

27th November, 1968

Mr. F.D. McCarthy,  
Principal,  
Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies,  
P.O. Box 553,  
CANBERRA CITY.

Dear Mr. McCarthy,

Professor Jones has asked me to write to you about copying my tape collections in Canberra. For reasons given below, I think that copies of my field tapes in their entirety should be held by the Sound Archive and that, for the time being at any rate, our EM copies should be issued from Monash and only in response to outside requests. As you know, our aim is to prepare EM (or "library") copies of all the song recordings held in the Sound Archive at Canberra. This will take several years to complete.

The possibility of destruction by fire, flood, earthquake or war is remote but cannot be ignored. I would in fact urge that at least two complete copies of each field-recorded collection should be held, preferably one in Canberra and the other in a different part of the continent. In regard to my own collections, I do not think it is a question of deciding whether the field collections or the EM copies should be safeguarded in Canberra. The field tape usually contains some speech. In our audition sheets we are transcribing any remarks made in English but there are Aboriginal remarks, sounds and significant pauses omitted from the EM copies which may be highly significant to some later researcher. A great deal of time goes into the preparation of EM copies, but I still believe that only one set of these need be stored (for the present at Monash University), and that it is more important for Canberra to watch over the listing, cataloguing, general safety and long-term storage hazards connected with the irreplaceable field tapes.

I have been reluctant to part with my field tapes for any length of time as I prefer to them constantly in the course of my work. I would prefer to send them to you for copying in six sets, that is according to each year of collection and as corresponding EM copies are prepared from them. We have prepared EM copies of the 1962 collection, which means that the 1962 field tapes are now ready for copying in the Sound Section. I would like to have the originals returned to me as I am familiar with these reels and prefer to work from them. Next to come will be the Kimberley tapes, EM copies of which will take us some time. This is the largest collection so far. The 1966 Cape York and Gulf collection will follow, and so on.



The Institute's offer to supply copies of tapes, under certain conditions (Catalogue of Tape Archive No. 1, pp. ii-iii), applies, in many cases, to tapes as they come in from the field. You will remember that previously I have expressed my disapproval of the Institute's offering, as research material or in exchange, of "raw", unedited field recordings of Australian Aboriginal music.

My feelings here are that if the Sound Archive is to reach a reputable standard, care must be given to the auditory condition and presentation of the tape contents before they can be offered to bona fide research workers here or overseas. Field tapes - including mechanical copies of field tapes - are indeed basic source materials for ethnomusicological study, but a certain amount of 'processing' is required if short song items are to be selected without loss of time and, more important, without ambiguity or error. In a recent paper which I prepared at your request for Recorded Sound I pointed out that an audible numbering system is essential if accurate published references are to be made to the recorded song material in our Sound Archives. This is our aim in preparing EM copies, ultimately of all song recordings of Australian Aboriginal music, commencing with Spencer's 1901 collection.

It is intense work and time consuming, requiring a trained musical ear and reliable tape-recorder "sense". I believe, however, that auditory work of this kind is vital and necessary if Australian ethnomusicology is to be scientifically based. In the process of designing and carrying out the duties attendant on the production of EM copies, Jill Lowrey and I have both learnt a great deal. Indeed I have no hesitation in saying that in our work in the Ethnomusicological Research Laboratory in the Music Department at Monash University we are creating a preliminary training ground in Australian ethnomusicological studies.

At the commencement of this letter I have suggested that we supply EM copies in response to requests received from outside the Institute. We can do this on receipt of the specified Sound Archive ("A") copy from Canberra from which the EM copy would be prepared. On the two Sony machines at our disposal we can copy only one tape at a time. For large and urgent orders, such as the copying of various recordings of Pacific music which I handled personally for Dr. Laade before he left Canberra, final copies (of EM copies) might have to be done in the Sound Archive.

To date, I have already done a great deal of selective copying for the Institute. As you know a number of special tapes were recently prepared in response to a request from Mačak in Czechoslovakia. I have also prepared, on behalf of the Institute, a special tape for EXPO in Canada and for a radio broadcast series in London at the request of UNESCO. As our EM system develops Mrs. Lowrey should be able to carry out this type of work with very little help from me. Inevitably, such



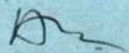
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tasks create extra typing and time-consuming checking of the typed lists.

I believe Professor Jones has already mentioned to you my urgent need for further typing assistance. In a second letter (enclosed) I have sent you a request for a full-time junior typist/typist, outlining our needs in more detail.

I have heard from Professor Jones of the appointment of a new Technical Officer. I hope it will be possible for Mr. Butler to visit us soon. It has always been my wish to ensure the closest co-operation in the audio work now being done here and in the Institute's Sound Archive.

Yours sincerely,



(Mrs.) Alice M. Moyle,  
A.I.A.S. Research Fellow