Witches, Book Binders, and a Cat Who Could Predict the Weather:

Stories from the Alabama Writers' Project

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To everyone else, Otis is the answer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction 1
II. The Federal Writers' Project in Alabama 9
III. A Tangle of Fact and Fiction: Accuracy Versus Authenticity 22
IV. The Alabama Writers 32
V. The Stories
  1. "Day of Judgment" by Jack Kytle 43
  2. "Bob Curtis, River Drifter" by Jack Kytle 49
  3. "Uncle Bud Ryland: The Coosa Fisherman" by Jack Kytle 55
  4. "Like Lost Children" by Jack Kytle 62
  5. "Horse Trade" by Woodrow Hand 74
  6. "Calling on Miss Lucy" by Woodrow Hand 80
  7. "Tom Cat, Weather Prophet" by Woodrow Hand 84
  8. "Wolf Brand" by Woodrow Hand 88
  9. "Joe's Tall Story" by Woodrow Hand 90
  10. "A Steel Mill Worker and His Wife" by Edward Harper 93
  11. "Hobbies, Pets, and Children" by Edward Harper 103
  12. "Some Grow Old" by Bennett Marshall 114
  13. "Book Binders" by Bennett Marshall 119
  14. "The Williams' Farm" by Mildred Thrash 126
  15. "Courting the Witch's Daughter" by Levi D. Shelby Jr. 130
  16. "Tax Utopia" by Pettersen Marzoni 135
  17. "Fishing Peter" by Maggie Boswell 137
  18. "The Haunted Graveyard in Lowndes County" by Maggie Boswell 138
  19. "Old Court Street Church Ghost" by O.O. Lowery 139
  20. "Unusual Personages" by Mabel Farrior 141
Appendix A – List of Writers Employed by the Alabama Writers' Project 143
Appendix B – Alabama Writers' Project District Map 147
Appendix C – Proposal for the Southern Program Written by William Couch 148
Appendix D – Story Request Sent to Southern Regional Directors 154
Appendix E – Writers' Manual by William Couch 157
Appendix F – Outline for Collecting Life Stories Source Material 161
Bibliography 164

INTRODUCTION

In November 1938, Alabama was one of two states to have submitted writings, primarily life histories of poor rural whites and former-slaves, to the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) (Couch 1). Established in 1935 as part of New Deal reforms under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was in charge of putting America back to work after the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic depression that crippled the country for at least a decade. Under the WPA umbrella were several rebuilding programs that contributed to the country's infrastructure and economy. More than 100,000 buildings and hundreds of thousands of miles of roads were constructed in a dual effort to grow the country and provide desperately needed jobs. As part of a group of WPA arts programs collectively known as Federal One, the FWP was responsible for putting writers back behind the typewriter. Some famous WPA writers include Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and John Steinbeck. The WPA also fostered the talents of a young Orson Welles in the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). During his time with the FTP, he produced pioneering and controversial works such as a staging of *Macbeth* set in Haiti and a powerful attack on corporate greed called *The Cradle Will Rock.* However, these WPA writers are an exception. They were incredible talents who took advantage of federally sponsored work opportunities.

Several other New Deal programs were created to archive the American experience as seen through the eyes of civilians. Through photographs, plays, and audio recordings the individual life stories of thousands of Americans were captured and combined into a richly detailed image of the country as it struggled to rebuild itself. For example, Dorothea Lange's iconic 1936 photograph of Florence Owens Thompson entitled *Migrant Mother* portrays the despair of an entire nation through the eyes of a migrant farm worker who had just sold the tires off her broken down car in order to feed her children. The image was created while she was working for the Federal Resettlement Administration and humanizes an emotional context of the Great Depression. This was also a goal of the FWP. Each state had WPA offices, but Alabama was one of the first to contribute to the FWP archive.

More often the writing collected by the FWP was bland or overtly ornate. This was especially the case in Alabama. In most cases, the skill level of writers on federal work-relief lists was questionable (Brown 10). This issue plagued southern states during the development of their own state-based offices of the FWP. However, some southern states were able to hire enough capable writers who produced good work. The Alabama Writers Project (AWP), however hampered by politics and ego, was one of the state efforts that produced very compelling writing during its brief lifespan. The collection of manuscripts associated with the AWP is primarily housed at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery, with some documents residing in North Carolina and Washington D.C. Among the thousands of pages of WPA writing in Montgomery, some pieces stand out as well-written examples of quality storytelling. Many collections of FWP writing have been published including the state guide series and the emotionally moving former slave narratives. However, the short stories and the literary aspects of some of the life histories have received little or no attention except by folklorists who debate the legitimacy of those literary aspects. This project will correct that oversight by presenting a collection of unpublished yet exceptionally interesting examples of short stories, folklore, and artfully written life histories of the AWP. Included in this anthology are ghost stories, a fable about a cat that could predict the weather, stories about Alabamians struggling with poverty, pulp-style murder fiction, and an anti-Jim Crow story disguised as a fairy tale. The content of the stories is valuable due to the historical immediacy it provides. To contextualize the collection, a brief history of the FWP in Alabama that addresses the political and social barriers to the AWP as it evolved in the state will be included. Various primary sources, including original FWP memos, will be included in the appendix section for reference purposes. These additional resources should assist others who wish to pursue further research on the subject.

Due to the size and scope of the FWP, there are still hundreds of thousands of unpublished works that are worthy of attention and will provide scholars a huge pool of primary documents from which to continue telling the story of the country in the context of New Deal America. For example, the Library of Congress alone contains more than 300,000 FWP documents and other original FWP source material, more than half of which are related to the state guidebooks (http://memory.loc.gov/wpaintro/wpafwp.html 2-23-12). Add to that the FWP records held in the individual state archives and at various universities, and the idea of combining these into a comprehensive yet manageable American memory book seems nearly impossible. However, projects like this anthology can help chip away at the daunting task of enriching the American narrative by telling the stories of its people. Ultimately, the cultural identity of nation is created by its citizens. For that reason this project focuses on AWP writing because it creates a compelling picture of Alabama through the words of its common people, not through the words of its politicians or military leaders.

The writings held at the Alabama Department of Archives and History are irregular in length, and the quality fluctuates wildly, often within the same story (Brown 16). With few exceptions the AWP writers were from the areas in which they collected stories and folklore, which may reflect on why the quality of the writing is so dynamic (Hirsch 2). Poverty and a lack of consistent access to education in rural sections of the state are most likely the cause of the poor writing. According to a government report, more than twelve percent of Alabamians were illiterate in 1930 (Carlton and Cocanis 125). However, not all of the writing is bad. In fact, much of it is charming and fun to read. According to James Seay Brown, Jr., a history professor at Samford University, even the poorly written stories have an "attractive immediacy about them" (16).

In this project, chapter one provides a brief history of the WPA, FWP, and the AWP in Alabama. This chapter also highlights the friction between the AWP, regional and federal FWP offices, and Marie Bankhead Owen, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, who sought to derail the Alabama guidebook. Owen did eventually sign onto the project, but not before almost squelching it. Her unenthusiastic compromise ultimately benefitted historians and helped create a fascinating time capsule in the form of the Alabama guide book. Other important people in the development of the AWP are featured in chapter one including William Couch, FWP regional director; Benjamin Botkin, FWP national folklore director; Harry Hopkins, the first national director of the WPA; Myrtle Miles, AWP director; and, Sterling Brown, the national Negro affairs editor in Washington D.C. Without the efforts of these people the AWP might not have existed. Without their efforts many of Alabama cultural memories may have been lost to time.

Chapter two focuses on how scholars interpret the source material held in the various FWP archives. The struggle between folklorists to resolve the often blurred lines between folklore, life stories, and short fiction in the WPA collections has at times become heated. The academic paper-war between folklore scholars Jerrold Hirsch, Tom Terrill, and former FWP writer Leonard Rapport included in chapter two highlights the argument over validity versus authenticity in the still-evolving discipline of folklore studies. Hirsch and Terrill argue that the value of the FWP archives is in its authenticity regardless of its historical accuracy. Rapport argues that without verifiable materials such as first-hand accounts, birth certificates, and other primary sources, the stories are invalid and worthless to folklorists. In chapter two I argue that a middle ground between these approaches is the most valuable way to interpret the FWP archives.

Not much is known about the personal lives or backgrounds of many of the writers involved in the state writers' projects. Chapter three provides some detail about the lives of the Alabama writers including one of the three African Americans hired by the AWP and based in Colbert County. Since few records were kept about the writers themselves, much of what is known about them must be inferred through their writing. However, some of the writers lived extremely interesting lives. For example, one of Pettersen Marzoni's short stories was adapted into a film in 1923. His connection to the film industry was possibly due to his being responsible for the first film review column in the United States. Chapter three also outlines the process of how the stories were created for the WPA state guidebook series. The process worked like an assembly line with field workers, staff writers, and an editorial department that finalized the stories for publication.

Chapter four consists of twenty unpublished works from the AWP collection at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The writing included in this anthology represents four primary geographic regions in the state: North, Central, Southeast, and South Alabama. Embedded within these stories are the hallmarks of Alabama's unique cultural identity including folklore, ghost stories, and original fiction. The life histories in chapter four are embellished literary versions of the lives of factory workers, mine workers, and farmers. Themes in the stories include supernatural superstitions, the realities of long-term committed relationships, the dangers of pride, and the joys of childish pranks. Another theme uniting many of the stories in this anthology is the rhythm of local dialects. For example, in "Joe's Tall Story" by Woodrow Hand, Joe, a coal miner, recounts his frantic escape from a mine explosion. Hand delivers the tale with a musical rhythm that is inherent in the Alabama drawl: "Now, I wus supposed to get killed when Red Ash Mine exploded. I had a chance to get burned out, smoked out, or drowned out; but I got it all, and I coulda even been starved out. Here's how it wus" (Hand 1). The syncopated rhythm of his voice propels the reader through the story in the same way that Joe himself is flushed through the mine by a flood of water from the broken pipe. While the subject matter is compelling, my hope is that the stories included in this anthology will encourage others to explore the writing collected by the AWP. The writers in chapter four include Jack Kytle, Pettersen Marzoni, Woodrow Hand, Bennett Marshall, Edward Harper, O.O. Lowery, Maggie Boswell, Levi D. Shelby, Jr., Mabel Farrior, and Mildred Thrash.

In the 1970s the Alabama Department of Archives and History reorganized its AWP files. This reorganization provided some contextual information for the material including a partial list of Alabama's writers. During research for this anthology, I expanded that list to include writers not listed during the state reorganization of the AWP material. The expanded list is included in this anthology. Also included in the appendix section is a district map I created to illustrate the political and socioeconomic influences in the state at the time. For example, most writers were located in the black belt region of the state. However, the editorial offices were located in Birmingham. One could speculate this was done purposely to keep state politics out of the federal program. However, it is probably more likely that the editorial office needed to be where the best writers were. Most of the writers chosen for inclusion in this anthology were located in the Birmingham area. Also included in the appendix section are a memo from the director of the southern regional office in North Carolina that describes the program, an outline of the information to be collected for the life histories, and a memo to the state directors requesting that more material be submitted for the state guidebooks. All of these resource materials will contextualize the scope of the FWP and assist in further FWP research.

Before the FWP was terminated in 1943, the program was temporarily the responsibility of the United States Army. In the letter of transfer to the Library of Congress, director of the military writers' program Merle Colby wrote that he hoped "some talented boy or girl will stumble on some of this material, take fire from it and turn it to creative use" (Hirsch 228). Colby's hope that this material remains vital has been realized as public interest has grown in the FWP over time. For example, most states have produced collections of former slave narratives, including the University of

Alabama Press in Tuscaloosa. The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama was republished in 2000, and includes a new introduction written by Harvey H. Jackson III, a history professor at Jacksonville State University. Jerrold Hirsch, a history professor at Truman State University in Missouri, has also written extensively about the cultural significance of the FWP. His focus on the cultural impact of the FWP has been a major influence on this project. No other country has created an archive of personal histories as vast as the United States did during the Great Depression. This reinforces the fact that humans are inherent storytellers. One of the most unique aspects of the FWP archive is that it is told in the voice of American citizens and is mostly void of government propaganda. The hundreds of thousands of documents held in the various archives across the country create a cohesive cultural voice. That voice defines the cultural identity of the United States in terms that are paradoxical, democratic, eloquent, serious, funny, harsh, and very human. The unifying patchwork of folktales and regional writings collected by the FWP offers a massive resource for scholars that will continue to produce insight into the American experience for generations to come.

THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT IN ALABAMA

The United States was a dynamic and prosperous country at the beginning of the twentieth century. Industrialization had created wealth for some and opportunity for many. The country was shedding its isolationist attitude toward international affairs and becoming an imperial power. At home American cities expanded quickly as urban populations boomed. New buildings scraped the skies to accommodate new residents. From 1890 through 1920 the American economy expanded in cycles of rapid growth, economic plateaus, and moderate economic contractions followed again by rapid growth. However, by October 1929 the economic bubble of the early twentieth century had burst. The American stock market crashed, losing nearly eighty percent of its value by 1932. Millions of American workers, more than twenty percent of the workforce, lost their jobs during what became known as the Great Depression. During his bid for president in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed an economic stimulus package aimed at easing the economic and emotional strain of mass unemployment brought on by the Great Depression. When Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, the Depression was in full bloom. Roosevelt's economic recovery plan, the New Deal, was broad in scope. He included funding for civil engineering projects, such as roads and bridges, as well as funding for arts programs including theatre projects and the creation of an American folklore collection. To administer the New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created in 1935. Some in Congress were opposed to funding the arts projects included in the mandate of the WPA. It was the WPA's first director, Harry Hopkins, who was instrumental in securing funding for the federal art programs. Speaking before the United States Conference of Mayors in Washington D.C. on November 17, 1936, Hopkins addressed the dire economic situation the country was facing. "How many Americans were unemployed in March, 1933? Call it 18 million or 13 million; the smallest figure is bad enough. How many today, 11 million or 8 million? In any case it is nearly one unemployable worker out of five, and at the lowest point of this depression it was almost one out of three," Hopkins said (103).

Laborers and bankers weren't the only Americans affected by the Great Depression. In 1935, a quarter of the American publishing industry was unemployed (Taylor 100). Hopkins knew writers and artists were suffering financially. To ease the plight of writers, he advocated for the inclusion of arts programs into the WPA. Hopkins understood that the arts enriched the lives of all Americans. He argued that leaving artists out of the economic recovery would endanger the rich cultural heritage of the United States for decades to come. To address the mass unemployment of American writers, the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) was created as a division of the WPA. The primary goal of the FWP was to put thousands of writers back to work. To accomplish this goal the FWP created informational guidebooks for each state in the union to serve as a history of the state, a snapshot of its cultural demographics, and a geography book highlighting the natural heritage of the state. FWP funding was approved in 1935. The individual state programs were soon up and running.

Both professional and non-professional writers were hired by the FWP to collect the information that would be incorporated into the guidebooks. However, non-professional writers conducted the majority of the fieldwork during the FWP (Hirsch 184). Among the professional writers hired by the FWP were former newspaper reporters who welcomed the opportunity to work. Some former newsmen considered the FWP a humiliating form of charity, but when faced with the reality of feeding themselves and their families, the work was almost always accepted (Taylor 100). According to San Francisco based FWP writer Thomas C. Fleming, "Nobody wanted relief work, because we thought of it as welfare" (8). In addition to issues of pride in accepting the relief work, the pay was less than most writers had made prior to the stock market crash in 1929. For example, the average wage of a FWP writer was approximately sixty dollars a month, which was below the average national salary in 1936 (Fleming 8). The upper end of the pay scale for a FWP writer was ninety-four dollars a month, but few writers reached that level of pay.

Benjamin Botkin was a primary figure in the development of the FWP. His interest in folklore and the arts drove his decisions during his time with the FWP. As a published poet and first cousin of George and Ira Gershwin, his interest in the arts may have been genetic. As the head of the FWP folklore division, he encouraged FWP writers to pursue their artistic impulses when creating their work (Irvy 14). Botkin was interested in how the storytelling traditions of the South informed the national identity of the United States (Hirsch 182). His influence on the field of American folklore studies was primarily accrued through his anthologies, several of which evangelized southern culture. Instead of using folklore as a window to the past, Botkin believed folklore was a tool to better understand the present. In other words, folklore is an ever-evolving lens through which to interpret history, the living embodiment of the past. His first job with the FWP was in 1935. He was instrumental in the development of the Oklahoma Writers' Project and edited the folklore section of its state guide. In 1938, Botkin was appointed national folklore editor for the WPA. As national editor, Botkin focused on the value of folklore in modernity by considering how it bolstered the humanity of a quickly industrializing nation (Hirsch 183). Botkin often focused his interests on the South. He considered it culturally unique and not intellectually inferior to other sections of the country. Botkin hoped that FWP folklore collections and state guidebooks might help to blunt the stereotypes of the South as being inhabited by illiterate intellectual inferiors (Hirsch 186). In those collections the South is often depicted as being mired in poverty, while maintaining its intellectual integrity. In other words, Botkin did not equate poverty with a lack of intelligence. To the contrary, the folklore collected by the FWP often displays a quick-witted and wry sense of humor employed to adapt to adversity. Botkin's most important contribution to the program, however, was his concept of "applied folklore." Applied folklore shed some of the constraints of academic approaches to the discipline by allowing untrained writers to conduct the life history interviews and collect folksongs. In particular, the former-slave narrative anthologies that Botkin edited, including *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery,* were infused with the public intellectual impact that only the applied folklore technique could have achieved (Davis 4).

One of the hallmarks of applied folklore was the recruitment of non-professional writers living in the communities being studied to collect the cultural information (Davis 3). Botkin correctly believed that indigenous culture is the foundation of national identity (Hirsch 182). For Botkin, the local citizens best knew where to find the stories in their communities. He also understood that the caretakers of those stories would be more forthcoming with information if they were speaking with someone they could relate to.

Botkin argued that these non-professional writers would be the best interpreters of the colloquialisms that were steeped in the local culture. Prior to Botkin's leadership, the FWP focused on collecting life histories and focused less on the vibrant cultural ecosystems that helped to create distinct regional identities. Proponents consider applied folklore as a merger of anthropology, journalism, and traditional historical research practices. Under Botkin's leadership the use of applied folklore by the FWP allowed the program to amass a vast, and deeply rich, archive of regional cultures within the United States. Unfortunately Botkin's progressive politics and multicultural vision for America eventually attracted the scrutiny of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which accused him of anti-American activity in 1941 (Davis 5). The FBI investigation never produced any credible charges against Botkin, and the investigation was eventually terminated. In 1939, Botkin became head of the Writers' Unit of the Library of Congress when the FWP was broken up and folded into various other federal agencies. There he served as head of the Archive of the American Folksong from 1942 to 1944. Toward the end of his career, some academic critics labeled Botkin's approach to folklore as flawed and invalid. However, a resurgent interest in the FWP has salvaged his professional reputation, and more of his work with the program is being rediscovered.

While Botkin and Hopkins were instrumental in the development of the FWP at a federal level, William Couch was the program's primary figure in the South. Couch was director of the University of North Carolina Press when he was appointed to the FWP as a regional director in August of 1938. Within days of his appointment, Couch sent a letter to the directors of the seven individual southern states outlining his expectations for their programs. The letter offered guidance on what type of material and information to gather for inclusion in state guidebooks. Couch embraced Botkin's applied folklore approach and encouraged the state directors to hire untrained writers to gather life histories, folklore, and folk songs for the project. However, Couch believed there should be a set of guidelines the writers should follow in order to create a sense of uniformity in the material. Couch soon expanded the letter into a writers' manual that stressed a more journalistic style, similar to modern day newspaper feature writing. Couch asked the writers to merge simple facts with a more literary writing style that stressed "human interest, social importance, and literary excellence" (Couch 2). In the manual, Couch wrote, "The best stories will be those which combine all these elements" (2). His belief in the value of portraying southern life through the eyes of common people helped to inject the FWP folklore collections with the tangible immediacy of human struggle during the Great Depression. The manual was sent to the state directors and soon disseminated to the hundreds of FWP writers in the South. One interesting aspect of the manual is the level of freedom it gives the writers to practice their craft. While it stresses a modern journalistic style and prescribes the types of questions to be asked, the manual also states that if the story, or life history, is compelling, the way it is gathered is unimportant. Writing in the manual, Couch states: "It is not desired that each life history or story follow this outline in a rigid manner. The stories will not be useable if they are constructed on a rigid pattern. For instance, the writer may reverse the order of the outline, he may begin with any item which he considers of special importance in the case under consideration, he may follow the whole outline or limit himself to a part of it in any particular story" (Couch 1). The writers' manual might be Couch's most important contribution to the FWP. Without it, the quality of the material collected in the South might have been considered inadequate for inclusion in the state guidebook.

A lack of available skilled writers plagued the Alabama Writers' Project (AWP) director Myrtle Miles. Most of the writers on the relief roles had primarily made it on the list due to their being literate. Few were credentialed writers. In correspondence with Couch, Miles often cited the lack of qualified writers on the relief list as a major hindrance to the collection of well-written life histories needed for the state guidebooks (Brown 6). Couch often dismissed Miles' complaints. He persisted in his belief that using untrained writers to collect the material would create the blend of fact and fiction he was looking for in the stories. While creating a well-written narrative is a skill possessed by trained writers, any literate person could ask questions and write down the answers. "People like to talk, and if given a fair chance they will say what they think," Couch wrote to Miles (3). "The purpose of this work is to secure material which will give an accurate, honest, interesting, and fairly comprehensive view of the kind of life that is lived by the majority of the people in the South" (3). Couch encouraged Miles to leave the job of refining the AWP stories to the Birmingham editorial department. Couch was not alone in his belief in the abilities of untrained writers. Other regional FWP directors also believed that people in the communities were best suited to collect information about their own communities. For example Tennessee director William McDaniel often praised the non-professional writers on his staff for their ability to better relate to their peers. Writing about one of his staff members, he said, "Her greatest attribute is that she is one of the people" (Hirsh 172).

Couch was correct to assume that interviews conducted by untrained FWP writers would appeal to a general audience and become a valuable source of research material to future scholars (4). The resurgence of interest in the writings collected by the WPA affirms his position. For example, most states, including Alabama, have published collections of former-slave narratives. Couch advised the directors of the programs in Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida of the importance of collecting original, first-hand material. He also encouraged editorial freedom for the writers to creatively enhance the literary quality of the writing (Hirsch 168). Writers were encouraged to develop ideas that didn't meet the criteria outlined in writers' manual as long as the final product created a compelling read. What would make for a compelling read? Local color, slang, customs, ghost stories, and other non-traditional literary techniques were considered as options to enhance otherwise drab life histories often enveloped by the drudgery of poverty. The various state editorial departments of the FWP were equally encouraged by Couch to not impede enterprising writers who were creating interesting work. Even with the freedoms afforded to AWP writers and its editorial department, Miles' complaint about a lack of qualified writers had merit. With some exceptions, most of the thousands of AWP writing held at the Alabama Department of Archives and History was never considered good enough for inclusion into the state guidebook. This fact helped bolster Miles' argument. In her first two years as director of the AWP, she continually asked Couch for assistance in acquiring trained writers for her staff. Miles argued that she could not accomplish the goals mandated by the FWP, which included quotas for material to be submitted for inclusion in the Alabama state guidebook, without having a well-trained staff. After a review of AWP material, Couch began working with Miles to hire enough trained writers to collect the material needed for the planned six-hundred-page *WPA Guide to Alabama*. Their work paid off. By the end of 1938, Alabama had enough competent writers that some of them could be assigned to collect material for use in non-FWP anthologies planned for publication through the University of North Carolina Press. However, Couch's confidence in the AWP was complicated. In correspondence with his federal counterparts, he acknowledged that the quality of the material was mediocre at best (Jackson 18). Referring to the quality of the work being produced by the AWP, Couch wrote, "I cannot sleep at night for Alabama" (18). Couch's criticism of the material in the Alabama Archives' collection is valid. However, the archive's value is best considered as a collection of historical documents that give scholars insight to what life was like in Alabama during the 1930s.

A lack of quality writers was not the only hindrance to the AWP. Politics also threatened to handicap the program and block the publication of the Alabama state guidebook. Marie Bankhead Owen was the director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. She hoped to squelch the publication of the Alabama guidebook through her political connections. Why? Owen saw the *WPA Guide to Alabama* as competition with her own Alabama history textbook (Brown 9). In an attempt to stop the publication of the state guidebook, Owen asked her brothers, both U.S. Congressmen, and a close friend, Governor Bibb Graves, to refuse to cooperate on the FWP project (Jackson 16). Owen and Graves seemed willing to block the guidebook even if it meant national political embarrassment for being the only state unwilling to publish a guidebook (Jackson 17). For two years, Owen debated AWP director Miles over the merits of publishing the Alabama guidebook. During the feud, Owen and Miles openly criticized the accuracy of each other's work (Jackson 17). Owen claimed that the poor writing only reinforced the inaccurate historical facts. Miles responded by sharing with Owen examples of her own writing that suffered from the same criticism (Jackson 19). Under pressure from Owen, Governor Graves agreed to block publication of the WPA Guide to Alabama unless it was first scrutinized by a state reading committee (Brown 9). The AWP continued to collect material for the guidebook during the feud between Owen and Miles. The future of the guidebook was changed with the reversal of Governor Graves's decision to block its publication when Frank Dixon was elected governor in 1939. Dixon signed on as a sponsor and agreed to publish the guidebook. Owen acquiesced. She agreed to drop her opposition to the guidebook as long as she was allowed editorial input and could assist in its production and publication (Jackson 19). The delay in its publication ultimately benefited the quality of the guidebook, as it allowed time for its content to be revised. The *WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama*, which was republished in 2000, is an interesting read. It is concise in its language, and vivid in its imagery, regardless of arguments over its accuracy.

