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Folklife Archives Project 459
Interview with Yvonne Dodge (B1,F3)

Tape 1 of 1
Informant: Yvonne Dodge (YD)
Interviewer: Michael Ann Williams (MAW)
with Michele Pezzuti present
Date: July 29, 1996
Location: Princeton, KY
Transcriber: Hayden Roberts
Panasonic RR-830 Transcriber

Counter #

001 MAW: It's July 29th and this is Michael Ann Williams and I'm out in Princeton, KY talking to Yvonne Dodge and we're talking about Sarah Gertrude Knott and her sister Gladys Knott who were friends of Miss Dodge and talking a little bit about how she knew them, and what she knew about them and their family. And, where would you like to start? Would you like to talk a little bit about how you got to know Miss Gladys Knott? And then--

YD: Well, yes Michael Ann, Miss Gladys was a teacher at Caldwell County High School. And, I met her as a freshman entering high school there. And--Miss Gladys was a decidedly different person. Anyone who knew her would say she was quite a character and struck me so at first, I suppose. But, she became a good, really good friend, of mine and has remained so until her death, and still is really. I still consider Miss Gladys around even now [laugh].

MAW: When did you first meet Miss Sarah?

YD: Uh, Sarah was--Miss Gladys's sister. She came home to visit here, I remember coming over here to visit like in maybe 1962. Sarah was out, I remember, reading in a chair right out at the end of the carport there, and she said, "This is my Kentucky folklore sister, Sarah Gertrude Knott." I thought, well you know, what is that? You know, [MAW laughs] I didn't know, I didn't know what it was at the time.

MAW: What was your first impression? Do you have any particular-

YD: That, she was a very attractive lady, very friendly and who immediately went back to reading her material, you know. And, while I visited with Miss Gladys [laugh].

MAW: O.K., why don't we talk a little bit about what you know about their family and their family background. Where they're from and their sisters and brothers. Do you--

YD: O.K. they are from McCracken County, Kentucky. That's, Kevil was their address. They are buried at Spring Bayou Baptist Church Cemetery which is approximately 15 miles below Paducah. Their mother died when they were very young and their sister who was twenty years older took on a mothering role, I would say, toward them. That was Mrs. Lannie Ransdell.

MAW: How was her named spelled? Do you remember?

YD: L-A-N-N-I-E-R-A-N-S-D-E-L-L. Ah, she maintained a home atmosphere, I would say, where they went back to until Miss Gladys became employed in Princeton in 1941. And at that time, I think they rented an apartment, she and Miss Lannie here, Miss Lannie's husband had passed on. And she maintained her home in Ballard County for quite awhile, but I think was not in very good health and came here to stay. And after she'd been here, oh, I guess they were here until '51. They decided to build this house that we're in now and she sold her house down at, below Paducah at that time and this became their home.

MAW: And, then there were also brothers in her family?

YD: Ah, the brothers were Foster and Atlas and there was a brother Guy also who had died earlier.

MAW: And, Miss Gladys was the youngest of the--

YD: Miss Gladys was the baby in the [MAW: O.K.] family, that's right, having died at 95. She lived a full life. She was the young one.

MAW: How much older was Sarah Gertrude?

YD: Three years.

MAW: Three years, O.K.

YD: Mm-hmm, so they were very close. Actually the whole family was close. They had, they had something that you would like for a family life, I mean, you know, their association as brothers and sisters was respectful and very nice and they seem to value each other and have a good up-bringing. Their father was a central figure in their life since their mother had passed on. They were all of the Baptist faith--Sarah became the more culturally oriented person, I guess you would say, going into the folklore field.

MAW: What was their father's name?

YD: Clinton Knott.

MAW: And what did he do? Do you know?

YD: Not really. Except that I do know he was active in government as a leader and things like this, and they seemed to have good home conditions, and were like you say, encouraged toward education and leadership roles themselves--toward college careers and you know. So it seemed to be that they were on the up of education and learning and moving out into the world to take their places, which they did.

MAW: And, what--was Miss Gladys's educational background?

YD: O.K., Miss Gladys went to they, they graduated from Heath High School. She went to school at Western where she taught in the Demonstration School there. She went to George Peabody, Vanderbilt, in Nashville and then she taught at Heath High School and here.

MAW: How where the two sisters different?

YD: Completely different as anyone could see. Miss Gladys was the more athletic personality. Sarah Gertrude more--dramatic and dressy and--and--more noticeably attractive, I guess you would say as if you just look at people, as far as looks go. As far as
050 personalities, I doubt if Sarah had anything on Miss Gladys [both laugh]. She had her marvelous personality.

MAW: Uh-huh. How would you characterize her personality?

YD: Oh,--you would have to meet Miss Gladys to understand. Both of these ladies were very strong personalities I mean, you know, you didn't walk into a room and ignore them and you knew they were there and you liked it. You know, you weren't bothered by them. Uh, Miss Gladys would strike you with her interest in you, not with her above you arrogance or anything like this, but very much on your level, interested in you, very up, happy personality, and, a comfortable person to be around. She was, I'd say a stability. I was much younger and I always considered her a person, you know, who was always there for me when my parents weren't even there. I mean, if they wouldn't do it, she would [laughs]. I was lucky.

