

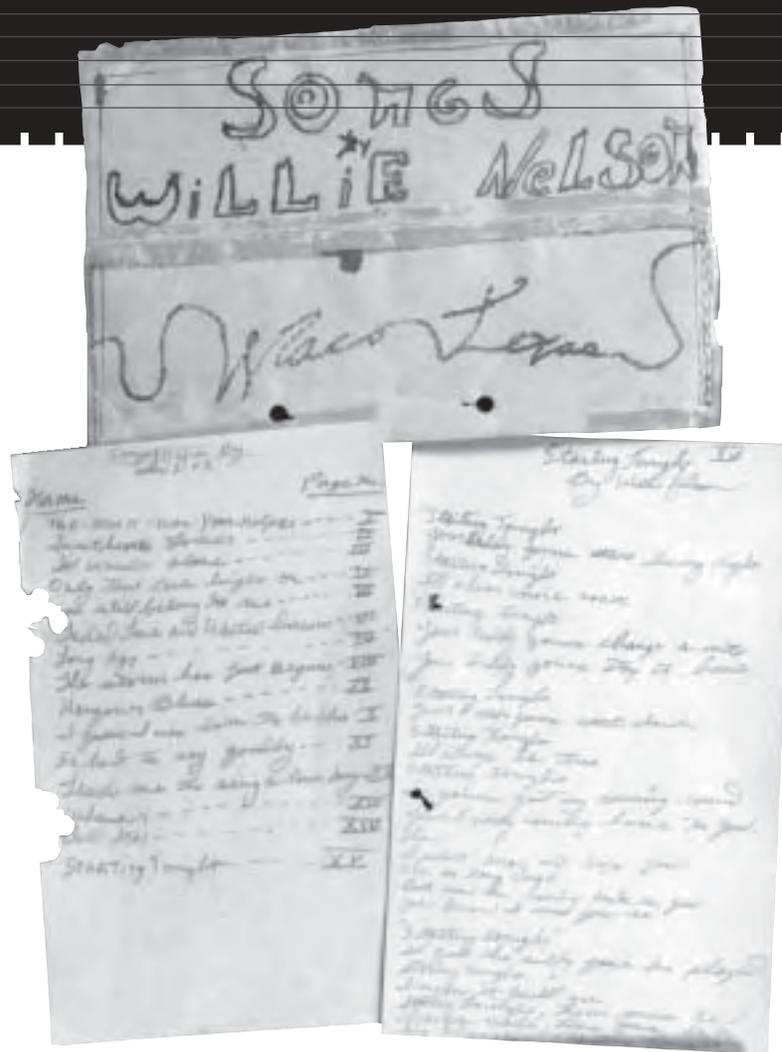
Texas Music Archives:

The Southwestern Writers Collection at Southwest Texas State University

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As an assistant curator at a literary archives collection, I 'm sometimes called upon to explain why something called a "Texas Music Collection" exists as part of the Southwestern Writers Collection. It's a good question, and the best answer, I've found, is to pull out one of our most treasured items. No, it's not the 1555 edition of Cabeza de Vaca's La Relación y Comentarios, considered the first written account of Texas and the Southwest and one of the rarest books in the world. This is something even more special to many Texans. It's a little handmade book of original songs, put together by Willie Nelson when he was about 11 years old. When you see Willie's songs written down on paper, it's easier to understand how musicians belong in something called a "Writers" collection. Because musicians, as we all know, are also poets.

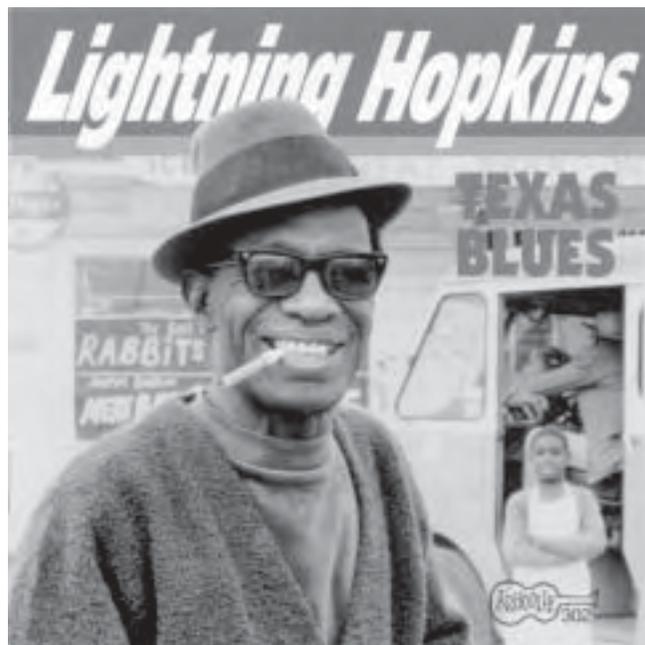


Willie Nelson songbook, written at age 10-11. Front cover, Table of Contents, and "Starting Tonight" song lyric. Willie Nelson papers. Photo by Brianne Corn, courtesy SWWC.

