

Annabel Morris Buchanan and her folk song collection

LYN WOLZ

Women have been active in the field of folklore for many years. They have collected songs and tales, founded folklore societies and folk festivals, written scholarly articles, pursued creative endeavours using folk motifs, and adapted folk materials for education and recreation. Annabel Morris Buchanan played her part in this tradition. She collected folk songs in the Appalachian region of the United States in the 1930s, founded an annual folk festival and directed it for six years, wrote about folk music, and composed music using folk themes. Though destined by birth to fill the traditional role of a respectable Southern woman, she took off in her own direction and joined the ranks of women in Britain, the USA, and many other countries who were dedicated amateur folk song collectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Buchanan excelled in every field in which she participated: she not only functioned as a hostess for her lawyer/politician husband, she also taught music, was a church organist and choir director, composed art songs and hymns, and wrote gardening articles and romantic short stories for women's magazines. In addition, she was a leader in the National Federation of Music Clubs and organised choral music festivals. These were all acceptable activities for an upper-class, 'progressive Southern woman', as one literary journal labelled her.¹ What set her outside the usual woman's role more than anything else was her work in the field of folklore.

One of Buchanan's primary motivations in all of her 'folk work', as she called it, was her belief that the composers of the elite musical world could improve the quality of their own compositions by using the themes of folk music. Indeed, one of Buchanan's primary contributions to elite creative expression lay in her own settings of folk tunes for piano and choir, and her compositions using folk themes, most of which were published by J. Fischer between 1929 and 1944. What distinguished her from most other contemporary composers was that in 1930 she joined what she called the 'most delightful of fraternities, that of the folk-music collector', which was to change her life in many ways.² Her reading of British and American folklore journals and other folklore publications, as well as of books such as *National Music* by Ralph Vaughan Williams and J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, helped to form her

opinions on the value of folk music and on the uses to which it should be put. Her ideas about and knowledge of folklore and traditional song were strongly affected by her contact with British folklorists during the White Top Folk Festival conferences and by letters from correspondents such as Anne Gilchrist. These contacts, as well as the many American folklorists whom she met at the conferences or with whom she corresponded, also influenced her development of a theory of a neutral mode in folk music and her theories about the tune families of folk hymns.³

A fortuitous combination of circumstances in Buchanan's life helped her to accomplish so much in so many different fields. Her own personal talents, her family background, the southern regions where she grew up and lived all of her adult life, her quick intelligence, her open friendliness, and her willingness to work hard, all provided the background for her accomplishments in folklore, music, and writing. One magazine writer was astounded that 'one woman has covered so many branches of the arts and specialized in each to so high a degree of professionalism'.⁴ Some more facts about Buchanan's life will help us to understand these extraordinary accomplishments. Annie Bell Morris was born in Groesbeck, Texas, in 1888. She showed precocious musical talent, playing piano for her father's church choir at the age of seven. Her family's tradition of singing folk hymns and other folk songs was very important to her. As she said in a speech in 1954: 'among my earliest recollections are the songs and tunes of my parents and grandparents: songs and tunes which, heard in the impressionable years of childhood, have profoundly influenced my life.'⁵ When Annie Bell was fifteen, she won a scholarship to the Landon Conservatory of Music in Dallas, Texas, from which she graduated three years later with the highest honours. She taught at a women's college in Abingdon, Virginia, where she met John Preston Buchanan, a lawyer and writer who would later become a state senator. They married and moved to Marion, Virginia, in 1912. Over the space of the next fifteen years, the roles of wife, mother of four, gardener, and church organist seemed to satisfy Annabel (sometime before her marriage, she had changed the spelling of her name), although she continued with her other creative activities such as composing art songs and writing articles and short stories for women's magazines.