MAW: What do you know about Sarah Gertrude's educational background?

YD: Sarah Gertrude also went to Heath High School were she was--in little plays I've heard them mentioned quite a bit. Speech, readings, she liked this type thing. She had a very good speaking voice in one of the lower, throatier, developed sound from drama. She studied in North Carolina, drama. And, aspired to be an actress. Had a screen test, that didn't work out. I assumed the reason they were in St. Louis was that their brother lived there and that it was probably the largest city one would go to from the area they grew up in. Uh, anyway, after getting to St. Louis she found the opportunity to set up the program which became the National Folk Festival.

MAW: Mm-hmm. She, Sarah Gertrude wrote about recreation and using recreation in folklore. Do you think that was an influence of her sister Gladys since her sister knew a lot about--

YD: Well sure, Sarah was such a strong person that she was not influenced by everyone. O.K., she was highly influenced by her sister, Miss Gladys, probably by her older sister, Mrs. Lannie Ransdell, whom I was not around that much. She was ill when I met her. Miss Gladys was a strong influence on anyone who met her. And, I am sure she was on Sarah. If she had a problem, Sarah would turn to Miss Gladys with the problem that's right, and she was in recreation, so it is safe to assume that she may had something to do with starting the National Folk Festival, yes [laugh].

MAW: I think I read in one of those things that she was very into square dancing.

YD: Oh, yes, definitely. We all, even I took, you know, even had an introduction to square dancing in my P.E. class up here at the school. Yeah, you know, she was, she promoted square dancing very much so, yeah.

MAW: Did you have a chance when Miss, when Sarah Gertrude Knott was in Washington to visit her there or--?

YD: Yes, I did visit her--and attend the--festival at Wolf Trap in 1971. We--I was at her apartment on Connecticut Avenue [pause]. And, I met some of her friends. Was out in Washington at, you know, or uh, several occasions and did go to the festival [pause]. We stayed at Tysons Corner at the Holiday Inn at that time when we went out to the festival but we stayed at her apartment the rest of the time and then went back. I think I was there for two weeks, at the time.

MAW: What was the apartment like? How did she live when she was-

YD: The apartment had--Miss Gladys once again had chosen the apartment for her, more or less. She had been in--she was not--into buildings or great homes like to glorify her image. She, she did it with her festival or with her knowledge or with her performance, it was not with her house at all. It was simply something to live in, to work in, and to, you know, take care of her needs as far as living goes. She did have apartment after apartment in different places. Uh, they, Miss Gladys thought some of them were a little small, a little cramped. They weren't as comfortable as they could be. And, she would teach school during the year, always go to the festival in the summer and look at her clothes, her closets, her apartments and see what she thought she needed you know, up-grading and would recommend that. And, I remember when she did find this bigger apartment--for her. The only thing I remember about the apartment it had large rooms. She had a--you entered with a hall. Sarah cooked, and she had a dining table and a hall. She had a, she had a way with a place that was kind of nice. I mean you would like it. It was, it was comfortable, and she sort of fixed things up kind of nice. She had a living room with, I think it was a day bed which I used and then, then there was a bedroom. She had a kitchen and a bath and they were large, large rooms. The only thing I noticed about the apartment was it was not air conditioned at the time. And I thought this was a major draw-back in Washington [MAW: Washington--] because I was there in July. She had big fans which we used. And--the living room looked out into a center area in the apartments that was like green and like a court or something, so the view was kind of nice. Miss Gladys would always look into how big the closets were, how the view was like, and you know, how big the rooms were. She, she liked comfort, you know. Not cramped conditions, but now Sarah probably would not object to those things, she didn't really care that much about that. She was more into, like I said her own
100 appearance, her work and getting her festival going then into where she was living at the time.

MAW: So even though Gladys was the younger sister it sounded like she kind of took care of Sarah in some of the more practical--

YD: Miss Gladys took care of everyone and that was her personality. It was not that she was going on as a star doing anything. She more or less was interested in you and sort of tried to help you along. That was the way she was; that was her personality. There aren't, you know, a lot of people like

[pause] that, really. And it was nice. This may have come about as, as being a teacher here over many years, having concern for her students, and you know, keeping up with a lot of younger people like that, probably made her, gave her that personality.

MAW: Did the oldest sister have a profession? Or was she--

YD: She was a teacher also [MAW repeats: She was a teacher also, okay]. Like in, we have Knott School down in McCracken County near the church where they're buried. Its been torn down now, but the sight is still there, when they would drive by they would say that's where Knott School was. That's where they went to school for the first six grades. And their big sister was the teacher there [MAW: oh, O.K.]. So all the views were that they came from a educationally oriented family, which was for-- and, probably allowed them in later life to move out into their professions that they did.

MAW: Were there any childhood memories that they shared with you or stories particularly that they would tell about when they were little or--?