In addition to the quality of the writing and political interference, racial issues were a central concern of many officials within the FWP. Only three Southern states had African American units: Virginia, Louisiana, and Florida (Hirsch 180). Other states hired black writers, but their treatment was often inequitable. Sterling Brown, the national Negro affairs editor in Washington D.C., spent the majority of his time with the FWP reviewing the material to be included in the various state guidebooks. During that time he sought to correct inequalities in the way race was handled in FWP projects. Brown advocated for merging the African American narrative with the American narrative. In order to do so, Brown sought to lessen the historical and cultural connotations of racial identifiers. Brown argued that the dominant cultural voice within a society did not define that society as a whole (Hirsch 108). He also strove to correct the myth that southerners, especially African Americans, were intellectually inferior to people living in other parts of the country (Hirsh 166). His struggle for the acceptance of minorities in the FWP was more difficult when dealing with program directors in the South. For example, Alabama director Myrtle Miles argued that Brown did not "understand the Alabama Negro, and the general negro situation in Alabama" (Hirsch 123). Commonly held attitudes about race are apparent in the Alabama guidebook. For example, a passage from the history section of the Alabama guidebook refers to Booker T. Washington as an "unusually intelligent young negro teacher" (*WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama* 52). The institutionalized racism the South experienced made Brown's work difficult, but he was eventually able to persuade several southern directors to hire African Americans.

Like Couch, Brown believed that solid ethnographic information could best be collected by utilizing writers in the local communities. Brown argued that those writers could use their cultural immersion to collect more personal stories. Using that argument, he pressured Miles to hire African American writers in order to provide balanced coverage in the Alabama guidebook. In 1937, Miles was unwilling to concede her position and would not hire African Americans. She argued that most literate African Americans were already employed, and thus not on Alabama's relief roles, making them unqualified for the AWP. Miles also argued that racial issues should be presented in terms that were "agreeable to all concerned" (Jackson 15). Unfortunately, that meant

African Americans were mostly represented in derogatory terms in the Alabama guidebook. However, by 1938, Miles gave in to Brown's pressure. She hired three African American writers including Levi D. Shelby Jr., whose story "Courting the Witch's Daughters" appears in this anthology. In spite of Brown's efforts, derogatory language aimed at African Americans was still approved by many of the FWP editors, including Miles. While the racist language is painful to read, many consider the Alabama guidebook an accurate reflection of the attitudes toward race in 1930s Alabama, and thus a valuable tool for interpreting history (Jackson 16).

Just as the AWP began to produce high quality work, anti-New Deal factions were gaining strength in Washington D.C. In 1939, Congressional concerns about future debt that the county was incurring, due to federal economic stimulus spending, focused a spotlight on various WPA programs such as the FWP. That year, due in part to Congressional pressure, the FWP was folded into the Library of Congress and renamed the Federal Writers' Program. This consolation gave Congress more oversight of the FWP finances. The name change also brought with it a consolidation of many of the programs under the FWP umbrella, including merging the folklore and editorial divisions with those divisions responsible for the production of the state guidebooks. This change forced the FWP directors to validate the existence of their various projects in order to secure continued financing for them (Hirsch 214). This added level of bureaucracy imposed upon the FWP by Congress constrained the program's ability to fulfill its original mission. By restricting the program's budgets for staff and publication costs, Congress intended to starve the FWP into non-existence. Prior to Congress tapering FWP funding in 1939, many of the program's most talented staff had begun to take jobs in the private sector. For instance, Jack Kytle resumed his work as a journalist in the Birmingham area and wrote pulp fiction stories for *Weird Tales* magazine. Economic recovery, preparation for World War II, and limited federal funding shrank the program further. In 1942, the FWP was absorbed by the military. The name was changed to the Writer's Unit of the War Services Subdivision. However, this incarnation of the FWP was not a priority of career military leaders. The program was shut down permanently in 1943. By the mid-1940s most FWP writers had been absorbed by the private sector and the military. All of the material that was collected during the FWP was the property of the military when the program ended. In 1943, responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of pages created by the FWP was transferred from the military to the Library of Congress. Today, the Library of Congress continues to inventory FWP material and is adding previously unpublished material to its online digital archive. In the 1970s, the Alabama Department of Archives and History reorganized its FWP files. Like the Library of Congress, Alabama has also expanded online digital access to its AWP archives. While interest in the FWP continues to grow, more work remains to be done in order to construct a more comprehensive cultural history of the United States during the1930s and 40s. The various state archive collections of FWP material, the Library of Congress, and the growing number of FWP anthologies serve as invaluable resources for continued study of the WPA, and its impact on our understanding of American culture.

A TANGLE OF FACT AND FICTION: ACCURACY VERSUS AUTHENTICITY

In 1923, Pablo Picasso said, “We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth, at least the truth that is given to us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies” (Chipp and Selz 264). Some of the material collected by the Alabama Writers’ Project (AWP) often blurs the line between fact and fiction. Writing is a technical skill for some. For others it is an art, one in which details can be manipulated in order to convey a larger truth about the subject matter. For example, the story “Courting the Witch’s Daughters” by Levi D. Shelby, Jr., one of three African American writers hired by the AWP, can be interpreted as an artfully subversive tale of how African Americans were in the process of overcoming hundreds of years of oppression. The story is listed in the WPA folklore section of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. While constructed as a fairy tale similar to Hansel and Gretel, the story should be considered as part of the long history of coded language in the African American community that includes the Underground Railroad Quilt Code and African American work songs. The death of the witch and the resurrection of the dead brothers who strive for the company of the witch’s daughters are analogous to the African America struggle for civil rights. Shelby’s appropriation of the fairy tale form to subversively deliver a call for equality for African Americans illustrates Picasso’s point and retains its validity and authenticity as social commentary. Still there are critics who would disqualify Shelby’s work when it comes to the study of folklore in the United States. Ironically, one of the most vocal critics arguing against the validity of FWP material is a former FWP writer, Leonard Rapport.

Before addressing Rapport's dismissal of the FWP's validity for appropriating fairy tales, altering details, and constructing quotes from memory, the process for how the stories were created must be explained. In the AWP there were several human filters the information passed through from the first interview to the final version of a story before it was approved by Federal Writers' Project (FWP) editors in Washington, D.C. The first stage was to perform the interview. In most cases an AWP staff writer or a field worker, an untrained writer who had been taught how to perform interviews, met with the subject of the interview. The field worker or staff writer often only had a pencil, a notebook, and his or her memory to rely on to create the quotes that would be included in the story. If a field worker collected the information, it would then be sent to an AWP staff writer or to the editorial department in Birmingham for revisions or a complete rewrite. The staff writers would also send their stories to the Birmingham editorial department for revisions. Once the revisions were made, the editors would consult the original writer or interviewer about facts and quotes in the piece. When possible the quotes would be confirmed and approved by the subjects of the original interviews. Once the quotes had been approved, the stories would be sent to the editor's regional district offices and the national FWP editors in Washington D.C. for review. National FWP editors would either recommend the stories for inclusion in the state guidebooks, or they would be sent back for more revisions. While each of the state guidebooks are substantial in length, the Alabama guidebook is more than six hundred pages; most of the writing created by the AWP and the other state FWP programs was eventually stored in various state archives across the country. The multiple levels of human filter the material passed through most certainly altered its validity in terms of verifiable facts. For example, it is very unlikely that the quotes in the majority of the FWP works are verbatim. More likely those quotes are only reconstructions of the writers' memories pieced together from interview notes. However, the writers' editorial choices still retained the authenticity of the historical and emotional contexts in which the interviews were conducted. In other words, the material is representative of the time in which it was created regardless of if each fact is verifiable.

The Alabama Department of Archives and History holds thousands of pages of AWP material. Many of the files in the archives contain multiple versions of various stories. Often those multiple copies contain differing accounts of the story narrative. At least five versions of "Like Lost Children," a story by Jack Kytle about Alabama Cajuns, are in the state archives, and each is slightly different. Due to its length only the final version is included in this anthology. To illustrate the editorial choices writers would often make, this anthology also includes two stories by AWP writer and Birmingham editor Edward Harper. His stories "A Steel Mill Worker and His Wife" and "Hobbies, Pets, and Children" are included to illustrate the contrast between the objective and subjective styles of recording the life histories and folklore used by FWP writers. "Hobbies, Pets, and Children" represents an objective journalistic approach to an interview with a Birmingham steel worker in which questions are asked and the answers are recorded. In this version Harper made no attempt at crafting a stylized life history as William Couch, FWP director for the South, had requested in the writers' manual that was sent to the directors of the southern programs. "A Steel Mill Worker and His Wife" is a subjective and more literary version of the same interview. The subjectivity is literary in nature and is apparent through his narrative framing of the interview. In this version, Harper crafts a narrative that is based on the facts embedded in his original interview, but through the story he conveys the emotional context of the interview as well. Both stories are equally valid and authentic, but when read consecutively the stories provide an understanding of the cultural context in which each was created as well as a multidimensional view of the Lewis' lives. The Harper stories about the Lewis family are interesting because the family was largely unaffected by the Great Depression. Even though Harper's contrasting versions of the interview contains differences in the quotations, the stories retain their validity and authenticity. They do so because these stories serve as a reminder that while many people suffered during the 1930s, other people were economically unscathed by the crisis.

Should human subjectivity be considered invalid when reconstructing the past? Should cultural influences be included or excluded from that reconstruction? The material held in the FWP archives is not immune from those questions nor should it be. Before his death in 2008, Leonard Rapport, a former editor with the North Carolina Writers' Project, frequently questioned the validity of the FWP material. He often compared much of the FWP life histories and folklore to "fool's gold" (Rapport 8). His argument was twofold. First Rapport argued that without primary sources to verify each piece of information in the interviews, the end product was not trustworthy. Second he claimed that the cultural history of this country should not be constructed out of material that cannot be verified. Rapport's criticism of the FWP material seems ironic considering he helped collect some of that material. However, his background lends credence to his argument.

Rapport was born, raised, and educated in North Carolina where he worked for William Couch at the University of North Carolina Press from 1935 to 1938. From 1938 to 1941 he worked for the North Carolina Writers' Project collecting life histories and folklore. After volunteering for the Army and serving in World War II, he earned a Masters in American History from George Washington University in 1957. During his career, Rapport worked as an archivist, historian, and author. From 1949 to 1984 he worked at the National Archives where he researched the development of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Yet despite his credentials, his dismissal of the FWP writing as invalid for use in the study of the cultural history of the United States is troubling.

The core of Rapport's distrust of the FWP material lies in the center of an experience he had during his time working for the North Carolina Project. In 1939, Rapport was collecting stories of North Carolina tobacco farmers for a book he planned to publish through the North Carolina University Press. He drafted a writers' manual similar to the one Couch had written, with one major exception. Rapport wrote in a 1979 issue of *The Oral History Review*, "I doubted we could, or perhaps should, peer into the heart and soul of the folk of the South" (12). Unlike Couch, what Rapport wanted from the stories was strict historical accuracy void of the writers' influence. In fact he didn't consider the FWP writers as writers at all, including himself (11). Rapport thought of the FWP writers more as recording devices that should be inherently neutral and not present at all in the story. "They are to be almost stenographic accounts. The writer is not to enter the story," Rapport wrote in his writers' manual (12). During the production of the book, Rapport became concerned about the accuracy of the decisions being made by his editors.

In 1940 Rapport wrote to Edwin Bjorkman, director of the North Carolina FWP, to complain about some of the quotes that were being attributed to the tobacco workers in the stories, quotes he did not transcribe during the interviews he conducted. “In the warehouse chapter I am using only direct quotations that I actually heard and wrote down and which are as close to the subject’s own words as I can get,” Rapport wrote to Bjorkman (12). The phrase “as close to the subject’s own words as I can get” is troubling because it implies that Rapport reconstructed some of the quotes, while also claiming that reconstructed quotes are mostly to blame for the inauthenticity of the FWP material. The human mind is notoriously efficient at transposing meaning; therefore, any quotes created from memory are most likely not one hundred percent accurate. With hindsight Rapport wrote in the *The Oral History Review* article that court reporters, teachers, or librarians would have been a better choice to collect the FWP material (14). “Persons who consider themselves writers, or who are told they are writers, in their heart of hearts begin to think of themselves as creative writers, and, most likely, in the innermost adytum, potential fiction writers” (14). Rapport asked for his name to be removed from the tobacco book credits and throughout his career continued to exhibit bitterness and contempt for the FWP writers who had been hired from the relief rolls (15). While dismissing the validity of the FWP archives, Rapport did conclude that the material was of immense value to the United States. In 1979, he speculated that if transferred to the National Archives, “these stories would become famous and influential; more famous and more influential than other material, more trustworthy though not as exciting, already in the building, unnoticed and unused” (15).

