Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

[Music: “Bonaparte’s Retreat” by William Hamilton Stepp.]

John Fenn: Welcome to the Folklife Today podcast. I’m John Fenn, the head of Research and Programs at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. I’m here with Steve Winick, a folklife specialist at the Center, and the creator of the Folklife Today blog.

Stephen Winick: Hi Folks! If you’re a regular listener, you’ll know that last time we asked our AFC interns to talk about items that appealed to them, based on our blog series “Caught My Eye” and “Caught My Ear.” We thought it would also be fun to do a staff edition where John and I and another staff member introduced our items!

John Fenn: That’s right, so let’s get started. We’re here with Jennifer Cutting, a frequent guest on the podcast and a folklife specialist at the American Folklife Center. Hi, Jennifer!

Jennifer Cutting: Hello!

Stephen Winick: Good to have you here, Jennifer! So the items we’re talking about with you are commercial recordings of morris dance tunes that are part of the National Jukebox. They’re played by house bands belonging the record companies. And I’ll just clarify for our listeners that these recordings have caught several eyes and ears around the staff, so you may have seen a posting about them on our Facebook page, or you may have seen them on our blog in a post by Stephanie Hall. But Jennifer really is our expert on morris dance and its associated tunes. She’s been a morris dancer and musician, and curates our most relevant collections, so we’re happy to have her take on these tunes. So first of all, Jennifer, what ties together the tunes we’re going to talk about?
Jennifer Cutting: These tunes were all collected from the tradition of morris dance music by a musician, dancer, and collector named Cecil Sharp. Sharp was a trained musician but he never really made it as a composer. In 1899, when he was 40 years old, he was staying with his Mother-in-Law for Christmas in her cottage in Headington, Oxfordshire. And on Boxing day, he looked out the window, and he saw the picturesque Christmas custom of a group of morris dancers, who turned out to be the Headington Quarry Morris. He quickly got a pen and some paper, and as the dancer danced and the musician played, he wrote down two of the tunes! Sharp went outside and had a chat with the musician, a man named William Kimber who played the concertina, and he arranged for Kimber to come back the next day. It was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with morris dancing, and Sharp dedicated himself to documenting, preserving, and reviving the tradition.

John Fenn: So how did these commercial recordings of morris music come about with Sharp listed as the author?

Jennifer Cutting: In the days before field recordings were ever released to the public, the usual way for a collector to publish materials was to transcribe the tunes directly from the playing of a musician into a music manuscript, and publish it in a book or sheet music portfolio. And while Sharp did make a few field recordings in his life, he really was of that older generation who wrote most everything down. So he developed relationships with some of the best morris musicians of his era, and he wrote their music down and published it in books and in sheet music. He also wrote down descriptions of the dances, and his morris dance books are among the best documentation of the tradition from his era. So these tunes were published in transcribed form, with Sharp listed as author.

Stephen Winick: So that explains his name being on some of these. But there’s more to a few of these sessions, isn’t there?

Jennifer Cutting: Yes. We have Cecil Sharp tunes from 1913, 1915, 1916, and 1922. But the ones from 1915 and 1916 are special. From late 1914 through 1918, Sharp spent most of his time in the United States. To backtrack a bit, after becoming interested in dance music, Sharp also became fascinated by folksongs, and he traveled around England in the early years of the 20th century collecting songs. He initially came to America
in 1914 when a theater production he was involved in as music director
traveled here from London. He wasn’t eligible to serve in World War I, and
the war made Britain a dreary place, so he resolved to stay a while. People
like Olive Dame Campbell convinced him that he could find great folksongs
in the Southern Appalachian mountains, so he spent the springs and
summers of 1916 through 1918 in the mountains and the rest of the time
based in New York, taking side trips across the country. He was able to
work writing music for theater and lecturing on English folk music.

**John Fenn:** So the 1915 and 1916 recording sessions occurred while Sharp
was here in America?

**Jennifer Cutting:** exactly. And for those sessions, Sharp personally
oversaw the recordings, looking over and correcting the scores as prepared
by the record companies, and overseeing the conductor and the band. So
these recordings of Cecil Sharp’s tunes, even though they sound so different
from folk music as it’s played in the tradition, are interesting because Sharp
was in the room with the band when they were recorded.

**John Fenn:** Wow. Let’s hear one!

**Jennifer Cutting:** OK, this is a 1915 recording of a tune he called The
Tideswell Processional Morris, which he collected at Tideswell in
Derbyshire.