YD: Uh, yes, I remember Miss Gladys always said that she left home one time when she was real small, ran up into the woods to her Uncle Joe's and they couldn't find anywhere, you know, and they thought she had run off, you know. Oh, they were, they were really full of a lot of stories. I don't know if you haven't heard this one. They always took advantage of the word Knott to the fact that I think even at Sarah's funeral, the preacher said that they always said they were Knott [not] sisters [MAW laughs]. This was the, you have not heard that? [MAW: No.] Oh yeah, they always told everybody that. You know, that was, that was one of their major,--but yeah, there were a lot little catchy stories like that they had. As far as when they were children, they pretty much grew up together, they were near the same, near the same age then, than their other, even their brothers and their older sister had a very, I'd say firm hand on them at that time, with, since the mother was not around. And her, since she was a teacher at the school it was, it was, sounds pretty nice.

MAW: Uh-huh. What did they call each other?

YD: Well, we were into nicknames here, I guess you would say and Miss Gladys's nickname was "Slats," she had gotten it at Western someway as a P.E. major or something, I don't know they all had nicknames there. So Slats held on; we called her Slats. Sarah, she was called Sarah Gertrude, Gertrude, Sal, Sally, quite often. To the world probably, if they would come in it was Sarah Knott,

is the way she preferred to be known, I think, more or less and maybe the Gertrude would come out in print, but as far as introducing herself, I think she would say, "I'm Sarah Knott," before it was, you know.

MAW: I noticed looking at the correspondence with Paul Green it was like over 50 years. In the early letters she signed herself Gertrude and then she started signing it Sarah Gertrude and then the last one she signed it Sarah; [YD: became Sarah, yeah--] so I wondered, within the family--

YD: But, then we all, it's interesting that she would go through the thing about her names, because we all do, we react to our names. And, different ones at different times in our life; so Sarah came out above the others in the end it seems like--so most people, I think now, you know, Sarah Knott is what they--

MAW: Right, they grew up and it was predominantly a rural sort of a background or--?

YD: Yeah, you really should go below Paducah and see this. No, its not so much rural now, but at that time it was. The road that goes--there now is--U.S. 60, O.K.? It goes right by the mall and down to the airport below Paducah. It's right on down there, you go so far and turn right about five more miles. Uh, that was, they do talk about this, the Clarks Line Road they called it. And, they did ride up and down it in wagons with horses when they were small. And, they talk about this, you know. Going to Paducah from down there was a major trip. And, I remember when I first, made my first trip down to the cemetery and that area, they showed me the creek where their sins were washed away, the well where they used to stop and get a drink of water, the school, Knott School, very strongly relate to this area.

MAW: Yeah, strong sense of [YD: Yeah] that home, yeah.

MAW: I wonder what would have inspired her to want to be an ac--I mean, if her sisters were teachers and that was more of a typical aspiration I guess, for, an educated woman, but to be an actress is?

YD: <u>These</u> ladies were not held down into what they can do. Some of us are. I mean, they, they did, it seems that they believed they could move out in any area, and do it and she did, you know. And, that, that is the way people [in family?], they believe they can do it. So, something inside of Sarah Gertrude Knott said I, I can be a great actress or I can be something great, and

I'll move out of Kevil and go somewhere and then she did, so--

150 MAW: Did she have a personality that was dramatic or--?

YD: Oh, very, very. She spoke well as a trained person, I mean as trained as you expect, you know in the best way I mean, you know. I mean--the highest class person would not be offended by anything Sarah Gertrude Knott said. She was a very classy lady, I mean she gave the air of, of knowing what she was doing and looking like a great actress or something. I mean, you know, she was sort of like that. She was, she was [pause], she was sophisticated along with her folksy air. But, this didn't seem to bother the common or whatever she called, I don't know if you call it common or not, but the, the people who performed who were not particularly trained in this field were not bothered by her at all, I mean they all seemed to relate to her and like her which is sort of unique because sometimes people are but no, no I don't think they were--I think they loved her, you know. She worked well with most, most people. You know, most of her life, I'd say. Phenomenally well in fact, which is--with the support that she needed, and the people that backed her, and the people that came. She seemed to work really well with them.

MAW: It seemed that she was very talented at getting people to help her--

YD: That seemed to be one of her strong points, that people reacted to her and liked her and wanted to do what she wanted them to do, you know, uh-hum, yeah.

MAW: But behind that she had a lot of family support with her sisters and I mean, they were kind of there for, since she--

YD: Definitely, I'd say so, yeah, yeah. Strong sense of family I would say.

MAW: When you went to Washington that festival, what was the festival itself like, just your own impressions.