Rapport's complaints about the inaccuracy of quotes and the lack of other primary sources to verify the FWP material was at the heart of his disagreement with Thomas Terrill, professor of history at the University of South Carolina and Jerrold Hirsch, professor of history at Truman State University in Missouri. Terrill and Hirsch published a response to Rapport's criticism of the FWP material in a 1980 issue of *The Oral History Review*. The two-part response systematically addresses the criticisms in Rapport's article. In part one, Terrill points out that while a credible scholar, Rapport alone could not evaluate a program as vast as the FWP based solely on his own experience working on one book. "From only a partial knowledge of the FWP Southern life histories project, he casts doubt on a project that involved dozens of people from Virginia to Oklahoma, who were engaged in a remarkable, innovative effort and who have left historians permanently in their debt," Terrill wrote (Terrell and Hirsch 81). Terrill argues that Rapport's standard of equating verbal accuracy with authenticity is a mistake (82). "The notion is impossibly rigid and seriously misleading," he writes (82).While conceding that some of the FWP stories were entirely fabricated, Terrill disagrees with Rapport that it is a reason to invalidate the entire FWP archive. Unfortunately, the FWP was shut down before Couch could improve the standards for collecting more accurate material. What remains in the archives may be flawed in terms of complete historical accuracy, but it is a starting point from which to reconstruct a broader understanding of the United States during the 1930s. Terrill argues that the value of the FWP life histories is embedded in the quotations of the subjects interviewed, even if those quotations are at best approximations, because they provide insight into the cultural climate of the time. Writing in *The Oral History Review,* he provides an example of how quotes from textile workers in the FWP archive shed light on how racial issues affected local communities. Terrill used this quote from one of the FWP stories to illustrate his point: "So far as the racial question is concerned locally, I see no immediate problem, but there is no doubt it will have to be faced by the next generation" (84). The farmer quoted in this story was foreshadowing the turmoil that plagued the South during the Civil Rights movement. Even if fabricated from memory, the quote was a gauge of the racial climate and therefore valuable for historians to better understand how desegregation affected the South. In response to Rapport, Terrill reaffirms Couch's belief in the importance of the emotional context of the interview. He does concede that accuracy should be considered while researching the FWP materials, but they should not be dismissed if the quotations are not one hundred percent accurate.

In part two of the response to Rapport's article, Jerold Hirsch calls into question the equation of authenticity with verbal accuracy (85). "No credible historian would base his work entirely on one source. It is obvious that like other historical sources, these life histories are most valuable when used in conjunction with as many other sources as possible," Hirsch wrote (86). Hirsch also points out that while Rapport was knowledgeable about the accuracy of the project he was working on, there was no way for him to assess the accuracy of the more than one hundred fifty writers involved in the North Carolina FWP, much less to dismiss wholesale the FWP materials. Hirsch, who has inventoried the entire Southern life history project, more than fifteen thousand pages, also examined the editorial practices of the program. He concluded that any literary embellishments due to "editing went beyond any standards that oral historians today would find acceptable," and any reasonable historian utilizing the FWP materials should augment their research with other sources (86). Hirsch continues to argue for the validity of the FWP material in various categories such as the study of American cultural history, African American history, the history of labor unions in the United States, and the history of the 1930s. Concluding his criticism of Rapport's article, Hirsch writes that "the danger of posing the question of authenticity in either/or terms is that it creates a false dichotomy which can only lead to a simplistic use of the materials" (87). Rapport offered no advice for how researchers could validate the FWP material, only criticism of its authenticity. In contrast Hirsch offered advice for how to place the materials in a practical historical perspective. "Historians who use these life histories need to remember that they were the result of collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee who were putting together an historical account in the format of a conversational narrative," Hirsch wrote (87). "Scholars will have to explore what kinds of questions these materials can answer, and they will need to take into account their limitations" (88).

Couch encouraged Southern FWP writers to create literary narrative, from their original interviews. They did. Today what exists in FWP archives across the country is a blend of fact and fiction that Hirsch calls a collaborative account of history. Some scholars continue to question the authenticity of some of the life histories due to their literary nature. Rapport's theory that people who consider themselves writers will at times venture into fiction does have merit, as Edward Harper's two versions of the Lewis family illustrates. Still, Couch believed it best to utilize non-academic writers like Harper who were instructed to avoid over-intellectualization of ordinary events that could obscure the reality of the cultural experience for average citizens (Hirsch 166). However, this also benefited the FWP material by making it more compelling because it produced a casual exchange between the interviewer and his or her subject. An integral theme of the FWP was to approach the idea of defining American culture with a blend of fact and fiction in order to create a shared cultural history (Hirsch 3). A rigid dismissal of the FWP materials based on a lack of verifiable fact is too simplistic a criticism and eliminates a large amount of source material from which historians and folklorists can use to extract a unifying cultural identity (Hirsch 3). While flawed, the FWP created a cultural time capsule of unprecedented scale.

A wholesale invalidation of this material would redact the voices of many ordinary Americans that are integral to the history of the United States. However, Rapport's argument still has merit. His argument for more stringent fact checking of the FWP materials would improve the historical accuracy of the material. History can never be reconstructed verbatim, but historical accuracy is a valiant pursuit. Hirsch's argument to include the FWP material in the conversation to define American culture is valid. Combining both approaches of Hirsch and Rapport will enhance the validity and authenticity of the FWP material. Only when the entire FWP archive is fully inventoried and academic study of it has been exhausted will a more complete version of American history be possible. Invalidating the use of FWP material in the study of American history would be a mistake.

THE ALABAMA WRITERS

One of the ironies of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) is that not much is known about the personal lives of the writers who helped collect the life histories of thousands of Americans. Several FWP writers had distinguished careers before joining and after leaving the program. The more well-known FWP writers include Ralph Ellison, John Steinbeck, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, John Cheever, and Saul Bellow to name a few. However, the well-known writers are in the minority. Most of the FWP writers remain unknown. This irony is true for the Alabama project as well. The FWP writers who lived and worked in Alabama remain unknown to a majority of Americans. While the writers of the Alabama Writers' Project (AWP) were busy collecting the life histories and folklore of Alabamians, their life stories remain mostly untold. Obituaries and their other published works offer some biographical information, but no other records detailing the personal lives of the AWP writers are held by the Alabama Department of Archives and History. However, of the writers included in this anthology, limited background information is available. Biographical information about Jack Kytle, Pettersen Marzoni, and Levi D. Shelby Jr. is available online and from other archival sources including the archives of the Birmingham Public Library. For the eight other AWP writers included in this anthology, only minimal information could be extracted from the records held in the state archives, including what part of the state they worked in and if they were staff writers or part of the editorial staff in Birmingham. The information about the writers included in this anthology is limited, but it does serve as a starting point for further research on these writers.

When the Alabama Department of Archives and History reorganized its AWP files in 1977, the archivist created a list of most of the writers employed by project. That archivist also wrote about the lack of background information available about the writers, "Nothing else except what is shown here is known about these people" (ADAH AWP Materials). However, the list does contain some personal information, including notes about race and marital status. The marital status of women and racial identifiers are common notations throughout the documents held in the AWP collection at the Alabama archives. Writers who were white and male have no other identifiers listed with their names on the list of AWP writers. This demographic information reflects on a culture that was dominated by issues of race and gender. However, these sorts of social markers were not isolated to this list of AWP writers. Race and gender was noted in several state government documents at the time. For example, the Alabama Statistical Register, an annual registry of state government employees, included this information for decades. In the Alabama Statistical Register of 1931, African Americans were identified as "colored" or with the abbreviation "(Col.)," and a woman's marital status was included next to her job identification. The revised list of AWP writers included in this anthology retains the identifiers in order to accurately reflect on a society skewed toward powerful white men. The gender aspect of this fact is ironic because both the AWP and the Alabama Department of Archives and History were led by women. My revisions to the list of AWP writers include the addition of writers previously unlisted. Those writers include Cleveland Stamp, O.O. Lowery, and Mabel Farrior. It is possible there are more writers in the AWP archives not on the list. Further research to discover the names of more potentially unknown AWP writers is necessary to create a complete list.

William Couch, southern regional director for the FWP, wanted writing for inclusion in the Alabama guidebook to be factual and poetic. While most writing held in the AWP collection does not achieve the level of literary aspiration Couch demanded, some is exceptionally lyrical. Jack Kytle, Woodrow Hand, Bennett Marshall, and Edward Harper all focused on capturing the rhythm and melody of the various Alabama dialects. A unifying theme present throughout the AWP collection is how the writing captures the sound of those dialects. This aspect of the AWP stories is especially valuable as the modern trend toward erasing regional dialects becomes more prevalent through the use of the Standard American Accent in television, radio, and film. I chose the stories for this anthology for their particularly southern style of storytelling, which is often musical. These stories also showcase the South's linguistic diversity which often developed in the isolation of rural living. For example, if Kytle's character Bob Curtis had been raised in an urban setting, his use of language would be different: more staccato, urgent. As Curtis' drawl meanders out of his mouth and into the mind of the reader, it is impossible to separate the nature of his character from the importance of the Coosa River on his rural environment. Other contributing factors to the development of the South's unique story-telling character include the influence of African folklore, food traditions, early European settlements, trading ports along the Gulf Coast, and the traditions of Native American cultures. Those factors, and more, blended together in the rural isolation of the South. Because of that cultural diversity and isolation, the South has often produced larger than life constructions of cultural reality that manifested through visual art, literature, and music – all extensions of oral storytelling traditions. Each of the characteristics is prevalent among the stories in this anthology.

Jack Kytle is the most published and technically skilled writer included in this anthology. He was born Elvyn Jackson Kytle in Wilsonville, Alabama, a suburb of Birmingham, on October 22, 1906. He spent his childhood in Talladega, Alabama and then briefly in Georgia. Kytle was a journeyman-journalist for more than twenty years. He started as a sportswriter in Atlanta before moving to Birmingham to become a beat reporter and editor at several local newspapers. Kytle was also published in the *Milwaukee Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, The Saturday Evening Post,* and *The Message Magazine*. In 1941, Kytle wrote "Fish are Fighters in Alabama." The story was included in *Alabama Hunter*, a publication of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. While at the *Birmingham Post*, Kytle wrote the "Byways of Birmingham" column, which ran for five years. Kytle also authored several pulp novels in the 1950s and 1960 including *Texas Rangers, Giant Western, Ranch Romances,* and *Triple Western.* Kytle's AWP work has been published in other WPA anthologies including a story called "Alabama Eggnog" in the book *The Food of a Younger Land*, edited by Mark Kurlansky (2009). During his tenure with the WPA, Kytle was in charge of editing the Alabama edition of the national guidebook series and collecting life histories. Kytle also wrote original fiction such as "Day of Judgment," which is included in this anthology. The story is about revenge and the pitfalls of pride, and is similar to his pulp fiction occasionally published in *Weird Tales* magazine. The story contains themes that appear in most of his work: a fascination with the downtrodden, social outcasts, failure, and redemption. Kytle possibly developed an interest in these themes while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. Kytle died in Birmingham on March 5, 1971. He was sixty-four years old.

Pettersen Marzoni was born in Pensacola, Florida, on April 6, 1886. His life was the most colorful of any of the writers in this anthology. For example, he was discharged from the United States Navy at age twenty for hazing other cadets. Ten years later he was pardoned by President Woodrow Wilson and served in the Navy during World War I. In 1916 Marzoni married into a newspaper family from Alabama. His father-in-law Frank Glass was a reporter and helped introduce Marzoni to the profession. His first writing job was as a movie and theater critic for the *Birmingham News*. Marzoni is credited as writing the first weekly movie review column in any American newspaper (Hanley, Web). Marzoni also wrote fiction. His work appeared in several publications including *Weird Tales, Black Mask Magazine, Metropolitan Magazine, Good Housekeeping,* and the *Chicago Tribune.* Hollywood movie producers took an interest in Marzoni's work as well. His novella "Big Hearted Jim" was adapted into the 1923 film *Brotherly Love* (Hanley, Web). During his time with the AWP, Marzoni served as an editor in the Birmingham editorial offices where he collected former slave narratives, edited life histories of rural Alabamians, and wrote other original material. The city of Fairhope is the subject of "Tax Utopia" and is included in this anthology. The story is a history of the city and was written for the WPA Alabama guidebook. However, it was not included in the final version. In July of 1939, Marzoni died of a ruptured appendix in Jefferson County. His son Pettersen Marzoni, Jr. patented a role-playing fantasy game similar to "Dungeons and Dragons" in 1977, and his grandson is currently working on a complete bibliography of his grandfather's writing (Hanley, Web).

Race was a politically sensitive subject for AWP director Myrtle Miles. She believed race should be handled in a way that was acceptable to Alabama politicians.

