



# **Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings from the Upper Midwest, 1937–1946 (Languages and Folklore of Upper Midwest)**

*James P. Leary*

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America's Upper Midwest is a distinctive region where many indigenous and immigrant peoples have maintained, merged, and modified their folk song traditions for more than two centuries. In the 1930s and 1940s, Sidney Robertson, Alan Lomax, and Helene Stratman-Thomas—with support from the Library of Congress and armed with bulky microphones, blank disks, spare needles, and cumbersome disk-cutting machines—recorded roughly 2,000 songs and tunes throughout Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Spanning dance tunes, ballads, lyric songs, hymns, laments, versified taunts, political anthems, street cries, and recitations, these field recordings—made by people born before or shortly after 1900—were captured at a transformative moment when America was in the throes of the Great Depression, World War II was erupting, and market-driven mass entertainment media were expanding rapidly. Yet, except for a handful of Anglo-American performances, these remarkable field recordings in more than twenty-five languages have remained largely unknown, along with the lives of their mostly immigrant, indigenous, rural, and working-class performers.

Since the 1970s, folklorist James P. Leary has worked steadily to bring the folk music of the Upper Midwest to a larger public. *Folksongs of Another America* presents 187 representative performances by more than 200 singers and musicians, carefully restored in digital form from deteriorating original formats. The accompanying book provides an introduction, full texts of all lyrics in the original languages and in English translation, extensive notes about each song and tune, biographical sketches and photographs of many of the performers, and details about Robertson, Lomax, and Stratman-Thomas and their fieldwork efforts as song collectors. These restored performances reveal with clarity and power a nearly lost sonic portrait of another America.

Finalist, History, Midwest Book Awards

“A treasure. . . . Leary's deep knowledge of the subject matter is demonstrated by thought-provoking facts placing the dance tunes, ballads, lyrics songs, hymns, political anthems, and more in historical context.”—*Book Verdict, Library Journal*

“An amazing ‘bible’ . . . A magnificent boxed set of Midwestern music.”—*Surface Noise*, WFMU Radio, New York, NY

“The best set of folklore documents that I have heard in a long time. It is a truly amazing production. If it does not win an award for the best reissue set of 2015, then I really will eat my hat!”—*Musical Traditions*, UK

“Most celebrated field recordings of American folk music are documents of the rural South, but this absorbing collection makes the case for a different milieu entirely. . . . A mind-boggling swath of material.”—*New York Times*, Holiday Gift Guide

“Amazing. . . . The end-all book on folk music of the Midwest.”—*Finnish American Reporter*

“This monumental effort will have an audience among students and fans of traditional music. Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty and professionals; general readers.”—*Choice* ?

“So comprehensively detailed and thoroughly vetted that it would be hard to see where one would have a complaint about this magnificent volume. . . . It should serve as a standard text for understanding folklore in this region and a proud example of how best to package the surviving output of field trips. It outstrips most of its predecessors by virtue of its offering text, sound, images and moving images; *Folksongs of Another America* is a model of its kind.”—*ARSC Journal*, Association for Recorded Sound Collections

“Attains the highest standards of folklore studies. . . . A landmark presentation of traditional music of the Upper Midwest.”—*Journal of Folklore Research*

“Grammy nod for the polka prof: Leary has spent the last ten years . . . on [this] enormous, Grammy worthy undertaking.”—*Isthmus*, Madison WI

“Every track here, all 188 of them, is explored in ocean-depth, including translations of lyrics, stories of and from the performers, details of the various ethnic groups. . . . The wealth of goods here is staggering, and I suspect that, for many listening to even a single disc’s worth of this collection, the United States just got bigger.”—*The Old-Time Herald*

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