



## **CLARA THOMAS ARCHIVES**

**Inventory of the  
Mariposa Folk Foundation Inc**

**Inventory #F0511**

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**Fonds/Collection Number:** F0511

**Title:** Mariposa Folk Foundation Inc

**Dates:** 1961-2013, predominant 1970-2012

**Extent:** ca. 129 metres of textual material and sound recordings.  
ca. 187 GB of sound recordings.

**Biographical Sketch/  
Administrative History:** The Mariposa Folk Festival was conceived and realized by Ruth Jones and her husband Dr. Casey Jones, two folk music enthusiasts. Pete McGarvey a local radio broadcaster and Orillia town councillor suggested the name "Mariposa" in honour of local author Stephen Leacock's fictional name for Orillia in his work *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. The first festival was held in August 1961 and featured Jacques Labreque, Bonny Dobson, The Travelers, Alan Mills and Ian Tyson and Sylvia Fricker. Mariposa has hosted many up-and-coming stars in Canadian folk and popular music. From Leonard Cohen, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Joni Mitchell, and Gordon Lightfoot, all have performed in the early stages of their musical careers on the Mariposa stage. The festival grew in popularity, size and rowdiness until the popularity of the 1963 festival (with over 8000 advance tickets sold), and the lack of sufficient security, led to a backlash from town locals. The city of Orillia secured a court injunction to prevent the festival from continuing in the town limits. The festival moved to Maple Leaf Stadium in Toronto, Innis Lake near Caledon until settling at the Toronto Islands in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the festival was moved to Harbourfront and Bathurst Quay and later Molson Park in Barrie. The 1990s also saw a shifting roster of venues. Toronto Island, Queen Street West, Parkdale, Ontario Place, as well as Bracebridge and Coburg all played host to Mariposa performers and workshops. In 2000, the Mariposa Folk Festival was invited back to Orillia by city councillors Tim Lauer and Don Evans. In 2010, the Mariposa Folk Festival will celebrate its' 50th Anniversary. Mariposa is Founded On a cold January afternoon in 1961, radio personality John Fisher gave a short but enthusiastic speech to the Orillia Chamber of Commerce where he suggested that Orillia needed something such as an arts festival to promote the town as a tourist destination. In the audience that day was Dr. 'Casey' Jones and his wife Ruth, folk music enthusiasts, and within days the idea of starting a folk festival in Orillia had taken root. Ruth called upon Pete McGarvey, a local broadcaster and town councillor, who jumped aboard enthusiastically. He suggested the name "Mariposa" in honour of Stephen Leacock's thinly disguised fictional name for Orillia in his novella titled *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. On August 18, 1961 the very first Mariposa Folk Festival saw two thousand enthusiastic and generally well-behaved attendees set up their lawn chairs in front of a medieval-themed stage at the Orillia Community Centre. Double that number showed up on Saturday night to hear such artists as The Travellers, Bonnie Dobson, Jacques Labreque, Alan Mills and of course, Ian Tyson and his beautiful partner Sylvia Fricker. One interesting story from that first festival was the fact that home town boy, Gordon Lightfoot, was deemed to be "not of high enough caliber" to perform. He and then-partner, Terry Whelan, were told that they sounded "too much like the Everly Brothers." In 1962, virtually the same lineup appeared -- this time including Gordon and Terry, then billed as The Tu-Tones. 1963 was a different story and a turning point in the history of the festival. Over 8000 tickets sold in advance and, by the festival weekend, festival goers nearly outnumbered the townfolk. Restaurants ran out of food, the roads and highways were jammed, and crowding and confusion reigned. The small police force was overwhelmed as it struggled to cope with the crowds, the drunkenness, and the petty vandalism. The backlash from the townfolk and their elected officials was quick and unkind. The days of Mariposa Folk Festival in Orillia were, so it seemed, done. The folkies and their rowdy behaviour were no longer welcome. Mariposa on the Move In 1964, the Town of Orillia got a court injunction and the festival was forced to go somewhere else. It moved to Maple Leaf stadium in Toronto, later to Innis Lake near Caledon, and finally to Toronto Island where it made its home for the 1970s. While not always a financial success, Mariposa built a reputation as the place to be among both audiences and performers. Artistic director Estelle Klein pioneered the idea of workshop performances and the idea was quickly adopted by nearly every festival in North America. Estelle also had an