Willie's songbook is just one item in an extensive collection on the legendary star; also included are pages of handwritten song lyrics, concert programs and posters, tour itineraries, photographs, and publicity clippings. One can find several files on Nelson's "Farm Aid" initiative in the 1980s: correspondence, annual reports, newsletters from grassroots farm organizations, publications from various state departments of agriculture, concert memorabilia, grant proposals, and applications for funding. The Nelson papers contain material on one of the singer's bleakest periods—his trouble with the Internal Revenue Service in the 1980s and 1990s. The archives contain a notice of seizure from the IRS, as well as government documents and inventories for the 1991 auction of Willie's property. The Nelson papers are rounded out by a staple of any archival collection, representative artifacts, such as Willie's bandanas, sunglasses, t-shirts, and even a pair of his well-used running shoes, complete with mismatched shoelaces.

Another good question that people often ask is "How do you get all this stuff?" In the case of Willie Nelson, as well as most of our other archival collections, the answer is very simple. The materials are graciously donated by benefactors who wish to see that the collections are preserved and made available for future

researchers. The Willie Nelson collection came through the efforts of our founding donors, Bill and Sally Witliff, along with Willie himself, Bud Shrake, and Jody Fischer.



Courtesy Arhoolie Records

The Willie Nelson collection will prove to be a valuable treasure trove of detailed information for future historians. The tour itineraries, for example, detail where Willie and his band were on specific dates. The snatches of song lyrics captured on hotel stationary trace the development of some of Willie's best-known hits, along with a few songs that never got off the ground. The correspondence from fans offers first-hand testimony about how the singer affected numerous lives; some even make the case for Willie as a secular saint. The "Farm Aid" files illuminate the inner workings of an organization that reflects Nelson's sense of social obligation to his fans.

The Southwestern Writers Collection, founded in 1986, is one of the youngest of the major archival repositories in the state. We consider ourselves a "living collection" in many ways. Not only are many of our donors and artists still living, we also continue to grow steadily as we collect and preserve the works of significant Texas and Southwest writers, musicians, and filmmakers. We are committed to collecting Texas music materials that represent the state's rich diversity, from country and Western Swing to blues, polka, rock and roll, conjunto and Tejano. To that end, we've gathered hundreds of representative recordings from performers in all genres. In terms of our primary source materials, the archives, what we collect depends on what people



Courtesy Arhoolie Records

choose to donate. We've had tremendous success so far, partly because of our responsible stewardship and good word-of-mouth reputation. The first thing we do after taking in a collection is basic preservation work—rehousing all material in acid-free folders and boxes and storing them in a climate-controlled facility. Though every archives collection has a large backlog of uncataloged material, we have made it an institutional priority to expeditiously "process" the collections—which means that the materials are organized and a detailed inventory and guide to the collection is compiled. We place all of our "finding aids," as these guides are called, on our worldwide web site.

The Internet revolutionized academic research, and institutions that make finding aid information available via the Web are a welcome sight to scholars. A researcher can quickly locate archival collections and review online what specific material is available for research. The Web has certainly brought widespread attention to our own music holdings, as well as our other archival collections. The numerous inquiries we receive from researchers all over the world are good indicators of the widespread interest in Texas music history.

Our Texas Music Collection includes a number of prominent Texas musicians and musical styles. We are honored to be the archival repository for the Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame, which has been led for several years by Al Dressen. Among the holdings are rare treasures from the King of Western Swing, Bob Wills. The collection contains Wills's blazer, along with a hat he wore



Courtesy Arhoolie Records

and a fiddle he played. Additional artifacts are stage outfits worn by the Light Crust Doughboys, along with Laura Lee McBride's fringed leather costume. The collection is rounded out by numerous sound recordings, rare photographs, awards, clippings, posters, momentos, and other items that pay homage to Western Swing legends such as Milton Brown, Smokey Montgomery, Cliff Bruner, Tommy Duncan, Johnny Gimble, Hank Thompson, Leon "Pappy" Selph and many others.