That meant African Americans were portrayed as inferior in most of the early AWP writings. Sterling Brown, a national FWP editor, pressured Miles to hire African American writers. Brown hoped to portray African Americans in Alabama in a positive way, not just as uneducated laborers. Brown's persistence was successful. Between 1938 and 1939 three African American writers were hired by the AWP (Jackson 16). Levi D. Shelby Jr. was one of the African Americans hired by Miles. He worked in Colbert County, Alabama collecting former-slave narratives and folklore. His story "Courting the Witch's Daughters" is one of the most interesting in this anthology. It is a surreal and supernatural tale of how three brothers subvert a witch's control in order to obtain the companionship of her daughters. This story can be interpreted as a subversion of Jim Crow Laws in Alabama and a victory for African Americans in a racially oppressive southern state.

I was unable to find the same level of information about the other writers included in this anthology. What I did learn about them was by reading hundreds of pages of their work. What follows is a brief overview of where these writers worked and what themes they incorporated into their writing. Maggie Boswell was an AWP writer working in Montgomery and Houston counties. The majority of her writing focused on ghost stories and folktales. However, she also wrote extensively about local customs, dialects, and culture, including songs and dances. Mabel Forrier wrote short profiles of Montgomery residents and collected former slave narratives. Her story "Unusual Personages" is a profile of a fortune teller living in the Chisholm neighborhood of Montgomery. O. O. Lowery was also a Montgomery-based writer who primarily collected ghost stories and folklore. Woodrow Hand was an editor in the Birmingham office. His work is similar in style to Kytle with one major exception: he injected humor into his writing. Hand's work is probably the most rhythmic in this anthology. The repetitive rhythm in his story "Horse Trade" lulls the reader into a trance as a set up for the story's punch line. Bennett Marshall was also an editor in Birmingham. Marshall's story about Sydney May Davis is an excellent example of Couch's directive to create literary versions of life histories. His choice and construction of the Davis quotes reads more like the opening pages of a novel and less like a standard interview. Birmingham editor Edward Harper also created literary versions of life histories for the AWP. Two versions of one interview conducted with a steel mill worker in Birmingham are included in this anthology. "Hobbies, Pets, and Children" is a verbatim account of the interview. "A Steel Mill Worker and His Wife" is the more literary version of that same interview. Both stories are included to illustrate how Couch's writers' manual was implemented into Harper's work.

Understanding how the source material for these stories was collected assists in the evaluation of the work by showing how the writing was a collaborative effort between the field researchers, the actual writers (when different from the field researchers), and the Birmingham editorial staff. The process for the collection of the source material was similar to that of an assembly line. The field workers would use their connections in the community to gather interviews from locals. The material would then be sent to other writers or editors in Birmingham to be refined into more cohesive stories. Most of the writing was sent in to the editorial department already in a narrative form but in need of grammatical corrections in order to be published. While accuracy was a goal, most of the stories were by no means a verbatim account of history, nor were they narratives fabricated from a simplistic list of facts. The quotes were constructed from the memories of writers in the field. The editorial offices would then occasionally alter the quotes for readability. This was only done with approval from the original interviewer (Hirsch 157). Still, the editors were very focused on maintaining the authenticity of the original material. For example, the Alabama archives contain at least four versions of Kytle's "Like Lost Children." Each version bears the pencil marks of multiple editors questioning his quotations. From the multiple drafts of "Like Lost Children" held in the Alabama archives, it is apparent that the editors were intently focused on maintaining high standards for authenticity. However, the editors' focus on maintaining authenticity did not reject the writer's use of literary devices such as embellishment for dramatic effect (Hirsh 169). Most of the editors adhered to Couch's directive to craft the raw information into a literary version of real events. Under the direction of Miles and Couch, the AWP benefited from editorial decisions made in Birmingham. Those decisions made the stories more cohesive and enjoyable to read because of the focus on creating a more literary version of history.

However, before the editorial department received the material, the writers had begun to implement advice from the writers' manual while conducting the field interviews that served as the raw material for the stories. Couch encouraged writers to infuse the stories with the emotional context of the interview. "The writer must try to discover the real feeling of the person consulted and must record this feeling regardless of his own attitude toward it. Any story in which this principle is violated will be worthless," Couch wrote in the manual (Couch 2). The advice embedded in the manual was implemented by Alabama writers such as Jack Kytle. For example, when the main character in Kytle's "Bob Curtis: River Drifter" is introduced, there is no doubt how broken yet resilient he is. "Bob Curtis is afraid of life, and perhaps that is why he has always been a failure. He is forever going away to some job, but before two months are spent, he is back in a river shanty. He has come to depend upon the river as if it were an employer. It gives him and his hollow-eyed women folk only the barest and most tragic of livelihoods; yet, it keeps them alive" (Kytle 1). Couch blended journalistic principles with anthropology as a way to implement Benjamin Botkin's applied folklore method. In addition to providing guidance for the types of material to be collected for the state guidebooks, Couch instructed the writers to treat the subjects with basic human dignity. The stories included in this anthology were chosen partly based upon the writers' skills at doing so.

The purpose of this anthology is to give a general overview of the AWP and place it in the context of the FWP. The people involved in the program are at the center of that story. Much of their work is stashed away in archives across the country, waiting to be discovered. The authors of the twenty stories in this anthology deserve to be better known as well. In particular, Kytle and Marzoni are worthy of further study. For example, what were Kytle's experiences in the army? What did he experience during World War II? Who were his writing influences? What compelled him to start his writing career? Based on his AWP writing, he was fascinated with language and the ability of readers to transform printed words into mental images. Kytle also seems interested in psychology. In particular he was fascinated with the psychology of deviance and criminal behavior. His work seems to ask why humans live like they do, what drives them, and why are they violent at times? Marzoni is also a fascinating character. Based upon his writing, he must have had a magnetic and charismatic personality. His time in Hollywood is a topic that deserves more attention as well. Was his Hollywood connection due to his movie review column in the *Birmingham News*? How closely involved in the movie version of his short story was he? Do manuscripts of his pulp fiction still exist? Other interesting potential research topics include Shelby's use of coded language to subvert racism with storytelling. All of these ideas reinforce the value of the FWP materials in terms of their cultural significance. It is dismissive for critics to argue that most of the work is "fakelore" or otherwise invalid because of historical inconsistencies. On the contrary, American history is rooted deeply in a culture that has defined itself through its folklore regardless of historical accuracy. Despite those inaccuracies, the FWP is valid because it offers a glimpse of how the country wanted to define itself. The FWP was an important way for the country to retain a sense of self during a time of trauma, the Great Depression. The hundreds of thousands of pages held in the various FWP archives across the country form a puzzle of an American narrative we cannot experience fully until all of the pieces are found. The stories in this anthology will add another piece to that puzzle.

DAY OF JUDGMENT

Jack Kytle

1937

When Old Seth Nichols arrived at his beloved Coosa River, the purple shades of early dusk cooled the dampish woodland. A pecker-wood rapped viciously at a dead pine and crickets and tree frogs joined in an evening musicale. A bullfrog croaked far up the river; a white crane wheeled slowly past, its wide wings tinged with red against the crimsoned western sky.

Old Seth sat down beside the dim, leaf-covered path. He stretched his tired legs and breathed deeply of the fragrant forest air. He was tired and all his body ached. It was eighty miles from Montgomery to his squatty river shack; and he walked them, every one.

His lined face held the pasty pallor that months in prison bring. His hair and scraggly beard were white; but his broad shoulders were straight as any pine. Old Seth was proud. They had taken him from his swamps and penned him in a prison; but he had not complained. He would not let them know that keeping him there had seared deep into his soul. He loved freedom with the same fierce passion of a mountain lion. Death was preferable, in his heart to prison.

But they had not broken his spirit. They had worked him in a jute mill; herded him with other men into barred cages as if he were a swine. They had cursed him, sought to tear down the haughty fortress he had built between himself and them; but he said not a word. They could not know; but it was not Seth Nichols they abused. Seth Nichols was roaming somewhere on his river. Only his body was in prison.

He would have died except for an obsession. He knew the day would come when he would walk away through the same iron gate into which he had come. That day to him became a thundering day of judgment; a day to live for with stubborn, desperate patience. On that day he would walk away from the iron and concrete tomb to kill a man.

There were long hope stifling nights and days to wait. There were nights when he cried aloud for his woman, Sara; nights when just one word from her would have been balm to his tortured heart. On those hellish nights he would reach under the thin mattress of his bunk and clutch the letters he had secreted there. They were letters from Sara; but he could not read them. And Old Seth was too proud to admit to guards that he had never been to school; that he could not read his name.

He would save them, every one. He would save them until that day he went home to her again. She had always done his reading. No one else should do it now. With the letters held firmly in his big, rough hand, sleep would never come.

The sudden, weird wail of a screech owl roused Old Seth from his thoughts. He rose slowly from beside the river path on tired feet, ran his hand across his belt to reassure himself that the snub-nosed length of death was there. His face, relaxed in peace at being home again, became a mask of granite now. His gray eyes narrowed to grim slits. He took the loaded pistol from his belt and walked slowly down the path.

There was no need to rush. His months in prison had not rushed; and death could be the same. He headed straight down the lonely path, passed through a silent swamp that was seepy and treacherous with moss-clogged water and walked with a deliberate, ominous pace to a shanty on the other edge of the swamp.

He paused a moment in the willow-darkened yard, uncocked his pistol to again feel the slim, yellow slugs of death slipped in the cylinder. He snapped it shut again, called from the yard:

"Martin! Are you hyar?"

The shanty was cloaked in silence for a moment. Old Seth stepped from the pool of yellowish light thrown from a lamp-lit window of the house. The door eased open.

"Hello?" the man who stepped into the hall-light answered in a questioning tone, "Who called fer me?"

This was the ghastly game of death; the game Old Seth had lived for in his cell; the thundering dusk of judgment had arrived.

Old Seth's gaunt frame advanced a step from the gloom. His voice was deadly cold.

"It's me, Martin; Seth Nichols, done come back."

The man called Martin started down the steps, a slow smile flowing to his bearded lips.

"Why Hello, Seth! It's good tuh have yuh back ag'in!"

"Stop whar yuh are!"

The grating voice was heavy with slurred menace. The grayish man paused hesitantly.

"What yuh mean, Seth?"

Cold silence for one dragging moment, then:

"I've come tuh kill yuh, Martin!"

The grayish man stood rigidly still. He raised a hand protestingly.

"Wait, Seth!"

"Wait?—Wait?" the harsh voice sneered. "Shore, I've waited. I've waited in a filthy God damned cell; I've waited through twelve months uv hell fer this! Stand whar yuh are!"

"But, Seth...."

"I'll show yuh how to turn me up! I'll show yuh..."

The snub-nosed pistol cracked, spurted two bursts of orange flame. The grayish man clutched at his chest, slumped slowly to the steps.

The gaunt giant skulked into the shadows, tossed the power-warm gun into a clump of bush.

When Old Seth reached his own rough-board shanty, night was black. He pushed slowly through the door, tossed his worn felt hat upon the bed as he had done a thousand times before. He smiled faintly as the woman, startled from her task of cooking supper, ran to him.

"Seth, honey! Seth!"

His big chest thundered with emotion smothered there for months. He wanted more than all else in the world to take his woman in his arms and crush her slender body. This was his woman; the only love that his rough heart had ever known; the one frail post upon which he ever leaned for support. But he was gently-rough with her, turned his cheek to catch her kiss. There is a code with rivermen that they must not spoil their women.

She looked at him with eyes that lighted from their dullness, placed both hands upon his arms.

"Oh, Seth!" she cried, tears forming tiny rivulets upon her pale, lined cheeks. "It's good to have you back, honey; so good to have everything fixed up ag'in."

He looked into her cloudy eyes, pushed her from him gently.

"I reckon it right good tuh be back with yuh ag'in," he said and walked to seat himself beside the old wood stove that trembled on rundown legs. "I'd a-got hyar sooner than I did, but I had tuh kill a snake acrost th' swamp."

Her face went suddenly dull; her pale cheeks more pasty.

"Seth?"

"Shore I done it; I killed that damned skunk. He'll never turn another man who has tuh fool with whisky fer his grub."

The woman slumped into a chair. Her eyes stared blindly at the floor. Her arms drooped limply at her sides.

"Oh, God! Why did you ever do it, Seth. You know I wouldn't have lied to you; I never have. Why wouldn't you believe?"

"Believe?" he questioned, looking hard into her face. "Don't talk fool things, woman! Believe what?"

She lifted her tear-streaked face to his. Her eyes were very old and her graying wisps of hair clung damply to her cheeks.

"Oh, Seth; it wasn't him. I found out that it wasn't him. He worked and pleaded for a year to get you parole!"

Old Seth rose slowly to his feet. Stunned surprise came into his dull eyes.

Well, by God, I didn't know. Why didn't someone tell me 'fore it was too late?"

She bowed her graying head to trembling hands, said simply:

"Yes, you knew. You knew what he did. I wrote you all about it less than a week ago."

BOB CURTIS: RIVER DRIFTER

Jack Kytle

1938

Along the banks of Alabama's large rivers – the Coosa, Warrior, Alabama, Chattahoochee, and Tallapoosa – human driftwood floats to tangle the state's social structure. The driftwood is often migratory, turning to the rivers and a bare existence when the mines, the steel plants, and the textile mills cut down on employment. The driftwood is made up of people who are always on the very fringe of employment; they are given work only when operations are speeded to a point where any able-bodied man or woman, no matter how shiftless and ignorant, may be able to accomplish a job of sorts.