[Music: Tideswell Processional.]

**John Fenn:** So as a morris dancer and musician, how does that sound to
you?

**Jennifer Cutting:** Well, first off, it sounds much more polite and well
regulated than it does when the village band plays it Wakes Week in
Tideswell, which it's the last week in June. In the field, you hear the sound
of brass players in real life. You hear them losing their embouchures as they
get tired and then getting a gust of renewed energy as they get a second
wind. And this is a very orchestral sound, kind of an art music sound. Also,
dance music that is as repetitive as this, if you're going to turn it into art
music, you might want to introduce a little more variation than there is in
this score. But you know me, I'm short on opinion!

**Stephen Winick:** So, I have a little special feeling for these sessions, and
that’s because before I came to work at the Library of Congress, I was one of
the regional folklorists for New Jersey. And I was headquartered in Camden, in an old Library building that was part of the Victor Talking Machine campus, donated to the city by Eldridge Johnson, the Victor founder. And in the era we’re talking about, the teens and 20s, Camden New Jersey was a real musical crossroads because the Victor studio was there. So that’s where Sharp went to direct our session, but it’s also where Enrico Caruso went to sing opera, and a little later it’s where the Carter Family went to record. So naturally, I got to take a look into the Victor studios while I was in Camden—now in a disused building, I’m afraid. But I’ve been in the room where these recordings were made as well. And because of this abiding interest in all things Camden and all things folklore, a few years ago I actually looked up these sessions in Cecil Sharp’s diary, which is at the VWML in London. So here’s what Sharp himself said about the session where Tideswell Processional Morris was recorded:

Arrived at Philadelphia at 8.15. Went to McKenzie’s, had some breakfast, shaved etc, & went off to Camden to supervise Gramophone records. Great fiasco — scores badly written. Resolve to postpone work & go to N[ew] Y[ork] early tomorrow morning.

John Fenn: so the scores were so bad he gave up?

Stephen Winick: Apparently. Sharp published his tunes at piano arrangements, and the record companies employed band arrangers who would score it for band. Sharp seems to have hated the orchestrations so much he gave up.

John Fenn: So when did he get back to it?

Jennifer Cutting: Not for about a year. In March of 1916 he finally went back to Camden. He recorded several tunes he had collected from oral tradition, and also a few he had adapted from older tune books. Let’s hear Sellenger’s Round, which is a tune Sharp adapted from the seventeenth century work of John Playford.

[Music: Sellenger’s Round]

John Fenn: So how does that sound to you?

Jennifer Cutting: Well, because I play this tune on a diatonic button accordion and I have a limited range of chords. The chords used by this orchestrator sound like they’re all over the place. There are minor chords
where there should be major ones and major chords were there should be minor ones. But you know, variety being the spice of life, it’s fine.

**Stephen Winick:** By the way, Sharp liked this session much better than the previous one. He wrote: Caught 8 a.m. train for Philadelphia & reached Camden, Victor Lab, at 10.30. Thank heavens I had another conductor — one Mr Rogers — who really was a musician & knew his work — consequently I was able to finish off all the records.

**Jennifer Cutting:** Good to know! I’d like to play one more tune from the Sharp recordings. This is the Helston Furry Dance. It’s a seasonal morris dance played on May 8 in the town of Helston. Steve has actually written several blogs about this tune.

**Stephen Winick:** That’s right. I’ve traced it back to 1802 when it was published by a musician named Edward Jones as “The Cornish May Song.” It certainly goes back to the 18th century and quite possibly further. In the blog that accompanies this podcast you’ll find links to all my posts about this song.

**John Fenn:** Great, let’s hear the Helston Furry Dance!

[Music: Helston Furry]

**Stephen Winick:** So again, the Helston Furry Dance.

**John Fenn:** Jennifer, how does the record sound?

**Jennifer Cutting:** Well, this tune is traditionally played by a brass band so the Cecil sharp recording sounds more natural than, you know, brass band interpretations of fiddle music or, you know, accordion music. But the chord progressions in the orchestration are a good deal more complex than the way the village band plays this song, giving it a very august and majestic sound, rather than that of a kind of jolly village dance. So it's an entirely different thing, but I really like it. As I like to say, you can't keep a good tune down. And a good tune will sound great in all kinds of different settings as Helston free dance does.

