Folklore Society Papers | Libraries

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The American Folklore Society Papers: Hidden Histories of the Field

Special Collections & Archives

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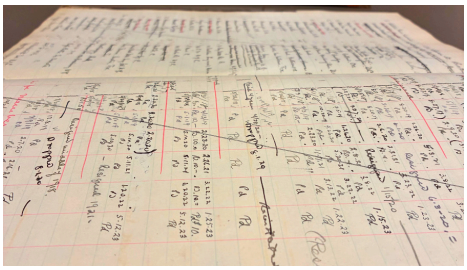
A rare collection at USU Libraries shows how the early days of folklore were shaped by cross-disciplinary curiosity and cultural care.

Preserving the Roots of a Field

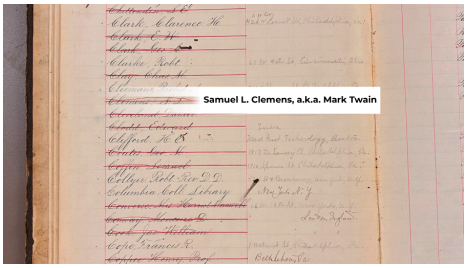
Housed in the **Special Collections & Archives** at Utah State University Libraries, the *American Folklore Society (AFS) Records* offer a remarkable glimpse into the founding conversations that defined folklore as an academic pursuit. Through handwritten correspondence, meeting minutes, editorial notes, and rosters, the collection spans more than a century of scholarly dialogue and cultural engagement [oai_citation:0‡Style Guide controlled terms.docx](file-service://file-Qo2UMyNa2z42NuQ1yn4DHB).



The collection consists of rosters listing noteworty folklore figureheads such as Mark Twain, Alice Fletcher, Franz Boas, and more

Among the most striking documents is an 1890 membership list that includes luminaries from multiple disciplines: **Samuel L. Clemens** (Mark Twain), **James Francis Child** (of *Child Ballads* fame), **Franz Boas** (often called the father of American anthropology), and **Alice Fletcher** (a pioneering ethnographer and advocate for Indigenous rights). Their presence reflects a time when folklore connected writers, linguists, anthropologists, and educators through a shared fascination with traditional and vernacular culture.

Also preserved are editorial proofs from early volumes of the *Journal of American Folklore*, notes from initial society meetings, and the records of the Women's Section—offering insight into the field's evolving focus and growing diversity of voices.



Folklore giants such as Samuel L. Clemens (aka Mark Twain) have their names on record.

These documents were recently featured in a campus exhibit tied to the Western States Folklore Society Conference. They underscore the foundational role folklore has played in how we study, celebrate, and question culture. What some considered fringe was always at the heart of cultural scholarship.

At USU Libraries, we're proud to preserve the voices that shaped folklore's beginnings—and to support the next generation of storytellers and cultural scholars.

Explore the Collection