YD: Well, Wolf Trap was the new performing arts center there. I was very, we were all very impressed with it. I had never been to Washington before. I took the historic tours of the White House and the cemetery and quite a few things like that. Sarah did not go on that, Miss Gladys and I went on that. She was interviewed by the *Washington Post*. We stayed in her apartment. She called a lot of her friends and she was glad to be back there to her phone to call people in Washington at that time. She did a lot of talking on the phone, had some people in for

dinner, and was very, you know, anticipating the festival how it would be since she was not directing that year. That was her fir--our first year back, and we did go out to Wolf Trap. We did stayed, like I said, at that Holiday Inn at Tysons Corner, which was still quite a few miles from Wolf Trap since its kind of back. And went to all the, I remember they had the party at night at the Madeira School which was the Jean Harris place [laugh], yes?

And I didn't go over to the Madeira School, but when I heard about that, I, you know, that's here that is, you know. But, she always wanted to go to the party afterwards. She was strong on those. She liked them. She was a, she was a party person who socialized with the people as you know, not just the stand back emcee, you know. When she did it, she was more, I'd say more classically dressed, in an evening dress and you know, really. Where as this festival at Wolf Trap was more the, the, I'd don't know, grassroots approach or something, down to earth; I don't know what you'd say about that was. I think they had three emcees, different emcee every night at the time. Had changed the format to a one particular group per night, category of performance per night. It was a bigger, I remember, and they had multiple stages with you know, out in the woods in different angles. And, it was nice. It struck me as big and very good facility to have it in, lovely.

I remember eating at something called the Evans Park Farm Restaurant. A very great place which I've since heard was like, is like a great restaurant listed in the top ten in the country or something. We went out like to eat and she didn't go, but Miss Gladys and I went to that. I mean, I went out to several different things and she, we went to see Mrs. Shouse at her house and had tea. She met her. And, Sarah was honored as the founder. Like on the Saturday evening program. I think they had her stand and announce that she was there. And I was impressed with the National Folk Festival, you know. Everybody seemed to know Sarah, you know. She walked around, everybody was running up talking to her, you know.

MAW: Most of the friends that she had were friends,connections through her festival work, did she have particular friends or interests that were outside the festival at all or--?

YD: Probably not. You know, I hadn't really thought about this and I would say that everybody at the festival would know who she was obviously and--it was, it was, in anybody's brain, it is not easy to separate her from the National Folk Festival, at least not, for me, you know. Someone else maybe standing in the director's position or at the emcee, you know, emceeing it. But, 200 you know, if she were around, you wouldn't get that

impression; you'd still get the impression that it was part of her. She never really became separated from the festival. Uh, she, was just intermingled with it to the point that was like her, you know. That was the way she felt about it.

It wouldn't take long to talk to her to understand that. I mean, you know, it was just--of course, anyone who has an organization realizes that keeping it going and having it again year after year is the, is the aim. And, if it doesn't go on that year, you don't have it. So that gives you a sort of drive to keep it going, you know. And, that was, that was what you sensed with her, kind of a nervous energy, you know, something's happening and I'm responsible for it, you know. And that was all the time, you know. And, that was kind of inbred in her over so many years that--it's not something you would just come home and say, "Well, I don't do this anymore," sit back and not do it, you know. No, you wouldn't be able to do that, I don't think. You know, she wasn't able to do that, she--she would still maintain interest in it, you know and still try to start another one or a smaller one or a regional one or, you know. That was her interest, starting folk festivals, whichever, you know.

MAW: What was her general feeling about some of the changes that happened as she retired, after she retired?

YD: I would say at age seventy-nine or eighty which I think she was at the time that she resigned from the festival--she was not into the changes maybe that were announced at the time. She didn't react well to them. I think the feeling was maybe that her health was affecting her in the way she reacted to what they were saying--some people I think that what they assumed, O.K.? But, once again, a person who starts a festival and has an image of it or a vision doesn't react well to some other suggestion sometime. They have their own idea what it should become and they really stand for that. I mean after all, if you're strong enough to start it, you feel you're strong enough to, to mold it into the image you wanted and I think she was kind of like that, you know, and--no, I don't think she reacted very well, to say, the change in name from the organization itself to the National Council for the Traditional Arts. She wanted the whole, the whole thing to be called the National Folk Festival which I don't, I think the change in name was O.K.. I, I don't see that was, as long as they maintain the festival and have it and keep the name on it, that's, it's, you know. But, even any little thing. I mean it's, you know, but once again, if you're, if for thirty years or something you've been setting up the programs and combing over them, and spending every hour of your life and minute on it and you see they're different, you, doesn't, you know, it wouldn't strike anyone to well, I guess. [pause] If you

really liked it, that is, if it was very important. Now, if it were just a job you wanted to get rid of or something and you didn't relate to it that's fine. I don't guess you would care, but if it was really like a part of you and you really related to it, that strong, it would affect you. And she was affected that way by it.

MAW: Was she angry or bitter?

YD: Well, she could be, she was strong. She, she was not--afraid to speak out if she didn't like you or something you said, you know. She expected you to respect that she didn't like it and still be nice to you and--after it was over, you know. She was, guess you would say, she was used to dealing with people like that and yeah, she could be very. She, she was a very temperamental lady, but not about life in general, mostly about the National Folk Festival. You know, it was just a, it was the biggest deal in her life. It was the main--core of her existence. And that was what she thought about all the time.