**Stephen Winick:** I’ll just add that that tune was recorded for Columbia records in New York. Sharp supervised that session too, which he called “A truly terrible experience!” But in those sessions, which spanned two days, he re-recorded most of the tunes from the first Victor session, which you’ll
recall he had called a “great fiasco.” I think he did get records he considered more satisfactory out of these 1916 sessions.

**John Fenn:** Of course, these Cecil Sharp tunes aren’t technically an American Folklife Center collection; they’re commercial recordings and part of the Library of Congress’s National Jukebox. But they have connections to many of our collections, some of which Jennifer curates. And you recently had a sad occasion to write about one of these collections on our blog, didn’t you?

**Jennifer Cutting:** That’s right. My good friend Tony Barrand passed away in January. Anthony Grant "Tony" Barrand was a singer, musician, dancer, and folklorist who donated the Anthony Grant Barrand Collection of Morris, Sword, and Clog Dancing (AFC 2003/005) to AFC in 2003.

Barrand's collection contains over 250 films of traditional folk dance, along with associated manuscripts. It not only documents the American, Canadian, and English teams dancing at Marlboro Morris Ales between 1976 and the present, and Barrand's own Morris teams performing on annual May outings over the same period, but is also very rich in sword dance, mumming plays, and old-style wooden shoe, or clog dancing. In some ways, the most important and distinctive aspect of the Barrand Collection is the way it captures many of the same Morris and sword teams dancing every year over more than a quarter century at the Marlboro Morris Ales and in other community performances. There are great possibilities for study given this kind of chronological documentation, as it is possible to watch the dancers progress from beginners to experienced performers, age, and then be replaced by a new generation. When Tony donated the collection in 2003, I did a long interview with him, and we used that as the basis for 4 blog posts, so we’ll link to those in the post associated with this episode as well.

In addition to making this collection, Barrand, who was born in England, has been a proponent of English folk traditions in America for more than 50 years. He was a longtime dancer as well as a singer and musician with the John Roberts and Tony Barrand duo, and with the quartet Nowell Sing We Clear. His death was a great loss to the North American folk music and dance community, and we really miss him!
John Fenn: Well, we’re very glad you were able to do a tribute on the blog. And thanks for being on this podcast!

Stephen Winick: Yes, thanks!

Jennifer Cutting: You’re very welcome! Thanks for inviting me!

Stephen Winick: So we’re going to shift gears here, almost literally. Because John, when you wrote a “Caught my Eye” post, it was about a machine from what seems like a bygone era.

John Fenn: Yes, I wrote that a few years ago, during my first weeks here at the American Folklife Center. They were kind of a whirlwind of meetings, trainings, and orientations to all aspects of the Library of Congress. As I passed through the Folklife Center’s Reading Room, one object repeatedly caught my eye: a Nagra IV-S reel-to-reel field recorder, which was perched atop a filing cabinet full of reference materials. In addition to being useful, it’s a beautiful object, and I couldn’t help thinking that it probably holds within its circuitry a host of tales about the places it’s been.

Stephen Winick: In the days before digital recorders, Nagras were state of the art, weren’t they?

John Fenn: Oh, yes. Portable Nagra tape machines were central to on-site professional audio recording since the Switzerland-based Kudelski SA company revealed the first production model in 1953, the Nagra II. Designed by Polish inventor, Stefan Kudelski, over the years the Nagra line proved to be rugged and sturdy. They were favored by motion picture recordists, reporters, and ethnographers around the world.

Stephen Winick: One thing many people who used Nagras around the world might not know it the meaning of the name.

John Fenn: True! The name “Nagra” derives from the Polish verb nagrać, and translates as “it will record.” Folklorists have made good on this name by using Nagra machines to document music and song, verbal art, cultural soundscapes, and interviews around the world.

Stephen Winick: So, what’s the history of the AFC’s Nagras?

John: The IV-S model is a stereo recorder introduced in 1971. The American Folklife Center acquired several IV-S machines to support our own field projects, and there is a good chance that the very machine I’ve
admired in the Reading Room ran tapes that are in the Montana Folklife Survey, the Chicago Ethnic Arts Project, the Omaha Indian Music presentation, and a number of fieldwork collections created by our founding director, the late Alan Jabbour. You can find a lot of those recordings on our website!

In addition to using Nagras for its own fieldwork efforts, the Center provided these machines and other field recording gear to folklorists through the Library of Congress Equipment Loan Program. Emerging in the early 1930s, this program tracked the arc of portable recording technologies—from instantaneous disc cutters weighing several hundred pounds to the relatively “light” Nagra IV-S (tipping the scales at about 15 pounds, fully loaded with batteries and tape).