Each year, they come and go. They may stay on the rivers only a month, or they may stay a year or more. It would be impossible to estimate the state's average annual river population. It is safe only to say that hundreds are always there, fighting grim battles with nature, and living only from one day to the next. No one dares to look beyond tomorrow; for the river people have become afraid to plan and hope.

Bob Curtis is afraid of life, and perhaps that is why he has always been a failure. He is forever going away to some job, but before two months are spent, he is back in a river shanty. He has come to depend upon the river as if it were an employer. It gives him and his hollow-eyed women folk only the barest and most tragic of livelihoods; yet, it keeps them alive. Bob says, "Th' Lord keers for his own. When hit gits t' whar hit seems we'uns will starve, a catfish gits on one o'my lines. I sell 'im in Sylacaugy fer ten cents a pound, an' that'll git some sowbelly an' bread."

The tragedy of his life is somehow heightened by the woman he married forty years ago. She is clean and quiet-spoken, and there is a graciousness about her that seems out of place in the environment to which she has been subjected. She can even read and write a little, but she has only one book to read. More and more during the last ten years, she has turned to the Bible for consolation. She has stopped hoping for anything better in this life, but says, "A great day is promised. I believe it will come for me."

Bob and Christine Curtis have three children, all girls. One is married to a textile worker in Sylacauga; the other two live at home. One of the three, Nora, a petite brunette who has the gift of determination perhaps from some ancestor, has made a valiant fight for education. She has managed to finish the eighth grade, often walking as many as four miles to ride in a school bus. But she is a woman now, and embarrassed by being in the same classes with children. Then, too, her clothes are old and frayed.

The other daughter, Beatrice, has accepted her father's philosophy of life. She is interested only in finding a man, and she does not mind if he also lives in a shanty, surrounded by direst poverty.

Christine Curtis is one of these women who are taught from childhood that a man is superior to a woman. She still calls Bob "Mister Curtis," and she would die for him if he said the word. Blindly faithful and devoted, she has followed his [sic] from shanty to shanty through the years, watching her pitiful little collection of furniture mauled and ruined.

She was not meant for the river; for she loves beauty, cleanliness, and honor. Her task in preserving either in the midst of stark ugliness has been difficult; but the shacks in which she has lived bear the marks of her patient toil. Flowers grow at each of them.

She never complains of poverty. Hunger and need have become old stories for her. She did not complain the day Bob's trotlines yielded a 46-pound yellow cat, a fish which would have brought him $4.60 worth of food, but which was traded for whisky and a roaring drunk. That, also, is an old story.

We were in the middle of the river, baiting a trotline with red worms and minnows. It was barely daylight, and a heavy fog lay over the glassy water. An occasional bass rose to the surface, turning over with a splash and looking for all the world like a bronse [sic] slab. Bob said, "Damn yore skin; I'd like t' sink a tooth in yuh!"

I asked him then, "Bob, do you plan to stay on the river this time?"

He pondered a moment, his eyes narrowed. "Damned of I know," he said at last. "Hit's about as good a place as anywhar. I mought stay, an' then ag'in, of thangs pick up in Sylacaugy, I mought go back up thar t' work in th' mill. I jes' ain't decided."

"You and Christine are getting along in years," I ventured. "You might ought to settle down."

"Maybe," he replied, "but we'uns air gittin' along 'bout as good now as we'uns ever did. We'uns ain't never had nuthin'."

"You've got a fine wife."

His bearded face broke into a grin that bared stumps of tobacco-stained teeth. "Shore, I have," he laughed. "I wouldn't keep no other sort."

We were silent as he pulled the boat along the trotline, baiting it carefully, but he paused at one of the hooks and glanced at me over his shoulder. He was not smiling now.

"Yuh know," he said. "I've tried time an' ag'in t'git ahead alittle, so that I could do somethin' better fer my folks, but I don't never git nowhar. I ain't never had but one job that payed [sic] me mor'n $1.50 a day, an' thet was in the mill, whar I made $12 a week. But they laid me off, an' I couldn't do nothin' else. When I come back down hyar, I have t' come. Hit's better t' eat a little bit than non a-tall."

He began pulling again slowly the trotline.

"Mos' people don't know whut hit means t' go hungry."

"I guess lots of them have learned during the last few years," I reminded.

"Well, I ain't never been no other way," he said, and laughed a little. "I guess th' best times I ever seen was when I worked fer a sawmill over in Coosa. I was a teamster, an' a damned good 'un. I drawed my grub from th' commissary, an' me an' Christine got along fine. Th' kids begin comin' along then, an' my oldest un was jes' a tiny tyke when th' mill shut down. I hunted another teamster job, but that warn't none; then I come back to th' river. Off an' on, I been up an' down th' thang since.

"Shore, I've monkeyed with 'shine. Who wouldn't when hit brung in some cash money? But when th' county men started gittin' wise t' me, I quit. I couldn't 'ford t' leave my folks fer a jail stretch. Why, they'd never git along.

"Folks have been purty good t' us sometimes; givin' us clothes an' th' sort, but I never axed for anthang. I aalus thought thet th' Lord would take keer of thangs when they went too bad.

Leastways, Christine allus told me He would."

"You believe in religion?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he said. I b'lieve in hit; leastways, Christine has learned me t' b'lieve. Yuh know, th' Good Lord was int'rusted in fisherman. Christine read me 'bout thet. He was pore, too an' they nailed Him on a cross. Sometimes I think that them who are pore an' hungry hyar will be rich and fed in Heaven. Th' Book says, 'Blessed air th' pore…" He paused, for he could not complete the beatitude.

I said quickly, "The bible is full of comfort."

"Hit air," he agreed, and then shook his head.

"I know thet I am full o' sin," he went on. "Thar air so many temptashuns; but I'll git aroun' yit t' doin' decent. I git drunk, an' then Christine she prays fer me. But I'm doin' better; I don't run atter women no more. Christine uster say thet my speerit was strong, but thet my flesh was moughty weak. I guess she knowed, fer somethin' 'bout was writ in th' book.

"I ain't never been no church man; ain't been a time in twenty y'ars; but I'd be a purty tahng sittin' up in a church b'arfooted an' in a pair of overalls. I guess th' Lor'll take keer o' that, too."

I interrupted his religious theme, asking, "What kind of work have you done in your life?"

"Jes' sawmillin', cotton millin' an' fishing," he replied. "Yuh see, I ain't got no eddication. Christine, she said she war goin' to' l'arn me t' write an' read, but we'uns never got aroun' t' hit. That was a long time ago – 'fore th' kids come along. I don't guess I could'a l'arned anyways. I'm sorter thick-skulled."

We were pulling into the bank now, and there was time for one more question. I ask, "Bob, how do you like the way Mr. Roosevelt is running the country?"

He pulled hard with his paddle, saying, "I don't monkey in his business. I'm too damned busy lookin' atter me an' mine."

We walked up the trail toward the pine-board shanty. Christine's frail body was framed in the doorway, her cotton dress whipped hard against her body by the wind that had risen.

UNCLE BUD RYLAND: THE COOSA FISHERMAN

Jack Kytle

1938

Below the lush spot where Cedar Creek flows into the Coosa River, at the end of a dim wagon road, Charlie "Uncle Bud" Ryland sits on the front porch of his shanty and dreams of his past – when he is not fishing his trot-lines. He has lived through a span of nearly seventy years, and has learned to be friendly with the water giant. It has sometimes left its banks to sweep his boats downstream, breaking them into splinters with its fury. Once, it almost took away his cabin; but never berates it. "Durned river's like a man," he philosophizes, "Hit's got t' blow off steam sometimes."

He was sitting beneath the huge oaks that keep his yard in day-long shade when I came upon him. For a moment, he did not recognize me in the shadow of the dusk. He rose from his chair and began advancing cautiously. He is blind in one eye, and the other, in his own words, "ain't wuth what it'd cost t' buy 'specks'." But when recognition dawned upon his tanned, deeply lined face, he smiled and came down the path with a stiff-legged trot.

We shook hands silently for a moment, and then he said, "Lord, boy, nit's been a time!"

"Yes," I answered. "It's been six years."

He shook his mop of gray hair slowly. "The years do fly away," he drawled. "Somewhar I've heard – I don't place jest whar – that th' years be like hickory nuts. They fall away fastest after the frost come."

He stooped and plucked a cluster of cockle-burrs from beside the path, observing, "But the frosts won't come for a good time yit this year. See how green an' tender they air? I kin allus tell about what the weather's go'nter be by watching 'em an' the' tree bark. Hit never fails to come out true."

We started up the path to the shanty, but before we arrived at the steps, he walked off to a clump of brush about thirty yards away and reached into its center. Without a word, he withdrew an earthen gallon jug, and then rejoined me. "I imagine," he said in his slow way, "thet th' trip up was tiresome; you'll be needin' a toddy."

"Do you still make your own?" I asked.

""Hit's th' only way I'd drink it," he said. "I never tuk a swig of store-bought whisky yit but what it left me with a bustin' head. Now this hyar corn, hit's good; made on a copper still. I never sell a pint, but I'll make my own as long as I kin git to th' swamps."

The cabin that sat before us on crumbling pillars was only a squat heap of rough pine lumber, thrown together carelessly. It was dirty gray from the buffetings of many winds, and it seemed, indeed, that one more good wind would tear it asunder. On the narrow front porch, a zinc water bucket sat on a shelf, with the washpan and a bar of cheap soap nearby. Fish hooks and lines were strung from a dozen nails that had been driven into the walls.

Inside, the cabin was freshly scrubbed, but its cleanliness served only to emphasize its bareness. There was one bed made of two-by-four lumber, and covered with a straw mattress. Nearby was a dilapidated cot, covered only by a patchwork quilt for great age. In a corner stood a wood stove that seemed to be yearning to crumble off its weary legs.

In the other room – smaller than the first and added without much planning to the original structure – a long table and bench had been nailed to the wall. A sack of corn meal was on the table, and a bag of coffee rested on a nearby shelf, but no other groceries were in evidence. There were no chairs in either room.

"After a little while," my host said, "I'll walk over to th' Cravens an' git us some lard. I got plenty catfish down thar in th' live box, an' we got all th' meal we need. I'm a bit tard of fish, but I guess you kin stand a bait."

"Tell me, Uncle Bud," I ventured, "do you eat fish all the time?"

"Most of th' time I do," he answered, "though once in a good spell I take a yaller cat into town an' trade hit fer some canned stuff an' side meat. I do thet when it gits to whar I can't look a durned catfish in th' face."

I said, "Well, we'll make a swap. You feed me fish, and I'll feed you some canned meat and loaf bread. I have some down there in the boat."

His lined face beamed.

"Yo're moughty thoughtful," he said at last.

After he had cooked, and we had eaten together, we drew up willow-bottomed chairs on his porch that faced the river. It was night now and the darkness was like pitch. Crickets were fiddling away in the surrounding forest, and far away a hound dog wailed. Somewhere out in the dark water, a fish came to the surface and rolled over with a resounding splash.

“Sounds like a durned cow turnin’ over,” Uncle Bud observed, and then he lit his stumpy pipe and tilted his chair back against the wall. It was a never-failing signal that he was ready to dig his thoughts back into the past.

I ask, “When did you stop keeping your gun in your lap?”

He drew upon his pipe in silence for several moments, and then he gave an indirect answer.

“I don’t have t’ carry hit no more, son,” he said, and then he added fervently, “Thank God!”

He went on, “fer seven years, I was never without a gun on me. I either toted a rifle or a pistol. Fer seven years, I never set down an’ et but what I kept my back to th’ wall, so that I could be facin’ th’ door. Hit worried me bad. Hit made me sleepless many nights; but I don’t have t’ worry no more.”

“I remember how you always seemed to be watching out for something, or somebody,” I interrupted.

“Yes,” he answered. “I was afear’d in them days; I was afear’d that I mought do somethin’ that’d send me t’ th’ chain gang. Hit’s an awfully big relief t’ know thet all that business is done with. Sometimes the Good Lord do take trouble away fer a soul. He done hit for me.”

I ventured, “What happened – did some enemy die?”

He puffed several times at his pipe.

“Sometimes they die,” he slurred.

“Uncle Bud” Ryland vows that he has no complaints to make against life. He can neither read nor write, but he blames his illiteracy upon himself. Unlike many of the hundreds who eke out a bare livelihood along the river, he does not wish to leave. He has lived here so long that, in his own words, he "has tuk roots." Many times he has little or nothing to eat. He has only on pair of pants and a couple of blue work shirts, but he does not mind that. He says, "I earn my own way – I allus have; hain't nobody ever had me t' feed."

Sitting there in the darkness, I ask him to tell me about his past life; about the wife and children he had mentioned vaguely; about his view on present conditions in the outside world.