MAW: Do you have any sense of over the years how she supported herself; since, I mean, the festival never brought her--much money, she had a little bit of a salary?

YD: She was paid a salary. Uh-huh, enough for apartments, expenses, and traveling. She did not drive. So she always relied on like taxis and she always had an office. She stayed in a lot of hotels and even when was in the rest home, she thought she was in a hotel, see. Cause, she was so used to hotels I mean and it didn't bother her. It was something like what she'd been used to, you know. In, in short, she spent most of her life in apartments or in hotels instead of in a family home setting.

MAW: Do you think she missed having a family life?

YD: Oh, no, no. We don't think so. We think she loved her life as it was and was very satisfied with it. I don't think she would have traded it at all, I think she had a good time. Up to
250 the time that maybe see retired. I think she--you know, the other life was the busy, busting life of putting on the festival was, that was Sarah. That's what she liked.

MAW: Do you think over the years she had male admirers? Or?

YD: Well, we know of Melville Hussey who was, who was the attorney for the National Folk Festival. She did inherit some of his furniture and things that, some of them's even here. As far as anyone else, particular name, I don't have that, but I did

hear a lot about him. He did pass on away. [pause] He seems to been a very fine--gentleman.

MAW: But she enjoyed the type of life she cut out for herself?

YD: She was her own person, O.K.. With her own image and her own organization to run and--I guess if you had children, a husband, and a lot of things, it would get in the way of something like that. A lot of professional people, you know--give all their time to something that big. Because you're traveling, moving, you have your mind on this, you really not going to have time for a lot. She did--she did cook. I was interested in a lot of her--she made bread. She always made me a little, there was a little pan in here now. Just a small pan. She always made me a little loaf, and she always fixed this topping for it, I don't know, sugar and water and flour, something had on top. It was delicious, homemade bread. I don't make homemade bread to this day, but we always had homemade bread. And, she made this--special garlic dressing for the salad, she would mash the garlic. Someone, she had seen someone do that into the wood of the bowl with the juice and get it real, you know? And, it was just I, really, I make that sometimes and. She was a good cook, she could cook, but it wouldn't be like a routine three meals a day type put it out. This would be an occasion if she cooked.

MAW: Kind of a gourmet, sort of--

YD: Definitely, [both laugh] and it was very good. We looked forward to it.

MAW: What was her sense of style and the way she liked to dress?

YD: Oh, very, very--well, I wouldn't say flamboyant, but very up-to-date, classic. I would say was her look from her hairdo on, which was off the face. Well--coiffeured look, I guess you would say to a--a suits, blue seemed to be her predominant color. She even had the blue glasses which she wore on a chain around her neck and would take off and on. They looked well with her white hair, which was very white in later years. She was a thoroughly attractive lady, yeah. Almost striking and. But, if you saw her you would think she was striking; if you heard her speak you would like her voice; and by the time you talked to her, you'd realized she was very forceful and dynamic, and, you know, ready to move on with what ever she was doing.

MAW: You said, she sort of was, had a temper but was it that she, she just was kind of forceful?

YD: She was use to service, people working for her. A secretary. she would become impatient if she landed in Princeton, say here, without a typewriter or a filing cabinet or desk and a secretary to type up her things, so she could send letters out to everyone, see. So, she quickly set-up a, where ever she went an office, either on the porch or the back bedroom or something. She would set-up a, a desk, a typewriter, now I guess it would be a computer now, but at that time it was a typewriter. She was always at the typewriter, you'd hear the pecking back here. She would type it out, then give it to a secretary, sometime they came here, sometime they worked out of their own home. And, they would return the stuff to her and she would mail her correspondences that way. Oh, so she did, she, she expected certain things. Probably not her fault because she had, had them at her finger tips, see being in. She had a very nice office in Washington on DuPont Circle with a business manager and a secretary, at least and you know, was used to just saying, "I need this," and it appeared, you know. And so, I think she had--I don't think she, she made a lot of money, as you would say but her living conditions were not bad. She had good, she traveled. She stayed in hotels and things like this; so she was really in the traveling circuit out in the world and it, it's, it wasn't bad. It's exciting, I guess you would say.

MAW: When did she settle down permanent, retire permanently in Princeton?

YD: 1971.

MAW: One, uh-huh. And, she moved in here with her sister, do
300 you want to tell us a little bit about the history of the house?

YD: O.K., this house was built--by Miss Gladys and her older sister, Mrs. Lannie Ransdell in 1951. Mrs. Ransdell had sold her, finally decided to sell the farm in Ballard County that they had called home because her husband had passed away and moved here with Miss Gladys. And, Mrs. Lannie lived here until her death in 1963, I believe it is. And, I did see her, she was in a wheelchair the first time I ever came here. She didn't talk much and was much, very old, you know. And, sort of sick and Miss Gladys was taking care of her at the time. Sarah would--come home and visit, you know. And, that's when I'd meet her, you know. Then they would, Miss Gladys would go to the festival, which I didn't know that much about at the time because I'd never been and--Sarah would continue her traveling all over the United States, as she would say, you know.