eye for talent. Among those she hired were Buffy Sainte-Marie, Gordon Lightfoot, Phil Ochs, John Hammond, Joni (Mitchell) Anderson, Tom Paxton, Pete Seeger, Doc Watson, James Taylor, Tom Rush, Leonard Cohen, Murray McLauchlan, Taj Mahal, John Prine, Richie Havens, Buddy Guy and Bruce Cockburn. Neil Young made a surprise guest appearance in 1972 as did Bob Dylan. It was during the time at Toronto Island that the festival blossomed with its workshops, its artisans area and its "native people's area." Dance, craft and music were consistently of such high standards that audiences returned year after year despite changes in the popular music mainstream. By 1980, the festival had moved to Harbourfront in Toronto and then over to Bathurst Quay in 1981. That year the rain made the festival site a quagmire and, despite a good artistic lineup, the festival lost a lot of money. In fact, things were so bad financially that no festival was held at all in 1982. In 1984, Molson Breweries approached Mariposa organizers about moving the event to Molson Park in Barrie. A few meters off the main highway to Toronto, and with lots of trees and open spaces, it seemed a good fit for a folk music festival. A modest crowd of 2000 people attended that year and established a home for the festival for the next several years. By the time 1989 rolled around, crowds of 25,000 were commonplace. The next year though, unseasonable cold and rain all spoiled the fun, and the festival was in debt once again. To make matters worse, Mariposa and Molsons parted company, and the festival found itself on the road once again. Ontario Place became the next home for Mariposa and for two years served that purpose. In 1993 it was back to the Toronto Island for daytime workshops and to Queen Street West for evening concerts. James Keelaghan, Colin Linden, the Irish Descendents, Holmes Hooke and Ann Lederman were among the widely recognized performers to appear that year. For the next couple of years, the festival followed that format, but poor weather and weak attendance put the festival into serious debt, yet again. The Doldrum Years By 1996, there were threatening noises that the festival would fold, just like in 1987 when last minute heroics by Lynne Hurry and Mariposa founder, Ruth Jones McVeigh, helped save the festival from extinction. In 1996, there were two Mariposa festivals: one in Bracebridge and one in Cobourg. Mariposa in Bracebridge was a success but the one in Cobourg lost money. By the end of the 1990s, the festival had become a small, one-day festival in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto. The Rising Phoenix The City of Orillia had more than doubled in size since the festival was ignominiously given the boot in the early sixties. As was the case forty years earlier, there were individuals with foresight and imagination. City councillors Tim Lauer and Don Evans were like-minded individuals with an interest in folk music. Joined by fellow roots enthusiast Gord Ball, they cooked up a plan to approach Mariposa Folk Foundation about the chances of re-locating the festival to where it all began. It was a case of fortuitous good timing. With Mariposa scouting for a new location, the Foundation's board of directors was receptive to the request from the small party from Orillia. Within weeks, a loose band of volunteers pulled together to form a not-for-profit organization, Festival Orillia Inc. (FestO), to stage the festival in Orillia, and to complete negotiations with Mariposa Folk Foundation. Late in 1999, a three-year agreement to stage Mariposa Folk Festival in Orillia was signed and the re-building began. In the ensuing months of intensive meetings, discussions and planning sessions, a strong bond and mutual trust developed between FestO Charter President, Gerry Hawes, and Mariposa Folk Foundation President, Lynne Hurry. By the time of Mariposa's triumphant return to Orillia in July 2000, the two had already cooked up a plan to make Orillia its permanent home. Less than a year into the three-year agreement, a Harmonization Committee was struck, leading to the eventual disbandment of FestO with Mariposa Folk Foundation continuing on, not only as the predecessor organization, but as the successor organization as well. To this day, the Mariposa Folk Foundation board of directors is comprised of people from Toronto, Orillia and elsewhere across Southern Ontario. At the first festival back in Orillia in 2000 nearly 400 volunteers signed up, and a stellar cast of performers played to the delight of a large appreciative audience. Of course, it helped that hometown boy Gordon Lightfoot headlined the Sunday night finale. Since then, Mariposa Folk Festival has flourished in Orillia. During past decade, the Mariposa Folk Foundation launched a Hall of Fame to recognize leaders and classic performers from its past. Mariposa has also entered into a Partnership with York University to protect, catalogue and digitize

## F0511 - Mariposa Folk Foundation Inc

its nationally significant archive of folk music and materials. In 2010, Mariposa Folk Festival celebrated its 50th anniversary, cementing its place internationally as one of the 'Grande Dames' of folk festivals. [from Mariposa Folk Festival website]

**Scope and Content:** Fonds consists of the organizational records of the Mariposa Folk Foundation Inc., the volunteer organization established to manage and operate the Mariposa Folk Festival. Also includes donations of material from early organizers of the Mariposa Folk Festival prior to the incorporation of the Mariposa Folk Foundation.

**Restrictions on Access and Use:** There are some restrictions on access to some materials.

**Finding Aid:** Fists available for some accessions.

**URL of Finding Aid:** <http://archivesfa.library.yorku.ca/fonds/ON00370-f0000511.htm>

**Accruals:** The fonds comprises the following accessions: 2007-009, 2010-008, 2010-065, 2010-066, 2011-034, 2012-017, 2012-062, 2013-006, 2013-009, 2013-024, 2013-046. Further accruals may be expected.

**Related Records:** See also the Ruth Jones McVeigh fonds (F0582), the David Warren fonds (F0624) and the Mariposa Folk Festival collection (F0644).

**Immediate source of acquisition:** Donated by the Mariposa Folk Foundation board in 2007 and 2013, Bob Stevens in 2011, Greg McCaughey in 2012, Sy Potsma in 2010, 2012 and 2013.

**Virtual Exhibit:**

**URL of Virtual Exhibit:** <http://archives.library.yorku.ca/exhibits/show/mariposa>

**Provenance Access Points:** Mariposa Folk Foundation Inc.  
M.I.T.S. (Mariposa In The Schools)

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