He said, "They ain't nothin' wuth tellin'. I got seven kids, but my wife, she's been dead goin' on twenty years. Six of my kids live in West Virginny. Two is boys, both coal miners; an' my four gals married coal miners. I got one boy thet lives up th' river a piece an' tries t' farm. He's weak-minded."

"Did you ever work in the mines?" I asked.

"I lost my eye workin' thar," he said. "I worked an' sweated in the mines fer years when I was young, but thar come a time when things went to th' dogs in Alabama. I tuk my family t' West Virginny then, and we got along right nice fer a time. We never had no money much; ain't no igner'nt miner wuth much; but we was comfortable. Then my wife tuk pneumonia an' died jet thet fast. I never could git my mind back on my work atter thet. She meant so powerful much to me.

"I worked on up that fer awhile but kep getting' my mind back hyar on this river. I was borned hyar, you know. Well, one mornin' I got up from the breakfast table, and I told my kids, 'I'm goin' back home.' They was all good-sized then, and they decided to stay up thar. I come back t' this river by myself, an' 'cept fer a month, I've been here ever since."

"Where did you go that one month? I asked.

"Well, sir," he went on, "my kids sont me some money an' wanted me t' come an' see them. I went off away up thar again, but hit me so sad I couldn't stay. Hit was all right in daytime, but at nights hit was lonesome. Then one mornin' I heer'd Doc – he's one of my boys – tellin' his wife that they was goin' to keep me up thar. I got up out of bed that night an' left walkin'. Thet was a good spell ago, but I hain't been back."

"Do you ever hear anything from the children?" I questioned.

"At fust I got some letters," he said, "but they knowed I couldn't read. I don't know what was in 'em, because I never had 'em read to me. I don't git word now, but air good kids, an' they'll git along. I sorter fell thet I should stay down hyar clos't t' my weak-minded boy. He don't git along well sometimes, an' I keep purty close watch on him."

It was during the middle of September that I visited "Uncle Bud," a time when Europe was on the brink of war after the demands of Adolph Hitler. But he knew nothing about the trouble over Czechoslovakia – he had never so much as heard of that nation – and Adolph Hitler was only a name to him. He knew that "Mister Rosy-velt" was President of the United States, or had been the last time he heard. So far as politics or current events were concerned, he was not interested.

"I never voted fer nothin'," he told me. "They didn't seem't be sense in me doin' hit."

He was dozing in his chair when I waked him and told him it was nine o'clock. He threatened to become angry if I protested sleeping on the lone bed, which was far more comfortable than the wobbly cot upon which he sprawled after winning the argument. But loud snoring soon let me know that he was sleeping as if he were reclining upon the most expensive mattress that modern manufacturing can create.

I left next morning with a swig of corn whisky and a breakfast of side meat under my belt. And watching him standing beneath the giant oak in his front year, as my boat began rounding the clumps of river willows, I could not help thinking:

"You maybe old, and poverty-stricken, and ignorant; but you are a damned good man."

LIKE LOST CHILDREN

Jack Kytle

1937

They stood timid and embarrassed in a ragged line. There were five boys and seven girls, their ages ranging all the way from six to twelve. It was November, and frost had fallen that morning, but only two of the children were wearing shoes. Some of the little girls had no coats, only thin cotton dresses. The boys were dressed in overalls that were badly faded, and some without braces. This condition necessitated the use of twine to prevent the overalls from falling about their ankles.

The two visitors sat on a bench in the school room facing the children, but they looked only at the teacher, who was clothed little better than they. She held a bright yellow ruler in her hand, using it as an instrument to maintain singing rhythm that was never maintained. She turned to her small charges.

"Can you sing for the people?"

They hesitated for a moment, uncertain and ill at ease. Then the tiny girl with a faded blue ribbon knotted about her hair began this song:

Oh, if you look for me
And I'm not there
You'll know I'm climbing
A stardust stair—

There were many verses, and then another song:

Lord, I want to be ready,

Yes, I want to be ready,
I want to be ready to suffer
Just as my Savior did—

As they sang, their faces were expressionless, unless sadness, blank behind hollow eyes, is an expression. They lifted their eyes from the floor only when they looked at their teacher; for she was one of their own kind. Already they had learned that the average white comes to them only to pity and stare in open-mouthed wonder. Already, many of them had heard the thrust, "Dirty Cajan!"

The Tombigee River, with its high, white cliffs glistening in the sunlight, flows majestically across the pine-wrapped lowlands of Washington County, in Alabama's southwestern corner. Branching from its banks to the west is wild country, in which the fleeting glimpse of a racing deer is not uncommon. This country is blanketed by scrub pine and sparse oak. The land is poor and pierced by gullies, a desolate stretch of forest and white sand. Now and then a dim logging road, often more trail than road, is encountered with disarming suddenness. And squatting out in the pine woods at the side of those trails, often several miles apart, are the dilapidated shanties that house the people known to Alabamians as Cajans.

The name is not applied correctly. They are not related to the Cajans of Louisiana. The Louisiana Cajan can trace his ancestry through a proud strain, but this is not true of the Alabama people. And in that truth lies their misfortune and a hundred years of oppression. The Alabama Cajan cannot trace his ancestry beyond a few generations.

Where one Cajan will say that he descended from a South Carolinian who came into Alabama and married a Creek Indian woman, another will relate that it was really a Mexican who married a French woman of noble lineage. Still another will insist that the Cajans descended from Gulf Coast pirates who intermarried with Indian women. But the rural white people of Washington County say with unconcealed scorn: "Their ancestors don't worry us none. Why, they're niggers and trouble-makers."

The Cajan denies Negro blood with a surprising virulence. But in justice to the Negro, it can be recorded that he disclaims the Cajan with equal vehemence. And certainly, the Alabama rural Negro's home, even to that of the most ignorant cropper, is cleaner and more comfortable than that of the average Cajan.

There are, of course, exceptions; but these exceptions usually occur in the instances where Cajan and white have intermarried. A striking characteristic of white-Cajan marriage lies in the fact that the white (intelligent and educated) either lifts his, or her, mate, or else is drawn downward to a surprising depth.

But regardless of which direction the match turns, the Cajan woman follows her chosen man with a dog-like devotion. The Cajan husband also is good to his wife. And, when married legally, they do not often join the unwedded members of their kind in a flagrant violation of moral standards. Even as they respect the conjure doctor, they respect the marriage vow. They believe that violation would bring some dreadful calamity.

But even in marriage (more of which is being urged among the Cajans) there can be deplorable conditions. The visitors paused at one hut, squatting far off to itself in the Happy Hill Community. On the slanting back porch were two women, a baby playing in filth, and a girl who could not have been more than eleven or twelve years old. Nodding toward the latter, one of the visitors asked: “Why isn’t the little girl in school?”

For a moment the two grown women looked at the questioner coldly, then they exchanged glances and giggled. “That-a-girl,” they said finally in high glee, “is a married ‘oman.” The child only stared with hollow eyes, drawing her bare feet under the folds of a bright red dress.

Until she shows her teeth, the average Cajan woman is pretty in an exotic way. Her features are finely chiseled, and her limbs well rounded. Some of the women wear red or yellow scarves wound tightly about their hair, and the great majority make a glittering display of cheap jewelry. But the Cajan woman is handicapped by teeth that are stained and often broken, a condition that seems characteristic of the people as a whole.

The men are rarely handsome, and most of them never smile. With faces bearded and toughened as leather, they talk in a monotone that seems never to change. Only their eyes betray their feelings. And when they do not like a person, the eyes can be icily cold.

The scorn of the white man has caused the Cajans, numbering some 12,000, to withdraw into their shell of isolation. It is something of a self-imposed exile, and, more than any other one factor, has wrecked the Cajan’s chances to better his condition. A tourist traveling by public highway would never know of his existence. His cabins are never on the main roads. He selects the most inaccessible spots available, and all he asks is that the white man stay away. Whether this self-imposed isolation is brought about by pride or timidity is a conjecture. Certainly, some of the Cajans evidence a superb pride that seems tragic in their bare hovels. Others will not face a stranger, retreating into the woods at his approach.

While some appear outwardly appreciative of the helpful efforts of white social workers, others are openly resentful. One woman, living at the end of a trail so rough that her shanty could be reached only by walking, told social workers: "We need nothing; let us alone!" Investigation showed that she had been begging among her Cajan neighbors to feed herself and her "nine head" of fatherless children.

This article is in no way concerned with the controversy on Cajan ancestry, but one striking fact should be noted. In a single family one may find a child with black, kinky hair and black eyes; another with deep blue eyes and hair the color of molasses. And both parents may be decidedly dark-skinned.

Some have attempted to explain this conflict in types by pointing to the loose moral standard prevailing among the people. This standard does prevail, to an alarming extent, but there are families in which the mother is known by all the community to be unquestionably chaste. And the conflict in types is found here as elsewhere.

The moral standard of the Cajans is a difficult and complex problem. Their language concerning relations is completely open. If a Cajan man is living with a woman who is not his wife, he does not attempt to conceal the fact. He seems to see no violation of the ethics of human existence. The Cajan woman feels the same, as is illustrated by a case several miles from Chatom.

We will call her Sally Reed. She is a widow with seven children, and for several months had been receiving commodities from the County Welfare Department. Arrival of these commodities was stopped suddenly, so she ventured into town for an explanation. "Why," she was told in effect, "you have been reported as having had an illegitimate child." She puzzled a moment, and then replied: "That's a-no reason. Why, Mees, five of mine have been thees way!"

Such a standard has brought its inevitable curse upon the Cajans, and it will not be stamped out easily. Some of them do not know what is wrong. At one cabin a mother stood in the doorway, her hand against her throat. "It been *so* bad," she confided, "Like boils or sumpin'." And she did not realize why her blind baby had died.

Such stories are not beautiful to write; but neither are they beautiful to see. It was not beautiful to see the tiny boy with brown eyes and curly hair trying to stand on legs thin as matchsticks, a club foot at the end of one of them. His mother said: "He'll pick up some weight, wait an' see." It was not beautiful to see the little girl groping for her mother's dress—groping because she was blind.

In these hovels that breed disease, there is only filth and human misery. All Cajan huts are similar, but some are better equipped than others. Usually, there are but two rooms. The cooking is done in one of these, while the entire family sleeps in the other; and sometimes these families may consist of ten persons. At one place there was only one room used for sleeping, covered by a leaky roof. The stove was on a rudely built porch outside, open to the weather.

The Cajan's furniture consists of odds and ends. Most of the beds and chairs are homemade, and the average Cajan's craftsmanship is crude. There may be a picture or so portraying some Biblical scene, although the average Cajan is not a religious person. A broken piece of mirror may adorn the wall, although one grizzled Cajan confided: "I ain't a-seen myself in years an' years." And he was a fortunate man, indeed.

Flies swarm unnoticed. None of the huts have screens, only pine boards nailed to hinges. Sometimes there are no doors at all, with the hut built high up from the ground to keep out the "prowlin' varmints."

The Cajan has a childlike attitude about all of living that has been the despair of many desiring to help him. There are times when he appears absolutely powerless to take any sort of initiative, although he is not usually a lazy person. At a filth-laden hovel near Chatom the visitors found a mother and five children, one of whom was a baby cuddling at the breast. They were seated about a fireplace in which not an ember burned. All were barefoot and scantily clad. All were shaking with the cold. The mother whined: "We're a-jes' sittin' here freezing."

They were huddled there beside an empty fireplace "freezing" in a country where rich pine knots are to be had at one's very door! Amazed, one of the visitors asked: "Where is your husband?," and the woman said: "He's out a-back gettin' ready for a 'possum hunt." The visitors stepped out the back door, and there beside a tiny blaze, on which he was melting lead to make buckshot, was the lean, bronzed "man of the house" who looked up from his task with hostile eyes.

Outside of the venereal diseases, the Cajan's greatest enemies are pellagra, hookworm, "sore eyes," and diphtheria. Pellagra runs rampant, with most of the adults affected. Gazing at her cracked hands, one woman said in wonder: "Strange, I ain't been frostbit."

The contributing cause to the great wave of pellagra lies in the fact that the Cajan refuses to eat anything except meat. When he can go into the woods and get game, or when he can capture one of the wild hogs that roam the countryside, he will not attempt to raise a garden. If seed are provided he will plant a plot of ground, but he invariably will allow it to run up in weeds. He has not learned to like green foodstuffs, and, except in a very few instances, he refuses to grow them.

Until only a few years ago, Cajan children did not know how to play. No games were traditional with them. They had no songs taught to them by the parents. Consequently, their games are similar to those of every school child, and their songs are more like spirituals than any other form. In singing, they sway their bodies, but they do not possess the Negro's rhythm.

On the school ground at Calvert, Mrs. R. M. Averitt, teacher, allowed the children a short recess so that the visitors could see how well they had learned to play. She said: "When I came here eight years ago they would only stand and stare at each other. They had never been taught the meaning of play, but now that they have learned, they seem to play with more zeal and real happiness than white children.

