

Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the

**FBI File
on the
Highlander Folk School**

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The Highlander Folk School (HFS) in Monteagle, Tennessee, was established in 1932 by Myles Horton, a native Tennessean, who wanted to “provide an educational center in the South for the training of rural and industrial leaders, and for the conservation and enrichment of the indigenous cultural values of the mountain.” The school accepted workers whom their unions considered potential leaders, and the unions paid most of their way through the school. These workers were trained in such endeavors as collective bargaining, contract negotiation, and strike organization, as well as less weighty, but presumably no less important, skills like poster-making and song-singing.

Although the school received public support from many prominent members of society, including Eleanor Roosevelt, the majority of the local conservative white populace regarded the school with suspicion, contempt, or both. Giving voice to that segment of the population was the Knoxville *News-Sentinel*, which hounded Horton and the school in an effort to make the Communist label stick. These feelings only grew stronger when, in the late 1940s, the school began accepting blacks into its program to advance the cause of racial integration. Martin Luther King, Jr., attended the school’s 25th anniversary celebration in 1957, and a photograph of him with Horton while there was used by the Georgia Commission on Education, a strong anti-Communist/segregationist group, which tried to portray King as an active member of a “Communist training school.”

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) never formally investigated the Highlander Folk School, although it appears to have come close a few times. The bureau was most interested in possible Communist party activity at the school, which never materialized. A few known Communists did either work at or attend the school.

For an uninvestigated organization, however, there is a good amount of material about the HFS. Because the bureau maintained a sporadic interest in the school, the file spans forty years with few

Introduction

large lapses in time. Because of the way the school was monitored, the bureau's file covers important events and includes a good collection of school-produced materials and local newspaper clippings. Most of these articles, particularly from the *News-Sentinel*, were hostile to the school's officials and their philosophies.

The school was raided by local police on August 1, 1959. They arrested four school officials for selling alcohol on the property and arrested Horton on a charge that he had been operating the school for his own personal benefit. Because both of the alleged offenses were against the state charter, the school was closed. Although the charges were later dropped, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the state's decision to revoke the charter for another violation: Because the school was private, it was required to be segregated racially. Horton later obtained another charter and moved to Knoxville, where he founded the Highlander Research and Education Center.

There are three areas of interest to the researcher using this file: 1) labor history, because the school tried to educate laborers for positions of leadership by equipping them with better skills for bargaining and organizing; 2) civil rights, because the Tennessee school was integrated and had its charter revoked as a result, also because it shifted from labor education to voter education in the South; and 3) postwar red-baiting, because the school was constantly being charged as a subversive organization (though it was never investigated or labeled as such).

The types of documents included in this file are bureau memorandums, teletypes, letters, and airtels, along with newspaper clippings. A good amount of Highlander Folk School-produced material (newspapers, annual reports, pamphlets) also exists.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released.

Introduction

The roll notes that follow this introduction do not provide a complete inventory of the file; however, they give an indication of the types of materials available for research. They are listed using the following format: type of document, date of document, and what the document concerns.

By Terry Lynch

ROLL NOTES

FBI File on the Highlander Folk School

Bureau File No. 61-7511 (Treason investigation)

Section 1

April 1936 - July 1941

Roll 1, 0001-0131

Report dated 1/29/40 on speech by James Dombrowski, chairman of the Highlander Folk School (HFS), on the philosophy and program of the school, including a list of HFS Advisory Committee members

Newspaper clippings, spring 1940

Various letters, 1940, alleging Communist influence within the HFS

Memo dated 12/6/40 to Bureau Director J. Edgar Hoover regarding request from Congressman Robert F. Jones to review the HFS file

Letter dated 4/9/41 from the special agent-in-charge (SAC), Knoxville, to Hoover requesting the bureau to develop photographs of HFS documents

Memo dated 4/14/41 from SAC Knoxville regarding report on the HFS furnished to William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor

Report dated 4/10/41 on the HFS, including organization, personnel, and sponsors

Report dated 5/13/41 on the enrollment of William T. Buttrick, Jr., at the University of Florida

Report dated 6/1/41 regarding past activities of HFS faculty members
HFS promotional literature

Report dated 6/4/41 on Edwin B. Schultz

Memo dated 6/6/41 from R. C. Hendon to Clyde Tolson regarding the HFS

Reports dated 6/41 concerning background checks of HFS personnel

2/ Guide to the FBI File on the Highlander Folk School

Section 2

July 1941 - January 1942

Roll 1, 0132-0267

Report dated 7/29/41 concerning background checks

Report dated 8/17/41 including the HFS Charter of Incorporation

Report dated 9/29/41 concerning the Institute for Labor Studies

Letter dated 10/4/41 from W. A. Murphy (SAC Knoxville) to Hoover concerning Myles Horton