While preparing a programme for her Marion Monday Afternoon Music Club in 1923, Buchanan read Cecil Sharp's book *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*,⁶ and was intrigued and inspired. From that time forward, she read all the books she could find on the folk songs of Britain and North America. Her papers include order lists of books she bought from Blackwell's in Oxford. These provide a fascinating glimpse into her reading on the subjects of folklore and folk music. Buchanan had long been familiar with the music that was played for square dances by some of the men in her town, but it was not until John Powell, a composer and pianist from Richmond, Virginia, came to address her music club in 1930 on the importance of saving America's so-called 'native' music for posterity and using it in composition that she began combing the countryside for folk music. She started collecting in her own neighbourhood but she soon branched out, travelling through



Figure 1 Annabel Morris Buchanan

the surrounding counties and further into the Appalachian regions of other states, either by herself or with fellow collectors such as Richard Chase.

An open and very friendly woman, Buchanan took advantage of every conceivable situation to collect folk songs.⁷ Once, for example, while riding on a bus in the dark, she noted down a play-party game from a fellow passenger. Another time she approached an old man on the street, who 'had a certain look about him', to ask if he knew songs from the *Southern Harmony* shape-note book; he did. Richard Chase told a story about Buchanan's ability to find folk songs: on one of their collecting jaunts they stopped at the side of a road so that he could change a flat tyre; by the time he had finished, she had noted down three fiddle tunes, a play-party game, and two ballads. While this anecdote might be apocryphal – after all, Chase was an inveterate storyteller – it does illustrate how highly other folklorists and collectors thought of her abilities. Her collecting notebooks and her correspondence with contributors and with other collectors give further fascinating glimpses into her collecting style.

Buchanan respected the 'mountain folk', as she called her informants, and they respected her. They were willing to give her not only their songs and tunes but their tales, legends, and beliefs. Indeed, some of them trusted her so much, even on short acquaintance, that they were willing to tell her about witchcraft beliefs and charms for healing, which are not matters that people in rural areas are often willing to share with outsiders. During the years 1931 to 1936, she developed another important avenue for making contacts with informants when she became the co-founder and director of the White Top Folk Festival, held on White Top Mountain not far from her home in Virginia. The festival was an odd concatenation of two types of musical event. It was modelled partially on the fiddle contests that had been popular in the area in earlier times and partially on the folk festivals held in Canada in the 1920s, about which Buchanan had read. Contests were held during the day and were open to anyone who wanted to participate – so long as the music was traditional as judged by Buchanan herself and by the judges, whom she chose from elite, not local, culture. The evening concerts featured those performers who were, in Buchanan's estimation, the best the region had to offer in the performance of traditional songs, dances, and instrumental pieces.⁸

Many of Buchanan's most important contributors were people she first met through the festival. It was also the place where she interacted with other folklore collectors, composers, and National Federation of Music Clubs officials, as well as with local, state, and national dignitaries, including first lady Eleanor Roosevelt in 1933. The White Top Festival was a focal point of Buchanan's life in many ways. In fact, at this time and in later years she often spoke of her 'White Top work', by which she meant all of her many activities in folklore.⁹ These are documented in her papers, which were deposited by her family in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1978. They include thousands of pages of correspondence with many well-known figures from the worlds of elite music and folklore, and hundreds of tales, legends, customs, sayings, herbal cures, and beliefs, as well as songs and tunes. Buchanan also deposited the songs she collected for the National Federation of Music Clubs' American Music Archive Project in the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress.¹⁰ I have created a database which includes the following information about each of the 839 songs Buchanan considered worthy of inclusion in her collection: song title, standard title, informant, collector, place, and date, along with any special notes. This database provides the basis for the following analysis of Buchanan's collection.

Of the total number of songs in her collection, Buchanan herself collected 570 and received around 270 from other people. The songs she did not collect herself were sent to her by a total of seventy-four people, thirty-eight of whom were members of the National Federation of Music Clubs and twenty-four of whom were well-known collectors, including Phillips Barry, Austin Fife, Herbert Halpert, William Koch, George Korson, Louise Pound, Anne Warner, and Mary Wheeler. The largest group of songs in this category consists of 128 songs from the manuscript collection of Martha Davis, which were contributed by Davis's sister.

Buchanan solicited songs from other collectors for two purposes: first, to complete her manuscripts, and secondly, to add to her American Music Archive Project for the National Federation of Music Clubs, for which she wanted to use examples of all genres of American folk songs and examples from every state in the USA.