MAW: Uh-huh. When--after she retired and had some problems with her health was it frustrating to her not to be able to get out and travel as much and to be in control?

YD: O.K., she did travel. O.K.--in this area, I would say. She did, she did go on with her travels. It wasn't on as large a scale or as national a level as she was used to, but--she kept busy. She had an office at the George Coon Library provided for by the library. She had secretaries working on, on her book. She maintained correspondence with, with most of the agencies--and people that had been on her board and active in her organization. She, when, introduced herself on her stationary letterhead, she always had a letterhead, that was very important to her. Soon as she arrived, she had a letterhead prepared, that's it. Which indicates she was used to a letterhead, where she was [MAW laughs]. If you didn't have that, you just, you know, weren't, working you know, you weren't. So, she got her letterhead as a consultant here from this house and she maintained a lot of correspondence and, and had a heavy mail, and worked on her book, and went out and spoke in Paducah, went to Tennessee, went down to visit Steve Cates, went to Western. Went to Lexington and up into eastern Kentucky to visit a lot of friends up there at Prestonsburg, Pikeville, up in that area. Berea, particularly. Went back to Washington to the festival. And, it was still at Wolf Trap at the time, in the summer. She was, she, she didn't just sit down and drop out and say, "I'm no longer in this area," not at all. I mean, it was if it went on here. It wasn't maybe on the level that it was on up there, but she had it here, yeah, she went on with it. Until, she did have an, an eye problem, a cataract was her first indication and she did have the surgery and it was successful, but about three months later she had a major stroke which pretty much was the end of her--on the level, alert, productive, material stage, I would say. After that, she did come back in pretty good shape at the rest home. She did have her material out. She always had something to write on and she wrote, but at times it made sense, at times it didn't. I mean, she was affected, but she came back stronger then we ever thought she would for such a major stroke. At which time she lived three years after that, but she--

MAW: What year was it that she went in the nursing home?

YD: She went into the nursing home in 1980 after the major stroke, O.K.? About a year after that, she was pretty good, but she was like [pause] she was slightly confused at times, is what I'm saying. But, she got up, walked around and dressed, and talked to people at the rest home. And, Miss Gladys, her sister,

would visit her daily. I visited her occasionally, I didn't go, she went every afternoon to see her. She kept up with her, she was taking care of her, but couldn't take care of her here because she was a strong person who would become upset and you couldn't deal with her if she didn't like something. You wouldn't be able to deal with her here. That's what we determined so she had to go there. She didn't object to it there. She thought she was at a hotel. It was fine. And, once again that's good, you know, if you have to go. And, she related to it. And, it was O.K., you know.

MAW: You were talking about earlier some of the things that she liked to have around, the type of art and things that she had in the house here.

YD: Well, she had a lot of gifts, people would bring her to the festivals. Everyone brought Sarah something from their native land or of where ever they had come from. She most prized her Indian possessions. She liked the Indians very much and she related to them. She had Indian dresses upstairs. She wore them around Princeton, a lot of people remember them still. She had a lot of folk art around. Which she related particularly, Haitian art. O.K., which she had even at the rest home. She had this picture over here that I was showing you. It was, she wanted to take that with her out there, so she could look at that. I mean, that made her feel at home there, see, seeing it that on the wall. And having her, her pencil and her, she had a bookshelf with a few things like this laying around with her material that she could pull out in case she wanted to look at and that, that was what made her feel at home.

MAW: And her favorite color? She had a blue room?

YD: Oh, blue, blue, blue, blue. Oh, yeah, definitely blue [both laugh]. And she looked great in it, too. Blue is the big color over here without a doubt [laugh].

MAW: How was she received generally in Princeton? I mean she must have been rather a flamboyant character for a town, a small town.

YD: Probably so, it was that in this town her sister Gladys would top her in recognition. I mean, she was like everybody in town had her in school so they all knew her; so Sarah became more or less Miss Gladys's sister who was sort of famous from, and then moved back to live with her here. Which Sarah moved out more into the Paducah area which was, was O.K.. That's a larger area than this any way and that gave her more of an regional

impact, which is very smart once again. And, worked over, instantly started up the Kentucky Lake Folk Festival, which I think has probably grown into this Four Rivers Folk Festival. Now, I've assumed that was the beginning of something like that. It's right over there in that area and they never had one before. But anyway, that seemed to have taken off, really well. I showed you a clipping about that a minute ago. And, that was the one she worked on, she got here. She set-up meetings with some pretty influential people in Paducah, and I remember going to those myself, and they decided on the lakes area to have it over here at the time, they thought that would be a good area to have it, and it probably was. And, that was about the time that The Land Between the Lakes was being developed. They're talking about cutting back on it now, I think even aren't they? Cutting the thing back? But, at that time, it was forward thrust over there and is still an active area over there. And, so that's, that's where they had it and she was very much into that festival at the time. She, she pushed for having it. It was, there was something, you know, inside of her that just said, "Let's have another festival. If there's not one here, let's start one," you know. And, that was what she was happy doing, she wasn't happy if she couldn't do that, you know.