Country music is represented by our holdings on Willie Nelson as well as contributions from Jerry Jeff Walker, who played at the dedication of the Southwestern Writers Collection. Walker has donated a pair of his Charlie Dunn boots, as well as his handwritten lyrics for his song honoring the revered bootmaker. Long-time *Austin City Limits* producer Bill Arhos has recently donated numerous personal archives from his twenty-odd years of guiding the celebrated television show. Arhos's materials are like having a backstage pass to *Austin City Limits*, and they include candid photographs, rare ephemera, concert posters, program schedules, press packets, newsclippings, correspondence, sound recordings, and magazines.

Another very exciting area of the Texas Music Collection is the material relating to conjunto and Tejano music. Included in the collection are copies of some 12,000 recordings made by Mexican-American performers in Texas and the Southwest from the 1920s to the 1980s. As any student of Texas history knows, there remains a wide disparity between Anglo and Mexican interpretations of specific historical events. Too often, historians in the past have relied solely on written Anglo accounts. The Mexican view was often overlooked or ignored, many times

because no published work on particular historical events existed. Yet as Américo Paredes so vividly demonstrates in his groundbreaking book, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, a vital response to Anglo history can often be found in the music, particularly the corridos, popular among Mexican communities. In that sense, these 12,000 songs offer immense potential for future researchers interested in Mexican perspectives. Much of the story of the Mexican presence in Texas remains to be told, and some of it will undoubtedly appear in future research into collections such as this.

Another important collection of note is the *Selena: Como la flor* archives, donated by *Texas Monthly* Senior Editor Joe Nick Patoski, who wrote an acclaimed biography of the murdered Tejano superstar. The archive consists of early drafts of the book, extensive research into Selena's life, interviews with dozens of musicians and others who knew Selena, correspondence, hundreds of Selena-related clippings and other publications, documents from the Yolanda Saldívar trial, and an extensive record of Patoski's relationship with his publisher. The collection is useful to researchers in many ways, from a possible examination of how the Anglo media portrayed Selena, to her relationships with others in the Tejano music industry. Among the most fascinating aspects of the collection are the oral interviews. Only a very small portion of the interviews ended up in the pages of Patoski's narrative, yet a wealth of information was collected. For example, one of Patoski's interviewees was Laura Canales, a pioneering female singer in the male-dominated world of Tejano music. Patoski and Canales discuss Selena in their conversation, yet they also speak at great length about the issues women face in the music industry. That subject goes beyond the scope



Courtesy Arhoolie Records



Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Showboat Hotel, Las Vegas, March 13–June 7, 1959. Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame collection. Photo courtesy SWWC.

of Patoski's biography and is waiting to be ferreted out by enterprising researchers. Patoski's extensive interviews function very much as a collective oral history of Texas's Tejano music scene.

Stevie Ray Vaughan is the subject of another major research collection donated by Joe Nick Patoski and Bill Crawford, co-authors of *Stevie Ray Vaughan: Caught in the Crossfire*. The collection has received intense attention from several researchers, but much more remains to be analyzed. Patoski and Crawford assembled a wealth of research material for their biography, and the collection contains dozens of bootleg recordings spanning the entire breadth of Vaughan's career, from his early days with

the Cobras in 1975 to his final performance in Wisconsin on August 26, 1990. As in the Selena papers, the rich oral interviews with numerous musical personalities are of particular interest. Included here are discussions with B.B. King, Ray Benson, W.C. Clark, Kim Wilson, Buddy Guy, Angela Strehli, and Austin club owner Clifford Antone. The conversations not only illuminate Stevie Ray Vaughan's personality and musicianship; they also document the rise of Austin's music scene in the 1970s and 1980s.

Patoski has written for *Texas Monthly* for some 25 years now, and he has also donated his personal writing archives to the

Southwestern Writers Collection. At *Texas Monthly*, Patoski has covered a wide variety of stories, from bargain-hunting excursions along the Texas-Mexico border, to meditative explorations of the rugged reaches of Texas's mountain country. But for much of his tenure at *Texas Monthly*, Patoski has been the magazine's principal music writer. As such, he has received hundreds of promotional materials over the years, such as press kits and sound recordings covering everything from hillbilly punk to gospel rap. Patoski also served for a time as the manager for Joe "King" Carrasco and the Crowns, a popular Texas party band that blended Tex-Mex with New Wave. Material from his time with Carrasco is also present in the collection, including Joe King's royal cape and crown.