The 570 songs and tunes that Buchanan collected herself were from 170 different contributors. The majority of these people gave her only one or two songs, but forty-seven gave her between three and twelve songs each, and seven – who were all from Marion, Virginia, or surrounding Smyth County – gave her from thirteen to thirty-four songs each. These seven included three who were regular performers at the White Top Folk Festival: singer Horton Barker of Chilhowie; singer, fiddler, and dance-caller Council Cruise of Damascus; and dulcimer player and singer Samuel F. Russell of Marion. Buchanan's most prolific informant, however, was Elziebell Ferguson of Marion, from whom she collected thirty-four songs. Many of her contributors were also informants for other collectors, either before or after Buchanan recorded their songs. This gives an interesting perspective on how the songs of individual performers changed over time or between performances. For example, Horton Barker was recorded on paper by Buchanan in 1931 and later recorded on disc by Richard Chase and Arthur Kyle Davis. John M. 'Sailor Dad' Hunt was recorded by Buchanan in 1933 and 1934, but also by Arthur Kyle Davis during the same years, as well as by John Lomax in 1935, by the National Folk Festival in 1938, and by Alan Lomax in 1941. These multiple recordings allow scholars to look at the repertoire of a singer to see which songs were sung for which collectors and in what kinds of performance situations.

Sometimes Buchanan's contributors sang songs for her that they did not sing for other collectors. For instance, there are twelve songs from Horton Barker in Buchanan's collection that are not in any of the other published or recorded collections. Again, Samuel F. Russell, whom Buchanan recorded before anyone else, gave her sixteen songs that are not in any other published or recorded collections. All collectors, and often performers themselves, are aware that, depending on the situation, the audience, and the way the singer or instrumentalist is feeling at the time, a performer will offer a specific set of songs or tunes. Any recording session is merely a snapshot of the singer's active repertoire on a particular day or, in some cases, a resurrection of old materials from an inactive repertoire, if that is what the performer believes the collector or the audience wants.

The types of songs Buchanan collected were diverse. Although she was not immune to the 'look how many Child ballads I found' syndrome, she did endeavour to collect all the material that came her way – banjo and fiddle tunes, children's songs, and hymns, in addition to old ballads and lyric songs. She organised her songs into folders using her own classification scheme (Figure 2).

Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation

- I – A Child Ballads (Arranged by Number)
- I – B Later Imported Ballads
- I – C Native American Ballads
- II – A Traditional Lyric Songs
- II – B Native Songs
- II – C Humorous Songs
- II – D War Songs and Ballads
- II – E Sea Songs and Shanties
- II – F Nursery Songs
- II – G Hunting Songs and Drinking Songs
- II – H Dance Songs
- II – I Dialogue Songs
- II – J Cowboy and Western Ballads
- II – K Old Published Songs in Oral Tradition
- II – L Moralities and Confessions
- II – M Parodies and Satires
- II – N Rounds and Catches
- II – O Mormon Folksongs
- II – P Lumbermen's Songs
- II – R River Songs
- III – A Accumulative Songs and Carols (Secular)
- III – B Carols (Sacred)
- IV – A Folk Hymns
- IV – B Ballad Hymns
- IV – C Camp-Meeting Hymns
- IV – D White Spirituals
- V – A Singing Games
- V – B Play-Party Games
- V – C Country Dance Figures
- V – D Country Dance Tunes
- VI – A Nursery Rhymes
- VI – B Games Without Music
- VI – C Counting Rhymes
- VII – A Negro Songs (Secular)
- VII – B Negro Spirituals

Figure 2 Annabel Morris Buchanan's folk music classification scheme

Child ballads	104 versions of 34 song types
Children's songs	103 versions of 55 song types
Broadsides	55 versions of 41 song types
Hymns	55 versions of 32 song types
Humorous songs	36 songs
Lyric songs	35 versions of 27 song types
Native songs	34 versions of 23 song types
Fiddle tunes with words	23 versions of 13 song types
Native ballads	21 songs
War songs	11 versions of 9 song types
Sea songs	8 songs

Figure 3 Analysis by type of 570 songs collected by Annabel Morris Buchanan

Analysing the collection by song type, the largest number appear in the categories for Child ballads; children's songs, which includes nursery rhymes, play-party games, and lullabies; and broadsides, both British and American; with fairly large numbers of hymns, humorous songs, lyric songs, and native American ballads (Figure 3). The anomaly of sea songs being collected in the mountains of Virginia can be explained by the inclusion of the songs of 'Sailor Dad' Hunt, who was a retired sailor living in Marion.