**Stephen Winick:** Yes, I know that the strategy of lending equipment and recording supplies to a network of regional collectors was really productive for us, both in building the collection and in creating a community of folklorists with ties to the Library.

**John Fenn:** That’s right, it’s a very important part of our history. Of course, with advances in portable audio technology starting in the cassette era of the late 1980s and on through the current digital era, reliable field recording gear has become much lighter and less expensive. But the American Folklife Center holds onto Nagras in acknowledgment of the history of our field. The few we have on display at the AFC embody the material culture behind folklife fieldwork, representing examples of the technological heritage of the Center and the important documentation efforts we have supported over the years.

**Stephen Winick:** So let’s hear something recorded on one of our Nagras. Unfortunately, the fieldworkers didn’t write down the serial number of the Nagra they were using, so we can’t be sure this was the very same machine on display in our reading room, but this recording was made on one of our Nagras. It’s a set of jigs played by Liz Carroll on fiddle and Tommy Maguire on button accordion.

[Music: Liz Carroll and Tommy Maguire play Irish Jigs]

**John Fenn:** So that set of jigs by Liz Carroll and Tommy Maguire was recorded on one of our Nagras by Mick Moloney in 1977. And an item that caught your eye some years ago relates to that, doesn’t it?
Stephen Winick: That’s right. Years ago, I noticed a photo we have of Mick Moloney, taken by Jonas Dovydenas in 1977. It shows Mick at the Annual Midwest Fleadh Cheoil at Bogen High School in Chicago. He’s all geared up to record, with the trusty Nagra strapped to him, with headphones and a mic. And it’s on the roll of film it’s sandwiched right between photos of Liz Carroll, so we know what Mick was recording! And of course, I was reminded of this photo when Mick passed away unexpectedly in July.

John Fenn: So tell us a little about Mick Moloney.

Stephen Winick: Moloney was one of the leading figures in Irish music on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as a great folklorist. He was born in Limerick, Ireland, and began his career as a musician in his teens. He was in the first generation of musicians to combine the popular "ballad group" sound of bands like the Clancy Brothers with traditional instrumental music. He was in some bands like The Emmett Folk Group and The Johnstons, which were important trendsetters in Irish Music during the 1960s and early 1970s. So, in 1973, The Johnstons played at the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and Mick Moloney met Kenneth S. Goldstein, who was both one of the organizers of the festival and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Mick decided to stay in the United States and study folklore at Penn. And while working on his PhD, Mick became one of the foremost musicians on the Irish music scene in America, as well as one of the foremost documentarians working in the field. He brought together the Irish ethnic music scenes in different American regions into more of a national scene where everyone knows everyone else, and he just mentored and influenced everyone.

I’ll say that it was on Mick’s advice that I applied for graduate school, so he is partly to blame for my being a folklorist. He did earn that PhD, and taught widely. My first teaching experience was as Mick’s teaching assistant! At the time of his death he was a Global Distinguished Professor at New York University in the Irish Studies Program and the Music Department.

In 1999 Mick was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts – the highest official honor a traditional artist can receive in the United States. Mick was also interested in the
intersections of Irish folk music with other styles of music, which led to several research projects, including "If It Wasn't for the Irish and the Jews," which he spoke about at the Library of Congress in 2009. You can see a video of that lecture on our website. And I’ll finally say that Mick was been generous with time, music, and activism, playing frequent benefit concerts for charity. In recent years, Moloney has lived part-time in Thailand, where he was involved in a charity home and school for poor children. So an all around wonderful musician, folklorist, and friend.

**John Fenn:** You can see that picture of Mick on the Folklife Today blog as well. So let’s thank our guest Jennifer Cutting, our engineer Jon Gold, and Mike Turpin and Jay Kinloch for the use of the studio. And of course thanks to you, Steve!

**Stephen Winick:** Thanks to you as well, John, and also to the musicians and collectors we’ve featured on this podcast.

**John Fenn:** So to play us out, how about another recording made by Mick on the Nagra? One of the other up-and-coming musicians Mick captured at that 1977 fleadh was a young flute player and dancer named Michael Flatley, who later went on to star in Riverdance and Lord of the Dance. Let’s hear some tunes from Michael Flatley! Until next time!

[Music: Michael Flatley plays a Reel]