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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
Department of Library Special Collections
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

Descriptive Inventory

MSS 690 RICHEY, Nancy Carol, b. 1959 – Collector

2 boxes. 30 folders. 561 items. 1966-2017.
Originals, photocopies, photographs, digital images, digital audio files.

SC2016.159.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This collection was assembled by Dr. Carlton Jackson, a history professor at Western Kentucky University (WKU) from 1961 until his death in 2014, and Nancy Carol Richey, the Images Librarian in the Department of Library Special Collections at WKU, while they prepared a biography about thumb-picking guitarist and Kentuckian Mose Rager. The material was donated after Dr. Jackson's death, so the collector is listed as Nancy Carol Richey. To see more about Dr. Jackson, consult WKU [Manuscripts Collection 581](#).

Moses "Mose" Rager is credited with creating the thumb-picking style of guitar playing. He was born in the community of Smallhaus in Ohio County, Kentucky on 2 April 1911. The son of Joe Rager and Bobbie Shelton Rager, he grew up in Drakesboro, Muhlenberg County. The family moved there when Mose was an infant, so that his father could find work in the coal mines. Mose Rager took various career paths. He was a barber, a grocery store owner, a factory employee, and a coal miner, though his musical talents could have earned him a good living. For a short time, he toured with Grandpa Jones, Curly Fox, and Texas Ruby, but he preferred to stay home with his family.

Rager developed a unique three-finger guitar style that had evolved in western Kentucky and was referred to as "that Muhlenberg Sound." This thumb-picking method is characterized by alternating bass progressions played with the thumb, innovative chord progressions and the melody played with the fingers. This combining of techniques gave traditional country melodies a jazz-like sophistication that was unique to the country genre. Rager's distinctive guitar style was first made popular in the 1940s and 1950s by guitar artists such as Merle Travis, Ike Everly (father of the Everly Brothers) and Chet Atkins of Grand Ole Opry fame. Students and admirers of Rager's style are many, and the style is perpetuated today through such artists as Eddie Pennington and Tommy Emmanuel. Rager died 14 May 1986 and is buried in the Ebenezer Cemetery in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of research material gathered by Nancy Carol Richey and Carlton Jackson for their book *Mose Rager: Kentucky's Incomparable Guitar Master*. Box 1 Folder 2 contains e-mails and correspondence directed to Richey and Jackson about Rager or about the book's general country music topic. Photographs and permission forms for the use there of are included in Folder 3; the majority of the photographs are digital files and are stored in the Photo Archives. Folder 4 includes the correspondence of Mose Rager, chiefly congratulatory letters sent by politicians and bureaucrats related to his appearances at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in 1973 and 1976. A signal exception is a letter from Merle Travis thanking him for his mentorship: "If it hadn't been for you, a lot of us would be pickin' up cans along the highway to sell." Folder 5 holds correspondence written about Rager or about guitar playing, including ones from Merle Travis and Eddie Pennington. This folder also includes several letters to Rager's wife, Laverda. A photocopy of a manuscript song, "He's God, There Is No Other," with music by Mose Rager and words by Charles R. Crafton, copyrighted 1979, is included in Folder 6. An audio file of Mose Rager singing various tunes is included on a compact disc in Folder 7; the digital file is also available in the WKU Sound Archives. Folder 8 includes the same, but other musicians also play on the disc (CT 261). Folder 9 includes a video file of an interview with Rager done with D.K. Wilgus in the 1960s; Mose plays a few songs in this short four-minute video. This interview is available on YouTube. The transcript of an interview with Rager in 1976 conducted by Bill Lightfoot is included in Folder 10. Another transcript of an interview with Lee Jones Prem and Kennedy Jones, Jr. with John W. Rumble in 1988 is found in Folder 11. Folder 12 holds the transcript of an interview with Laverda Rager and Anita Rager Smith (Rager's daughter) with John W. Rumble, John Knowles and Bob Pinson in 1988. Folder 13 houses the transcript of an interview with Mose Rager conducted by John Lomax, III in 1979. Folder 14 is a reference folder only for an interview conducted by Kate Born with Rager in 1977; this interview is part of Manuscripts Collection 411, Box 68, Folder 1. Folder 15 contains a large number of news clippings about Rager. Information about the Rager family can be found in Folder 16. Information about the monument dedicated to guitarists from Drakesboro in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky can be found in Folder 17. Folder 18 contains information about Mose Rager Day in Muhlenberg County, which started in 1993. Material collected by Chloe Logan for a biography of Rager can be found in Folder 19. Folder 20 includes some miscellaneous material related to Rager such as time sheets from coal mines, odes, and some promotional material related to an album titled "Pure Mose."