Letter dated 10/12/41 from Murphy to Hoover regarding status of the HFS investigation

Report dated 10/21/41 concerning HFS contributors

Report dated 11/29/41 on HFS personnel

Report dated 12/30/41 on all aspects of the HFS to date

Section 3

January - October 1942

Roll 1, 0268-0530

Report dated 1/8/42 regarding Joseph Kelley Stockton

Letter dated 1/19/42 from Murphy to Hoover stating that HFS-produced publications, including *The Highlander Fling*, will be provided in future reports

Letter dated 1/28/42 from Murphy to Hoover regarding a synopsis of the HFS 1941 annual report

Letter dated 2/16/42 from Murphy to Hoover, including copies of *The Highlander Fling*

Report dated 2/26/42 on James Dombrowski

Letter dated 2/28/42 from Murphy to Hoover regarding a \$100 donation to the HFS from Eleanor Roosevelt

Copy of the ninth annual report of the HFS, 1941

Copy of *Songs of Field and Factory*, HFS publication, spring 1940

Letter dated 3/18/42 from Murphy to Hoover, including HFS promotional literature and additional copies of *The Highlander Fling*

Report dated 4/1/42 on interview of Horton concerning his activities in the school area

Report dated 6/17/42 concerning interview of a former HFS employee

Report dated 7/9/42 regarding the HFS benefit concert in Washington by Paul Robeson and other HFS activities; includes newspaper clippings and additional HFS publications

Guide to the FBI File on the Highlander Folk School 13

Report dated 9/12/42 regarding founding of the HFS and other background information

Memo dated 10/23/42 from Hoover to SAC Knoxville ordering a halt to the active investigation of the HFS

Report dated 10/22/42 on summer session of the HFS

Section 4

October 1942 - June 1954

Roll 1, 0531-0732

Memo dated 10/27/42 from K. R. McIntire to Mr. Mumford, including HFS promotional materials

Report dated 12/3/42 on tenth anniversary activities at the HFS

Letter dated 12/14/42 regarding closing of file, including one HFS publication

Letter dated 2/14/47 from Assistant Attorney General David L. Bagelon to Hoover regarding the HFS; includes additional information

Memo dated 3/18/48 from Hoover to SAC Knoxville regarding possible Communist "front" status of the HFS

Letter dated 12/10/50 from Myles Horton to Hugh H. Clegg, assistant director of the bureau

Memo dated 1/4/51 from D. M. Ladd to Hoover regarding response to Horton

Memo dated 1/22/51 from Mr. Belmont to Mr. Ladd regarding response to Horton

Letter dated 2/14/51 from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to Hoover inquiring into the investigation of the HFS

Letter dated 1/31/51 from Horton to U.S. Attorney General J. Howard McGrath regarding bureau investigation of black students enrolled at the HFS

Memo dated 2/26/51 from Hoover to Peyton Ford, deputy attorney general, concerning correspondence with Myles Horton

Memo dated 2/21/51 from D. M. Ladd to the director regarding Baldwin's allegation of bureau activity at the HFS

Teletype dated 2/21/51 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding interviews of Myles Horton

4/ Guide to the FBI File on the Highlander Folk School

Memo dated 3/5/51 from Peyton Ford to Hoover regarding correspondence with Myles Horton
Memo dated 3/12/51 from L. L. Laughlin to A. H. Belmont regarding an HFS letter alleging bureau investigation of interracial enrollment
Newspaper clippings concerning the HFS
Memo dated 2/27/51 from D. M. Ladd to Hoover regarding complaints surrounding the HFS investigation
Letter dated 3/14/51 from Lucy R. Mason of the Congress of Industrial Organizations regarding bureau agents
Memo dated 2/23/51 from D. M. Ladd to Hoover regarding the investigation of the HFS
Letter dated 4/18/51 from Herbert M. Levy of the ACLU regarding correspondence from Hoover
Memo dated 8/25/53 from A. H. Belmont to D. M. Ladd regarding Jenner Committee request for information on Myles Horton
Memo dated 8/27/53 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding interview of Rev. W. A. Swift, Monteagle, TN