Texas Monthly magazine is one of the signature archival collections held at SWT. In 1994 the magazine agreed to donate its enormous archives to the Southwestern Writers Collection, and the materials fill an entire warehouse annex. *Texas Monthly* has covered Texas music extensively over the years, and its archives offer additional opportunities to music researchers.

Thanks to a grant from the Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission in 1999, we have completed the massive task of processing the first five years of the magazine's editorial archives: 1973-78. Through internal memos, correspondence, notes from editorial meetings, responses from readers, and other files, researchers can piece together the ways in which the state's leading mainstream publication reported on the state's music.

Another *Texas Monthly* writer, Mike Hall, was once known as the leader of an Austin-based band, The Wild Seeds. Since joining *Texas Monthly's* staff, Hall has written stories on personalities ranging from Lance Armstrong to Roky Erickson. In the spring of 2000, Hall conducted interviews with several musicians for a feature story on a curious phenomenon: why so many great musicians hail from Lubbock. Hall envisioned the story as an oral history, and, as such, he conducted lengthy interviews with West Texas luminaries Jimmy Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Jo Harvey Allen, Caroline Hester, Terry Allen, Angela Strehli, Delbert McClinton, Lloyd Maines, Waylon Jennings, and many others. Hall has since donated the tran-



scripts of his interviews to the Writers Collection, where they stand ready for researchers.

Another popular magazine with great potential for research is *Hispanic*, a national publication that reaches over one million readers a month. In 1999 *Hispanic* donated its editorial archives from 1994–98 to the Southwestern Writers Collection. The materials consist of manuscripts, correspondence, memos, research, press kits, and editorial suggestions. The archives allow unparalleled insight into *Hispanic's* coverage of Latino music, which is of particular interest to historians examining the relationships between Hispanics in Texas and the larger Hispanic world.

Additional donations have come in during the last year, such as vintage concert posters donated by Nancy Coplin and Bruce Willenzik. These documentary performers as diverse as Mance Lipscomb and the 13th Floor Elevators.

The business aspect of the music industry is often as fascinating as the musicianship, which is why archives that relate to music management are also very valuable resources. The Southwestern Writers Collection has been fortunate to receive important music business archives in recent months. We have worked closely with SWT's Center for Texas Music History (formerly the Institute for the History of Texas Music), which helped bring in the Mike Crowley Archives and the Roger Polson and Cash Edwards Archives; their Under the Hat Productions represented artists such as Terri Hendrix and Ray Wylie Hubbard. Mike Crowley managed the careers of several major Texas artists, including Tish Hinojosa, Jimmy Dale Gilmore, Hal Ketchum, and Joe Ely. The Crowley archive contains massive amounts of information detailing the financial, legal, and public relations work necessary to manage artist careers. The files hold tour itineraries, contracts, publicity materials, legal correspondence, videos containing rare footage of television appearances, accounting statements, snapshots, marketing reports, catalogs, and news clippings. Researchers can explore everything from venue contracts for Tish Hinojosa's Border Tour in 1994–95 to publicity efforts made on behalf of Hal Ketchum, which include a coffee mug featuring the singer's smiling face. The Southwestern Writers Collection also holds selected materials on the life and career of legendary music producer Harold "Pappy" Daily, donated by Daily's grandson Mike.

The Southwestern Writers Collection's holdings represent just one part of an extensive network of private and public collections that exist throughout the state. Devotees of Texas music often envision establishing a single high-profile Texas music



Photo of Laura Lee McBride wearing fringed leather costume which forms part of the Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame collection. Photo courtesy SWWC.

museum and collecting institution that can bring together the diverse collections under a single roof. The Southwestern Writers Collection and the Center for Texas Music History will continue to collaborate on future archival projects, but such a museum and collecting institution probably won't happen in the absence of a multi-million dollar financial commitment. The best bet may be to elect Willie Nelson as Lieutenant Governor, and then he can convince the state legislature to appropriate \$80 million towards the enterprise. After all, it worked for Bob Bullock and the State History Museum.

In the meantime, we at the Southwestern Writers Collection see ourselves as a partner with the other diverse collections within the state. As such, we will continue to do our best to serve the interests of donors, researchers, and the general public by continuing to collect, preserve, and make available important archival collections that reflect the unique heritage of Texas and her cultural arts. Those who wish to join us may contact any of our staff at 512-245-2313 or visit our website at www.library.swt.edu/swwc. We plan to continue to grow and flourish as we join with others who share our vision. ■