Box 2 includes material about other guitarists, chiefly Merle Travis and Eddie Pennington. Folder 1 includes the transcript of an interview with Merle Travis conducted by Douglas B. Green in 1975. Folder 2 includes photocopies of a series of print articles that include interviews done with Merle Travis and conducted by Mark Humphrey; the interviews appeared in *Old Time Music* in 1981 and 1982. Folder 3 contains longer articles about Merle Travis that appeared in magazines and journals. Miscellaneous articles and news clippings about Travis are located in Folder 4. Folder 5 includes printed material about thumbpicking guitarists. News clippings and other printed material about Curley Fox and Texas Ruby can be found in Folder 6. An audio recording of the album "The Wreck of the 1256" by Texas Ruby and Curly Fox with lead guitar by Mose Rager can be found in Folder 7. The recording has been saved in the WKU Sound Archives and a playlist is included in the folder. Folder 8 includes printed information about thumbpicker Eddie Pennington. Printed material about pioneer thumbpicker Arnold Shultz can

be found in Folder 9. Folder 10 includes a photocopy of a booklet which accompanied a video of the same title: "Legends of County Guitar featuring Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, Doc Watson and Mose Rager."

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Mose Rager	1966-2017	478 items
Folder 1	Inventory	n.d.	1 item
Folder 2	Correspondence with authors	2008-2017	17 items
Folder 3	Digital and real photos, permission forms for items in books	1947-2016	262 items
Folder 4	Correspondence with Mose Rager	1973-1984	18 items
Folder 5	Correspondence with others	1966-1995, n.d.	32 items
Folder 6	Manuscript score for "He's God There Is No Other"	1978	1 item
Folder 7	Mose Rager – Audio	n.d.	1 item
Folder 8	Mose Rager and others – Audio	n.d.	1 item
Folder 9	Video interview with Mose Rager conducted by D.K. Wilgus	n.d.	1 item
Folder 10	Interview with Mose Rager by Bill Lightfoot	1976	1 item
Folder 11	Interview with Lee Jones Prem and Kennedy Jones, Jr. by John W. Rumble	1988-2013	2 items
Folder 12	Interview with Laverda Rager and Anita Rager Smith by John W. Rumble, et al	1988	1 item
Folder 13	Interview with Mose Rager by John Lomax, III	1979	1 item
Folder 14	Interview with Mose Rager by Kate Born	1977	1 item
Folder 15	Newspaper clippings about Rager	1962-2013	58 items
Folder 16	Rager family information	1970-2009	8 items

Folder 17	Material about the monument dedicated to guitarists from Muhlenberg County	1987-1999	21 items
Folder 18	Information about Mose Rager Day	1996-2014	9 items
Folder 19	a) Correspondence of Chloe Logan; b) Draft from a book about Rager by Logan; c) research material collected by Logan for Rager biography	1973-2008	27 items
Folder 20	Miscellaneous material about Rager	1938-1986	15 items
BOX 2	Merle Travis and Other Thumbpickers	1948-2012	83 items
Folder 1	Interview with Merle Travis by Douglas B. Green	1975	1 item
Folder 2	Series of interviews with Merle Travis conducted by Mark Humphrey for "Old Time Magazine"	1981-1982	4 items
Folder 3	Articles about Merle Travis	1971-2005	6 items
Folder 4	News clippings and other articles about Merle Travis	1946-2007	26 items
Folder 5	Printed material about thumbpicking guitarists	1970-2013	21 items
Folder 6	Printed material about Curly Fox and Texas Ruby	1979-1986	9 items
Folder 7	Audio recording of Texas Ruby and Curly Fox on the album "The Wreck of the 1256"	1948	2 items
Folder 8	Printed material about Eddie Pennington	2004-2012	6 items
Folder 9	Printed material about Arnold Shultz	1993-2001	7 items
Folder 10	"Legends of County Guitar featuring Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, Doc Watson and Mose Rager"	2002	1 item

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS RICHEY, Nancy Carol, 1966-2017
690 b. 1959

Research material collected by Nancy Richey and Carlton Jackson about thumbpicking guitarist Mose Rager for their book *Mose Rager: Kentucky's Incomparable Guitar Master*. Includes interviews, news clippings, and correspondence by and about Rager as well as other thumbpicking guitarists, such as Merle Travis, Arnold Shultz, and Eddie Pennington.

