance of it by searching across the Library's website. An especially lively version performed by John Stone is found in California Gold: Northern California Folk Music From the Thirties.

California Folk Music Project

On **June 15**, 1939, in Oakland, California, folk music collector Sidney Robertson Cowell recorded Mary MacPhee performing Gaelic songs from the Hebrides, Scotland. The collection California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties Collected by Sidney Robertson Cowell contains these a cappella performances as well as still photographs, drawings, and written documents from a variety of European ethnic and English- and Spanish-speaking communities in Northern California. On the dust jacket of MacPhee's recording of "Hi Oro 's Na Horo Eile" Cowell noted, "This she sang to her husband when they were courting."

> *...I found their music beautiful and important and...wanted it preserved as it truly was for future generations to hear.*
>
> Sidney Robertson Cowell

Mary MacPhee... Berkeley, California, June 15, 1939. California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties Collected by Sidney Robertson Cowell. American Folklife Center

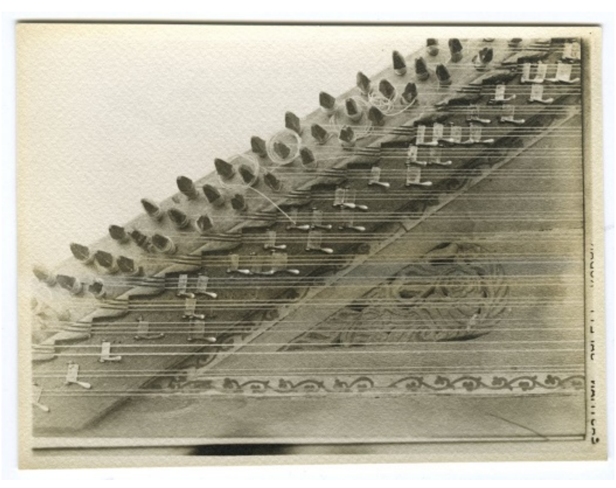
Cowell's California Folk Music Project was one of the earliest large-scale ethnographic surveys of regional American folk music. In order to accomplish her mission, Cowell organized a consortium of three institutions. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), a massive employment relief program launched by the Roosevelt administration in 1935, offered funds to hire approximately twenty people. The Music Department of the University of California, Berkeley provided space and equipment for the project. And, the Archive of American Folk Song (now The Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center) of the Library of Congress supplied 237 twelve-inch acetate recording discs and a repository for their safekeeping. The collection is quite diverse. For example, Cowell recorded Anglo, Armenian, and Croatian performers.

John Stone Playing Fiddle... Columbia, Tuolumne County, California, August 5-6, 1939.

Buffalo girls

Buffalo girls
00:00 01:31
Share

Buffalo Girls" performed by John Stone on violin, Columbia, Tuolumne County, California, August 6, 1939.



Qanun, close-up of tuning mechanism. Fresno, California, April 22, 1939.

Song of freedom

Song of freedom
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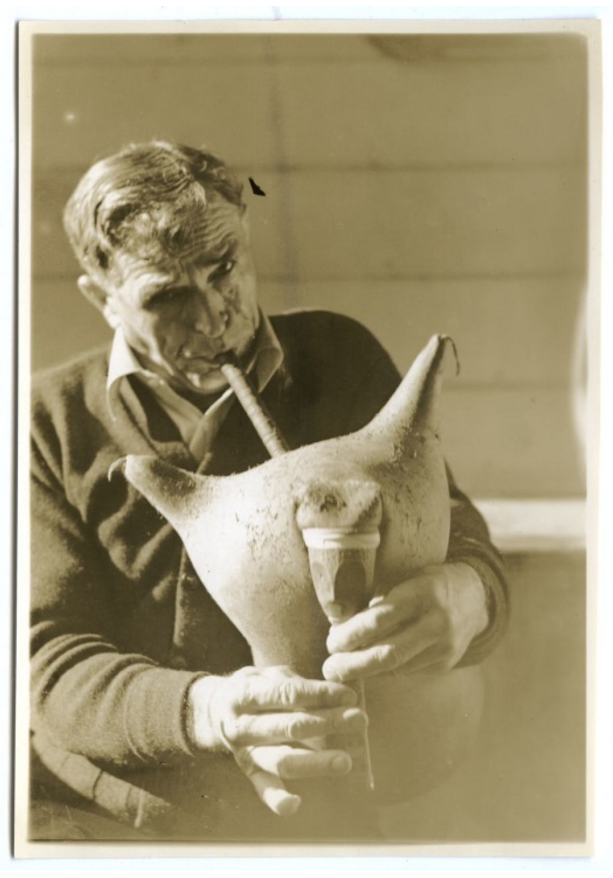
Song of Freedom" performed by Aslanian's Armenian Orchestra, Bedros Haroutunian on qanun, Fresno, California, April 23, 1939.



John Botica Playing the Misnice..., Mountain View, California, May 26, 1938, or January 11, 1939.

Dalmatian dance #1, poskocnica

Dalmatian dance #1, poskocnica
00:00 02:30
Share

Dalmation Dance #1, Poskocina" performed by John Botica, on misnice, Mountain View, California, May 26, 1938.

Learn More

- Also of interest are Sidney Robertson Cowell's recollections concerning her work and the people whose songs she recorded. Listen, for example, to her comments about the Russian Molokan Congregation in San Francisco.
- Find out more about the ethno-musical material assembled by Cowell and her colleagues. Browse the collection items by Subjects, or Contributors; view the Glossary of Musical Instruments and Ethnic, Cultural, and Language Groups represented. Also, see the Today in History feature on Italian folk music collected by Cowell in San Francisco.
- Voices from the Dust Bowl documents life in Farm Security Administration (FSA) migrant work camps in central California (1940-41). The collection is rich in music that complements that of the Cowell collection.
- See the list of Performing Arts collections for more music materials including the Dayton C. Miller Flute Collection and the sheet music collections: Music for the Nation:

American Sheet Music, ca. 1870 to 1885, Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1820 to 1860, and Historic Sheet Music Collection, 1800 to 1922.

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