Buchanan typed copies of the songs she collected using up to ten carbons and placed the copies in more than one folder. This gave her the ability to look up her songs by type of song, as above, or by informant or state. Another impressive aspect of her collection is that 464 out of her 839 songs have tunes accompanying them. She was one of the few American collectors who, even though she had no access to mechanical recording devices, often took down the tunes as well as the words to songs. Indeed, she was quite proud of her ability to note the tunes by hand with speed and accuracy. However, the handwritten tune usually appears in only one place in her files because copying tunes by hand was such a time-consuming process.

Buchanan also included as much information as she could about the song, the singer, and sometimes even the context of the performance, and included this information with the songs in her collection. Because she modelled her collection on others where the main concern was the song, and not the singer or the context, we could certainly wish for more information, but, for her time, she was meticulous about crediting the singer as much as possible. Almost all of the song sheets in her collection include the name and place of residence of the contributor, the name of the collector, the date the song was collected, and notes on the history of the song or the background of the informant. For example, there is a note at the bottom of 'I'm a Good Old Rebel' that tells the circumstances of how it was collected: 'One verse and tune recorded over telephone ... text written by Miss Ball.' Evidently this was

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a common technique used by Buchanan in collecting songs. Often she would only take the time to note one stanza, the chorus, and the tune while she was with the contributor or talking to them on the telephone, then she would have them send all the words to her later. This allowed her to collect a large number of songs in one day, at the White Top Folk Festival for example, without using a mechanical recording device.

'The Gypsy Girl' is an example of one of many songs that have notes written by Buchanan presenting a history of its appearance in published collections:

From Horton Barker,
Tune Mar. 31, 1931.
Words Aug. 27, 1931.

Collected and arranged by
Annabel Morris Buchanan

The Gypsy Girl.

1. My father was a captain of a gypsy tribe, you know,
My mother she gave me some counting to do;
With a knapsack on my shoulder, I bid you all farewell,
I'll take a trip to London, some fortunes to tell. ...

This is a version of 'The Gypsy Girl', ('The Little Gypsy Girl') from English broadsides. See Cox, 100, for West Virginia version. Cox also gives these references: Roxburghe Ballads, VIII, ii, 853; De Marsan broadside, List 9, No. 30; Singer's Journal, I, 146. American Star Songster, New York, 1851, p. 45.

The following version of 'Omie Wise' has an even more extensive set of notes on the history of the song, in this case describing the contributor's knowledge about it and his belief that it was a true story:

From D.A. Hilliard,
Sept. 14, 1931.

Collected and arranged by
Annabel Morris Buchanan.

Omie Wise.

1. I'll tell you a story of little Omie Wise,
Oh, it's how she was deluded by John Lewis' lies. ...

Mr. Hilliard says this really happened in Virginia. Another folk singer, the Rev. J. L. Sims, who has also given me a version of this ballad, wrote down for me, 'Omey Wise that was drown by John Lois in the year of 1856 in the state of N.C., Saro Co.' Lamar Stringfield (30 and 1 Folk Songs, 14) gives a version which he says is a true story: Jonathan Lewis having drowned his sweetheart, Naomi Wise, in Deep River, 1808. Miss Louise Pound (Pound, 51) gives a Kentucky version also found in Campbell & Sharp (No. 70 A,B,C) in which Omie was found 'In the bottom of Siloty below the mill dam' and mentions another