Section 5

December 1955 - February 1959

Roll 1, 0733-0936

Report dated 4/27/56 regarding Myles Horton and his wife
Copy of the HFS 21st Annual Report (10/1/52-9/30/53)
Copy of "A Guide to Community Action for Public School Integration"
Copy of "Public Speaking"
Copy of *Highlander Reports*, July 1953
Memo dated 9/20/56 from SAC Mobile to Hoover regarding the HFS
Memo dated 8/30/57 from L. B. Nichols to Clyde Tolson regarding increased activity at the HFS and the plan of events for its 25th anniversary
Memo dated 9/4/57 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding information that the HFS is becoming a center for teaching civil disobedience
Pamphlet issued by the Georgia Commission on Education, Governor Marvin Griffin, chairman, alleging Communist activities at the HFS

Newspaper clippings

Letter dated 11/1/57 from Hoover to SAC Knoxville inquiring into civil disobedience activities at the HFS

Letter dated 11/21/57 from Septima Clark of the HFS soliciting funds

Copy of *Highlander Reports*, 25th Annual (10/1/56-9/30/57)

Copy of "Official Statement of Policy" of the HFS

Newspaper clippings

Pamphlet: "Communism and the NAACP," origin unknown

Letter dated 1/59 from Myles Horton soliciting funds

Copy of 26th Annual Report (10/1/57-9/30/58)

Letter dated 2/2/59 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding action by Tennessee legislature to investigate "subversive" activities at the HFS

Section 6

February 1959 - June 1961

Roll 1, 0937-1042

Memo dated 2/24/59 from SAC Memphis to Hoover regarding support of Tennessee legislature by the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government

Letter dated 6/8/59 to C. D. DeLoach regarding John's Island Branch of the HFS

Newspaper clippings regarding police raid on the HFS

Memo dated 9/11/59 from Hoover to SAC Knoxville regarding open protest letter from Myles Horton

Report dated 9/15/59 on the HFS

Newspaper clippings regarding trial

Memo dated 2/29/60 from SAC Louisville to Hoover regarding the "Friends of Highlander"

Newspaper clippings regarding revocation of the HFS charter

Memo dated 5/22/61 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover pertaining to latest legal actions and decisions

Memo dated 6/29/61 from Hoover to legal attaché, Bonn (Federal Republic of Germany), regarding furnishing information about the HFS outside the bureau

Section 7

October 1961 - November 1967

Roll 1, 1043-1221

Memo dated 10/17/61 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding contingency plans for the HFS to move to Knoxville

Memo dated 10/25/61 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding prointegration activities at the HFS

Memo dated 6/20/63 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding information about racial matters

Memo dated 7/18/63 from R. W. Smith to W. C. Sullivan regarding requests from Senator Warren G. Magnuson and Congressman Jeffery Cohilan concerning racial agitation

Newspaper clippings

Memo dated 7/26/63 from F. J. Baumgardner to W. C. Sullivan regarding Highlander Research and Education Center (HREC), Knoxville, and request for list of officers, teachers, and students

Memo dated 8/13/64 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding update on situation

Memo dated 7/7/64 from SAC Knoxville regarding the Washington Committee for the HFS

Memo dated 8/28/64 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding voter registration drive at the Sea Island Progressive Club Center, St. John's Island, SC.

Memo dated 9/10/64 from SAC Savannah to Hoover regarding the HREC

Memo dated 7/27/64 from M. A. Jones to C. D. DeLoach regarding request by Congressman Roman C. Purinski for information about the HFS

Airtel dated 4/6/65 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover concerning information on student march on Washington, co-sponsored by the HREC

Newspaper clippings

Memo dated 10/19/65 from SAC Louisville to Hoover regarding vandalism against the HREC

Letter dated 10/19/65 from Hoover to chief, U.S. Secret Service, regarding the HREC

Guide to the FBI File on the Highlander Folk School 17

Memo dated 4/13/67 from SAC Louisville to Hoover regarding vote by the Tennessee House of Representatives to start a second legislative investigation of the HREC

Copy of Tennessee House Joint Resolution No. 14, authorizing a committee to investigate the activities of the HREC of Knoxville County and its affiliated organizations

Memo dated 6/9/67 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding the HREC

Section 8

January 1968 - August 1972

Roll 1, 1222-1245

Miscellaneous letters to the bureau requesting information about the HFS and the HREC

Section 9

November 1940 - June 1967

Roll 1, 1246-1354

Newspaper clippings, arranged chronologically

Section 10

January 1958

Roll 1, 1355-1358

Memo dated 1/20/58 from SAC Knoxville to director regarding attempt to blow up the HFS

Section 11

March 1959 and September 1963

Roll 1, 1359-END

Teletype dated 3/16/59 from SAC Memphis to Hoover regarding bomb threat received at the HFS

Airtel dated 9/6/63 from SAC Knoxville to Hoover regarding bomb threat received at the HREC