MAW: Doesn't sound like retirement was really in her vocabulary.

YD: No, no, no not really, not really. Maybe moving out of Washington or leaving, you know, say the folk fest--National Folk Festival office was retirement, but not really from the field or from the mental activity of constantly working on folk festivals, her material, or keeping up with the people, or having another one, no. No, that was always there. Even after her stroke, we, Miss Gladys would say, you know, that even in her unconscious moments, you could hear her, you know, something about the National Folk Festival would come out, you know. That was, that was the first thing on her mind, you know.

MAW: When did Miss Gladys pass away?

YD: Miss Gladys passed away, it will be four years this September 19th. She, she died--Miss Gladys had wonderful health--much healthier, being a health major then Sarah Gertrude. She really died of pneumonia at age 95. She was very much mentally alert up to--she was hospitalized for two weeks and stayed here at home until then and then died in the hospital.

MAW: It sounds like she was rather a, a legendary teacher in--

YD: Miss Gladys, to people in Princeton and to anyone, yeah,

Miss Gladys was legendary. Probably because of her, the interest that she was willing to show in her students and their lives and [pause]

MAW: She influenced a lot of people's lives--

YD: Probably even Sarah Gertrude Knott's life, yeah [both laugh].

MAW: How about the brothers? Do you know what they did or anything about them?

YD: I know--some of their--I knew the, the second I wife of the brother Foster, Mary. She has passed on since then. I didn't know him. I didn't really see the brothers, I saw his second wife and then I saw the adopted daughter of the other brother who is still in Paducah, I visit her sometimes. She wasn't really adopted at that time, people just sort of took a child and sometimes they didn't even adopt it and raise them. Well, they had one like that and I always keep up with her, but--they were--generally well respected people who were for education. And, the brothers definitely weren't as strong as, as the, say the three sisters were, but--they seemed to be O.K. people.

MAW: Do you think she had any kind of a role--I mean, growing up without a mother, was her older sister sort of her role model? I mean, she was a very independent woman particularly for that time.

YD: Oh, yeah. I would definitely say they thought their older sister was, as a teacher, was, was, they thought she was beautiful. I mean, they admired her in every way. She had a, a nice home, a husband. You know, nice furniture and you know, it was, yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah, I think she was a role model for them. Even though I don't think, I think they wanted. Obviously, Sarah wanted to be an actress or something more [pause]. She wanted to earn a place, I think. Her own identity, I think. Which she did.

MAW: Do you know if she ever did any kind of, you mentioned a screen test, but did she act in plays or anything like that ever?

YD: Oh, yes down in North Carolina, I think. She even did the plays, you know, up to that time. I think once that she, she took on the more executive role of, of the director's--role. After setting up the program in St Louis in Kiel Auditorium in 1934, I think, she settled into that role quite well, and never really went back to the--except I think that she used the speech,

the acting to her advantage in, in emceeing the programs or even in conversation with people, you know. I think it definitely
450 showed that she had this kind of training, you know.

MAW: She got pleasure out of being on the stage as part of emceeing.

YD: Oh, yes, Oh, yes. I remember, Madison, she had, had these festivals in all of the biggest, best places. We're talking about Madison Square Garden in New York. I remember Miss Gladys went to Madison Square Garden, she said that Sarah walked out in her beautiful gown and saw all those people and ran backstage and said, Oh, no I can't go out here," you know [MA laughs]. She told that one, you know, but then she went on out. She was scared when she got to Madison Square Garden they said, yeah.

MAW: So even she occasionally got stage fright.

YD: At that point she did.

MAW: Yeah, um-uh.

Michele Pezzuti: What was her, what were her work days like when she was in good health here in Princeton?

YD: Well, she--was a fairly early riser, I'd say seven o'clock or something. She'd eat breakfast, these, I'm not a breakfast person myself. I didn't really eat breakfast but they, they had breakfast. Newspaper. News of the day. And, then to the typewriter, and getting out your material and calling your secretary, and into your correspondence and you know, looking into what's happening with your own--festival plans for the day, whatever they were either on the regional level or around here or she always had something to do with correspondence or her material or her book or her secretary's coming in.

MAW: Did she have any particular political beliefs or moral beliefs that inspired the festival or?

YD: I'm sure there were, but as far as stating political beliefs--politics to the point that people were willing to follow what she wanted to do that is political in a way. As far as party affiliation I mean, or you know, running for office on a party level, we, we didn't hear anything like that or anything like this. Partisan, particularly, no. But, political from the stand point of developing a organization and having people support it, yes.

MAW: But she was not politically active in terms of political politics--

YD: No, no.

MAW: Or, anything like that?

Pezzuti: What about--what would the three of you do for fun. We talked about a trip to Florida?

YD: Oh, yes--we did, we went to Florida and on the way down we went, we stopped at White Springs, Thelma Boltin--

MAW: Thelma Boltin.