version from Virginia which came from a man acquainted with Omie Wise, having danced with her often. According to Miss Pound, when this gentleman once sang the song at a singing school in Indiana, a stranger present hastily left the meeting and skipped the country. 'Many people thought perhaps this man might have been the Lewis who murders Omie in the song.' See also *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XX, 265-6. Bascom Lamar Lunsford (Lunsford-Stringfield, 30 & 1 Folk Songs) states that he has visited the grave of Omie Wise at Providence Church near Deep River, N.C. So it seems certain that the tragedy occurred in this mountain section, whether in North Carolina or southwest Virginia, and became the theme of a typical American folk-ballad. I have also collected other versions of this, some with tune almost identical with the hymn tune, 'How Firm a Foundation'!

Buchanan also included instructions for many of the children's songs, singing-games, and dances that she collected. 'Green Gravel' is an example:

Sung by
Mrs. Elziebell Ferguson,
Marion, Smyth Co., Va.

Recorded by
Annabel Morris Buchanan
Sept. 15, 1931.

Green Gravel

1. Green gravel, green gravel,
The grass is so green,
And the masons, the masons
Are ashamed to be seen.
2. Oh, *Mary*, Oh, *Mary*,
Your true love is dead,
He wrote you a letter
To turn back your head.

Children form circle, hands joined. A leader has been chosen, who then chooses one from the circle by calling her name in the second verse. At 'turn back your head', the one chosen turns, facing backward, though continuing to circle, hands joined with the others. This player then chooses the next to turn. They continue in this manner until the entire circle has 'turned inside out'. (Sometimes girls and boys play. When a boy's name is called, the seventh line is sung 'She wrote you a letter ...', and the boy turns backward in circle.) The alternate words for 'the masons' are 'the maidens'.

'The Man that Lived in the Woods' provides an example of how Buchanan listed the standard or alternative titles and includes a typical note about the informant's ancestors and ethnic and geographical background.

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Sung by
the Rev. J. Levi Sims,
Pageton, McDowell Co., W. Va.

Recorded by
Annabel Morris Buchanan
Oct. 9, 1931

**The Man That Lived in the Woods
(The Drummer and His Wife)
(Father Grumble)**

1. There was an old man that lived in the woods,
And this you can plainly see,
He said he could do more work in a day
Than his wife could do in three ...

From his father, of Irish descent, born in Aiken County, South Carolina, later living near Walker's Mountain, north of Marion, southwestern Virginia, where Levi was born. Mr. Sims thought the song had come originally from his grandfather Sims, born near Belfast, Ireland.

Finally, 'The False Knight Upon the Road' gives an example of how Buchanan marked tunes according to the type and mode of the melody, according to her own modal analysis system:

Sung by
Mrs. Maud Gentry Long,
Hot Springs, Madison Co., N.C.

Recorded by
Annabel Morris Buchanan
Richard Chase
June 26, 1936

Pentatonic **The False Knight Upon the Road**
Mode 3 (Child 3)

1. Where are you going?' said the knight in the road,
'I'm going to school,' said the child as he stood.
He stood and he stood,
'I'm going to school,'
Said the child as he stood ...

Learned from her mother, Mrs. Jane Gentry of Hot Springs, who sang the ballad for Cecil Sharp in 1916.

One of the most important pieces of information for collectors in Buchanan's era was the state where the informant lived. There even seemed to be a kind of contest as to which state could claim the most Child ballads. Analysing Buchanan's collection by the state of residence of her informants, it turns out that most states are represented by between one and eleven songs. Most of these were sent to Buchanan by other collectors or by National Federation of Music Clubs members. The states

with the highest number of songs in her collection are the ones where she herself did a lot of collecting. The six states with the highest numbers of contributors and songs account for 611 out of the 797 songs in the collection that are credited to a particular state (Figure 4).

