The Rough Truth of John Handcox

In a New CD From the West Virginia University Press

According to legendary folksinger Woody Guthrie, John Handcox (1904-1992) was the "main light, organizer, and songwriter for the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union during its early days." Since then, Handcox's songs have helped establish him as the voice of poor cotton farmers during the Great Depression and, according to Pete Seeger, as "one of the most important songwriters of the early 20th Century." In Handcox's songs and poems, we find both the timeless artistic expression of one man and a documentary history of the major issues that drove the unionization of tenant farmers in the South and Southwest during the 1930s. In these recordings of Handcox's songs, poems, and stories, you will not find a honey-smooth voice. Perhaps his voice will even grate on you a bit. It has a bite to it—just as his lyrics have a bite, a roughness about them. But the reality that he speaks of is harsh and hard—a rough truth that Handcox knew first-hand.

Through the release of these recordings from the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian, this important labor figure's efforts are now accessible to new generations. His words—in his songs, poems, and stories—provide a historical record of the struggles of the STFU and the plight of tenant farmers in the 1930s. For this effort and for his songs and poems of truth, John Handcox should be remembered as a labor hero to us all; and he is now able to sing out his rough truth for eternity—in his own voice. —From the liner notes by Mark Allan Jackson

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Songs, Poems and Stories of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union

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