2 boxes. 30 folders. 561 items. Originals, photocopies, photographs, compact discs, digital files.

SC2016.159.1

SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Anderson, Bobby – Correspondence B1,F2,5
 Black Diamond Coal Mine – Muhlenberg County – Photo B1,F3
 Bluegrass music – Relating to
 Born, Kate (Interviewer) B1,F14
 Cook, Marlow Webster, 1926-2016 B1,F4
 Crafton, Charles Radnie – Mentioned B1,F2
 Everly, Isaac Milford "Ike," 1908-1975 – Mentioned B2,F2,5
 Feintuch, Burt, 1949-2018 B1,F4
 Ford, Wendell Hampton, 1924-2015 B1,F4
 Fox, Curly, 1910-1995 – Relating to B2,F6-7
 Grafton, Charles – Photos B1,F3
 Green, Douglas B. (Informant) B2,F1
 Guitarists
 Haile, Hascal Barlow, 1907-1986 B1,F4
 "He's God There Is No Other" [song] B1,F6
 Humphrey, Mark (Interviewer) B2,F2
 Jackson, Carlton Luther, 1933-2014 – Correspondence B1,F2
 Jackson, Carlton Luther, 1933-2014 – Photo B1,F3
 Jones, Kennedy, Jr., 1927-2008 (Informant) B1,F11
 Knowles, John (Interviewer) B1,F12
 Lightfoot, Bill – Correspondence B1,F5
 Lightfoot, Bill (Interviewer) B1,F10
 Logan, Chloe Hughes – Correspondence B1,F2,19
 Lomax, John, III, b. 1944 (Interviewer) B1,F13
 "Magic of Mose, The" (poem) B1,F20
 Mills, Frances Jones, 1920-1996 B1,F4

“Miner With the Thumbpicking Style, The: Legend of Mose Rager” (poem) B1,F20
 Monuments – Muhlenberg County B1,F17
 Musicians
 “My Favorite Legend: Mose Rager” (poem) B1,F20
 Oglesby, John T. B1,F2
 Pennington, Eddie, b. 1956 B1,F5
 Pennington, Eddie, b. 1956 – Relating to B2,F5,8
 Pinson, Bob (Interviewer) B1,F12
 Poetry B1,F20
 Prem, Lee J. (Jones), 1929-2016 (Informant) B1,F11
 Rager, David Clark, 1943-1970 – Photo B1,F3
 Rager, Dulcie – Photo B1,F3
 Rager, James – Photo B1,F3
 Rager, Laverda Alma (Maxberry), 1916-2003 (Informant) B1,F12
 Rager, Laverda Alma (Maxberry), 1916-2003 – Letters to B1,F5
 Rager, Moses “Mose,” 1911-1986 – Correspondence B1,F4
 Rager, Moses “Mose,” 1911-1986 (Informant) B1,F10,13,14
 Rager, Moses “Mose,” 1911-1986 – Photos B1,F3
 Rager, Moses “Mose,” 1911-1986 – Relating to B1,F15-20; B2,F1-2,5,10
 Richey, Nancy Carol, b. 1959 – Correspondence B1,F2
 Richey, Nancy Carol, b. 1959 – Photo B1,F3
 Rouse, Dot – Correspondence B1,F4-5
 Ruby, Texas, 1908-1963 – Relating to B2,F6-7
 Rumble, John William (Interviewer) B1,F11-12
 Shultz, Arnold, 1886-1931 – Photo B1,F3
 Shultz, Arnold, 1886-1931 – Relating to B1,F2; B2,F2,9
 Smith, Anita (Rager) “Wookie,” 1937-2015 – Correspondence B1,F2-3
 Smith, Anita (Rager) “Wookie,” 1937-2015 (Informant) B1,F12
 Travis, Dorothy (Thompson), 1927-1991 B1,F5
 Travis, Merle Robert, 1917-1983 B1,F4-5
 Travis, Merle Robert, 1917-1983 – Comments about B1,F4
 Travis, Merle Robert, 1917-1983 (Informant) B2,F1-2
 Travis, Merle Robert, 1917-1983 – Photos B1,F3
 Travis, Merle Robert, 1917-1983 – Relating to B2,F3-4,10
 “Tribute to Mose, A” (poem) B1,F20

SEE or SEE ALSO

Fox, Arnim LeRoy, 1910-1995

See:

Curly Fox

Owens, Ruby Agnes, 1908-1963

See:

Texas Ruby

Schultz, Arnold
See:
Shultz, Arnold

Smith/Jeffrey 02/05/2020

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Experience*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 88-94.
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