Virginia	437 songs	(lived there most of her adult life)
Kentucky	70 songs	(made three collecting trips)
Tennessee	37 songs	(made two collecting trips)
North Carolina	29 songs	(made two collecting trips)
Texas	23 songs	(from her family tradition)
West Virginia	15 songs	(from a former resident of Marion, Virginia)

Figure 4 The six USA states where Annabel Morris Buchanan collected most songs

Another item of interest to scholars is the date when songs were collected. The dates of collection for songs in Buchanan's papers range from 1911 to 1961. Out of the 839 songs, 181 are undated. All of those collected between 1911 and 1922 are from the Martha Davis collection. Buchanan herself collected songs from 1930 to 1961, although most were collected between 1930 and 1940, the years when she worked in her own area, took many collecting trips, and ran the White Top Folk Festival. Most of the songs dated between 1941 and 1949 were sent to her by others. Those dated 1950 were mostly gathered by Buchanan when she took her final collecting trip. Finally, half the songs dated 1951 to 1960 were collected by Buchanan and the other half were sent to her by National Federation of Music Clubs members and by other collectors.

Annabel Morris Buchanan's collection of folk songs is substantial and would prove interesting to anyone who wants to study a cross-section of traditional songs sung among white people in the Appalachian region, especially in southwestern Virginia, in the 1930s. However, extensive as her accomplishments were – her large folk song collection, her musical compositions, her writing, her founding of the White Top Folk Festival, among many others – she suffered one major disappointment in her life. She had long worked towards the goal of seeing her collection of folk songs published as a multi-volume work with musical settings and scholarly annotations, modelled on the published collections of Sharp, Child, Randolph, and others. She worked on four major book manuscripts for more than thirty years and tried several times to interest publishers in the projects, but to no avail. Her work has never been easily accessible and remains hard to find to this day. Although she is not one of the more well-known of America's folk song collectors, she was an ardent advocate of saving folk music through its use in every possible field of culture, and she influenced many people's views on the value of the folk arts. Most importantly, she left the world a legacy of the American folk songs she loved.

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Notes

- ¹ 'Real Southerner', *Southern Literary Messenger* (1939), 404-06.
- ² For a description of some of Buchanan's collecting experiences, see her manuscript titled 'On the Trail of the Folk Song in the Virginia Mountains' (unpublished, undated), Annabel Morris Buchanan Collection 4020, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as AMB 4020).
- ³ See Annabel Morris Buchanan, 'A Neutral Mode in Anglo-American Folk Music', *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 4 (1940), 77-92, for further details of this system, which was

- strongly influenced by the theories of Anne Gilchrist and Phillips Barry. Buchanan's correspondence with her two mentors, Gilchrist and Barry, is preserved in AMB 4020 (where her own letters to them are usually included because she kept carbon copies).
- ⁴ Mabelle Howe Mabel, 'Annabel Morris Buchanan', *Music News*, 22, 25 October 1929, p. 18e.
 - ⁵ Annabel Morris Buchanan, 'Our American Folk Music', unpublished speech given at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, San Jose, California, 21 May 1954, AMB 4020.
 - ⁶ Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, Comprising 122 Songs and Ballads, and 323 Tunes* (New York: Putnam, 1917).
 - ⁷ The three anecdotes that follow come, respectively, from one of Buchanan's field notebooks (AMB 4020), from her unpublished manuscript 'The Bough Was Given to Me' (AMB 4020), and from a conversation I had with Richard Chase at Ferrum College, Virginia, in September 1980.
 - ⁸ For a fascinating study of the White Top Folk Festival and Buchanan's role in it, see the chapter called "'This Folk Work" and the "Holy Folk": The White Top Folk Festival, 1931-1939' in David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
 - ⁹ See, for example, Annabel Morris Buchanan to Anne Gilchrist, 2 February 1939, p. 2, AMB 4020.
 - ¹⁰ This information comes from the Archive's publication titled 'Major Collections of Virginia Folklore in the Archive of Folk Song', which was compiled by Joseph C. Hickerson in 1975. Buchanan deposited the songs at the Library of Congress in the 1960s as part of the National Federation of Music Clubs' American Music Archive Project. The Archive of Folk Culture also holds a tape recording of Buchanan herself singing eighty of the songs she had collected or knew from her family's singing tradition.

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Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation

Edited by Ian Russell and David Atkinson



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The Elphinstone Institute

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