YD: She was there, and she asked us to breakfast. We went to the--White Springs memorial and stop there. She had had her festival down there, I think.

MAW: Yes.

YD: Thelma had a festival?

MAW: Thelma had a festival, yes.

YD: White--

MAW: The Florida Folk, Folkl--Fe--Festival, or it became the Florida Folklife Festival, yeah.

YD: O.K., well we went there. And, then we went on down to -- Clearwater and St. Petersburg. She visited a friend of hers named Lila Armstrong. Just a lady that I don't guess you have heard of her, in St. Peterburg. She had been a dear friend of
500 hers. We came back through Georgia and visited a lady [pause] Fanny, Fanny White at Milledgeville, Georgia and she had known her as a--a friend. And--I just remember Sarah always wore her birthstone, it was a, a purple set, I don't know, amethyst? I guess or something, I don't know. Her birthday was in January, O.K.? She had a birthstone or guess it was her birthstone, a big purple ring. I'm going to look at some jewelry in a minute and show you another one. But, anyway, and a--Fanny White had on the same ring [laugh] I was just, you know, I couldn't get over, here these two ladies, they were so similar, she had a ring just like hers on her finger, I thought, well that's, you know. But she was the, there's a college at Milledgeville. She was connected with that school and had retired, we visited her there on the way back. So that is to say, we did go on a Florida vacation, but

Sarah always had people that she was, knew along the way, and we would stop and visit them, too.

MAW: When was this, about what year?

YD: Oh, let's see, after we went to Washington to that festival, '71 and '72. Between '72 and '75, something like that [pause]. I think, is when we went on our Florida vacations.

MAW: Were there other people that you remember coming to visit here, folklorists, or that stood out in your mind?

YD: Yes, there were some people who visited here occasionally someone would want to interview Sarah or occasionally she would go--to meet someone, say in Paducah and be interviewed there or occasionally someone would come here, yes, to interview her and talk with her and, she did have some guests here, mm-hmm.

MAW: Do you think in her final years that she felt like she got the recognition that she deserved for her role, or did she feel like she had kind of been--

YD: I guess in the end she may have wondered about the National Folk Festival, what it would become. If you leave something that you've started, you wonder what somebody else is going to do with it. I'm sure she, see that's shaky and that's not a good feeling, O.K. I'm sure she didn't like that. That would be the only thing that would bother her about it, would be that she was not going to get to guide it when she had done it for 30 years and it had gone on so well, see. And--I really think though that--as far as I think, she, she relished the recognition, I think she wanted to have her place in history about it. I think, she was pleased that she did and didn't really plan it. It appeared that she did not plan the first program with the impact that it really had on the movement at all. You know, even she doesn't give that impression. It's like she just sort of slipped into it, had it, and it became what it was. And--but--I think she was, as far as being a great actress or something, I don't think it ever bothered her after that. I think she was pleased with what she had done and comfortable with it and that was O.K. for an accomplishment. And--the drama part was--it didn't matter, you know, it wasn't. Maybe this was better anyway, you know. Maybe this was what she was suppose to do.

MAW: Right.

YD: And--as far as her own place in history, I think she more or less put herself out as the National Folk Festival is what I'm

saying. It wasn't Sarah Gertrude Knott who did this. She wanted it to be the festival [pause], itself. Going on and, and with certain--set-ups and support and, you know. That it would be it and that it would last on and on and on, and which it does. And--people do realize that she's the founder of it. She does get the credit for the folk festival movement in general, I think, the early stages of it. And she saw this in print in several books before she passed away, you know. She was well aware of this and--yeah, I think, she was pleased. No, I never heard any indication that she felt slighted in any way about her accomplishments or anything like that, no, uh-uh. The only thing I would feel was her feeling a little unsteady say about the National Folk Festival, leaving it. You know, that she would have a gap feeling, like she couldn't carry it on, she couldn't see what was going to happen. It was up to somebody else now, and it was hers, and she didn't know what would happen to it, you know.

MAW: In terms of the book that never got published, it, was that a frustration to her, that she never saw it through--

YD: She wanted her book published I'm sure. I'm sure it was--I guess she was so busy with all these other things that the book took sort of a back seat for awhile that she didn't go ahead and work on it. It appears to me now, that had she been really, the thing to do would have been to have worked on the book when she was in Washington with a staff. Got a grant. And, she was in a good position to get, and go ahead with the book. Why she didn't do that, I don't know except that she said, it was lost in the mail. She did work on the book though, and the book is around. She did want her book published. Her book was dedicated to her family, all of them. The brothers and sisters listed. And [pause] reading the introduction to her book, she states that--there isn't anybody who can tell the story as well as her about the folk festival movement, and that is the reason for her writing the book, O.K. And so--we, we sure she wanted her book published. She left it until the last thing for some reason in her life to where physical factors kept her from, her eye, her heart, other things didn't allow her to complete her book.

MAW: Are there any--nieces or nephews that are still around?

YD: We have, we have this--Jesse Lynch in Paducah, who is not, like I say, she was a--

[end of tape and interview]