"We are trying to teach them happy songs, but they are slow to take these up. They much prefer singing *Deep Dark Sea* and such morbid tunes. We want them to learn happiness instead of sorrow."

But back over the flat, pine-wrapped roads to the school at Happy Hill Community, the visitors found easily how difficult it will be to blot out sorrow. There, Mrs. Isaac Johnson, the teacher, told of two absences caused by hunger. Other children could not attend for the reason that they did not have sufficient clothing.

The Cajan schools are fairly comfortable considering that the State must maintain a tri-racial system (white, Negro and Cajan). They are unpainted, boxlike structures with desks of many types and sizes, but they have heat and window panes. For the Cajan child who must trudge long distances to study in them, they must seem like castles when compared to home.

The great difficulty at present is keeping competent teachers. The Cajan parents will not tolerate Negro teachers, and many influential persons of Washington County object to white instructors going into the Cajan settlements. This objection has been caused by several instances of intermarriage, none of which ever ended in divorce.

Those who are interested in the welfare of these people believe that the solution to the school problem lies in worthwhile Cajan teachers. But, they ask, how will Cajan teachers be obtained when Cajans are denied admittance to the State colleges? None are wealthy enough to attend northern and eastern schools.

A scattered few have managed to finish college in Alabama, but they have done so by concealing the fact that they were Cajans; they were among the fortunate who have fair skins. But in other instances a Cajan striving for education has been asked to leave Alabama colleges.

The need for Cajan teachers appears most in relations between instructors and parents. Out of seven Cajan women interviewed by the writer of this article, only one knew the meaning of the initials, P.T.A.

While such slow (but certain) progress is being made in the schools, the churches are experiencing the most discouraging difficulties. The adult Cajan is not one to congregate, except with his own established associates. He also likes his Sunday leisure, and he does not sacrifice it easily for church. This is true especially where the preacher refers to subjects such as drinking, rowdying, and the living of men and women together out of wedlock. The churches have made valiant efforts, but even today there are adult Cajans who never heard of Jesus.

Yet, despite his irreligion, the average Cajan has a high sense of honor. He will walk miles to jail if an officer whom he likes sends him word to come in. Recently one Cajan stabbed another seriously, and was himself considerably cut up. As he lay at home in bed, he received word that a certain Mobile County officer wanted him. And without question or complaint, he arose, dressed himself, and walked seven painful miles into Citronelle.

Once he has learned to trust a person there can be no friend more loyal; but his trust comes slowly. Inherently suspicious, and by habit a solitary figure, he considers every man his enemy until extended time proves friendship.

The immense distrust evidenced toward every stranger was shown to visitors at a Cajan shack far back in the pine country north of Citronelle. It was dark, and the only light in the cabin was furnished by a feeble blaze that splashed a sickly yellow upon the unpainted pine walls. The visitors approached in an automobile, throwing the headlights against the front of the shanty. The horn was blown several times, because it is not ethical to approach one of these houses without first giving some sort of "approach warning." The horn had not sounded a second time before a figure darted from beside the fireplace to the back of the house, vanishing from sight as if he were a ghost. And not until the visitors had alighted from the car and stated their business was the mysterious figure seen again. Then he showed himself at a darkened window, turned away slowly, and replaced his shotgun in the corner.

The Cajan's superstitions are manifold and deep-rooted. He believes devoutly in conjure. He believes in witchcraft, and the awful apparitions of the forest night that he calls "ha'nts," or "boogers." He believes that every murdered thing, man or animal, has the power to return to life. Consequently, the Cajan murderer lives in constant dread that his victim will return in the role of avenger.

There are those who have worked among these people for years who are convinced that some improvement in their outlook on life has been made during the last two years. Of course, there has been no improvement in living conditions; none in morals, and only a little in the eradication of disease. But there is less rowdying and savage fighting than in the old prohibition days when moonshine whiskey flowed like water at backwoods "gatherings." The Cajan at last is learning to visit without believing that the visit should culminate in a free-for-all fight.

These visits are unlike those in other parts of the world. If a Cajan is invited into the home of another, he may remain a week, or he may decide to stay a month. In one instance a visitor prolonged his stay until the tubercular "man of the house" died, and then he remained on "to console and help" the widow.

On some early future day—and this statement is not made without authority—the bulk of the Cajan population will be without a means of livelihood. They know no occupation except turpentining and lumbering. Their turpentine brings but fourteen cents a gallon. The pine forests have been cut over so many times that years will be required to grow new timber. The sawmills long since have stilled their machinery.

Perhaps old Emily Bird, direct descendant of the colorful Red Bird summed up the problem of her people most completely with these words:

HORSE TRADE

Woodrow Hand

1938

Grandpappy Cook had just finished bragging about selling a five-dollar calf for eighteen dollars, so to egg him on I said:

"Grandpappy, did you ever do any horse trading?"

We were sitting in front of my fire. He rolled his twist of cud over his tongue and squshed [sic] it a few times with his seven teeth, then sprayed the fireplace from mantle to floor with amber. He studies the freckled effect while he propped his feet across a vacant rocker, my newest chair.

I knew the signs. They were the forerunner of one of Grandpappy's long tales (but don't call them tales to his face.) He started the chair to rocking, adjusted it to comfortable speed, then he said:

"Hain't never done so much horse tradin'; never did own many horses. I liked mules. But hit seems to me that I did skin a feller wunst. Hit's so long ago that I can't recollect fer certain, but I think hit wus Betsy that I traded to a feller fer his mule."

"'Pears to me that I saddled Betsy with a old worn out saddle that musta been no better'n a board covered with cowhide and wuz ridin' her over to Bailey's Mill – hit wuz about six mile – to git some corn ground. I had hit layin' across the front of my saddle."

"Betsy looked pretty good. She wuz right fat and could pace a little. She didn't have no scars or sores or no limp."

"Betsy was pretty to look at; and easy to ride, but she had moon-eyes."

Before I could ask what he meant, Grandpappy twisted his cud some more and I expected to see the tiled hearth take on another growth of freckles, but nothing happened. Grandpappy gulped and settled back into his chair. I recalled the time I swalled juice in my only tobacco chewing attempt and felt a little faint; but Grandpappy seemed not to be bothered with the drink of liquid tobacco.

Grandpappy continued:

"Atter I had rode along a mile or two, a feller come out of a side road ridin' one of the prettiest mules I ever see. He wuz slick as a fattened hog and stepped along like he wuz running over with pep. The feller wuz sittin' on a brand new saddle too.

"Me'n the feller spoke. He rode along with me a little way, all the time lookin' at Betsy. I could see what wuz in his mind, but I didn't let on. You kin tell a trader as fer as you kin see'im.

"Just like I expected, the feller said, 'That's a good lookin' mare.'

"'Yep,' I said. 'She's all right.'

"We rode along, talkin' about this and that. The feller kept twistin' about on his saddle so's I could see hit. I let him keep hit up for a while, then I said, 'That's a new saddle, hain't it?'

"'Yep,' he said. "Jest bought it last week. Hain't been set on enough to git shiny.'"

"The feller slapped the mule's rump with his hand, and he pretended he had a hard time keepin' the mule from runnin' off and leavin' me. 'Dern near got that horse-fly,' he said.

"I could see the feller had a lively mule, jest the kind I needed, but I still didn't let on. We rode on a ways, then the feller popped out in the worse kinda form. 'How'll you swap?' he asked. Jest like that. No way a'tall like experienced traders do. They talk about everything under the sun 'ceptin' the trade. So I figured I could take the feller easy.

"'I don't know as I care to swap,' I said. 'I like this mare mightly well. But she wouldn't suit you.'

"'How come?' he asked. 'What's the matter with her?'

"'Nothing' you could lay your hand on,' I said. ' You jest wouldn't like her.'"

At this point Grandpappy without warning nearly drowned out the fire, and the amber mist settled in front of us. I hastily excused myself and returned with a small cuspidor which I put in front of Grandpappy.

"As I wuz sayin'," Grandpappy picked up his story, "when I kept tellin' that feller that he wouldn't like Betsy, he commenced lookin' closer and closer to see why he wouldn't like her. 'Course he couldn't see nothin' because there weren't nothin' he could see. You can't tell nothin' about moon eyes 'till the full moon, and hit wuz a week yet 'till then."

I saw Grandpappy's jaw working and mentally patted myself on the back for thinking of putting the cuspidor (spittoon) in front of him, but he worked up his cud and very carefully avoided it. The fireplace took another coat of amber.

I noted the angle and moved the cuspidor a little more to the front of Grandpappy. I didn't see how he could possibly miss it next time. He continued his story:

"Well sir, the more that feller looked at Betsy, the less he could see wrong with her. He let me git in front of him so's he could see her hind part and got in front so's he could see all of that end. He switched sides of the road. I jest waited and finally he said:

"'In spite of what you say, I don't see nothin' wrong with that mare.'

"'I didn't say she had anything wrong with her,' I told him. 'All I said wuz that you wouldn't like her.'

"'Is she shy?' he asked.'

"'Scare her and see fer yourself,' I said.'

"He rode up close and jerked his hand across Betsy's eyes. She dodged jest a bit. 'Well,' he said. 'That shows she hain't blind, and she hain't shy either. Has she got sores under the saddle?'

"'Nope,' I said. 'But you can look for yourself.'

"'I'll take your word fer hit,' he said. 'Anyhow, she don't act like she's sore the way she's carryin' you and the saddle and corn."

Once more I saw Grandpappy get set to spray the termites, but this time, I had no worries. The can was in good position. The cloudburst came, but the cuspidor remained perfectly dry. Once more I took the angle and move the can. Next time even the law of averages would be on my side.

"The feller didn't seem to notice how I wuz lookin' at his mule. He wuz the best-lookin' mule I ever saw, and I wuz gittin' anxious to swap, but I knew hit wouldn't do to let the feller know about that."

"All uva' sudden, the feller said: 'Let's swap even.'"

"'Nope.' I said. 'I won't swap fer less'n fifteen dollars boot.'"

“The feller studied a little bit, then he said: ‘I’ll give you five dollars boot.’”

“’Nope,’ I said. ‘You’re the only one that wants to swap. It’s fifteen dollars or nothin’.’”

“’I can’t trade like that.’ The feller said. We rode on a piece and I could see that he still wanted to trade mighty bad. Some people jest can’t stand to own a mule when they think they can get a horse. Finally, he said: ‘I’ll give you my new saddle and five dollars boot fer your horse and saddle.’

“I told him all right. That suited me. In fact, I was tickled all over. We swapped right there and he even helped me move the sack of corn offa’ Betsy over to the mule.

“Bet when we wuz all set again, I said: ‘This is a trade. You won’t like Betsy, but I told you before we swapped.’

“He didn’t say nothin’; jest looked at me like he thought he had skinned a crazy man and rode off.”

Grandpappy stopped to roll his chew around and I took advantage of the pause. I said: “Well, Grandpappy, it looks to me like he did skin you.”

“Oh, no he didn’t. Didn’t I tell you Betsy wuz moon-eyed?”

Under the accusation, Grandpappy spat viciously at the fireplace, clearing the can by two feet. I moved it again. Grandpappy said:

“Iffin’ you don’t stop movin’ that can around in fronta me, I’m a gonna spit right in it!”

That set me back a pace, but I said: “Well, it still looks to me like he skinned you.”

“No, he didn’t. A moon-eyed horse can’t see nothin’ a’tall durin’ the full moon. He’s plumb blind ‘till the new moon. But the feller couldn’t tell nothin’ ‘bout that a week before the moon fulled; and he didn’t ask me.”

CALLING ON MISS LUCY

Woodrow Hand

1938

Nobody knows when the tradition of "calling on Miss Lucy" started, but it has been going on in Shelby County, and possibly all of Alabama for years. Neither is the reason for its origin known, but it easily could have been like this:

City boys used to ride through the country and yell, "Hello, Hayseed," at the farm boys. That made the farm boys mad enough to shuck corn with their teeth, but they didn't know what to do to the city boys because they didn't know anything about the city boys. They didn't know what they liked and what they didn't like.

However, when good roads were built, and all good farmers and all farmers who weren't no good bought automobiles, the country boys began going to town. They found out what city boys liked and what they didn't like.

In the meantime, while country boys were getting acquainted with the city, more city boys began going to the country. The fresh air was a novelty. They'd go out in the sticks and get drunk on the clean atmosphere like opium fields. But they kept calling country boys "Hayseed" and asking about their crops. The didn't realize that country boys were getting wise.

So all the enlightened country boys got together down behind a barn one day and drew up a plan for getting even with the city boys once and for all and ever after, so long as there were any city suckers left. The boys put their heads together and when they came out of the huddle, they felt that they really had something.

Well, pretty soon after that, three city boys came out of the city to get some of the remarkable stuff called fresh air. They were a high and mighty trio and held themselves quite aloof for several days, but finally they got lonely and went down to the depot to mingle with the country boys who had gathered to watch the train come in.

They stood around a while and then edged over to where four country boys were standing. They didn't know of course that the country boys had been waiting for just that very thing. One of the city boys said:

"What you fellows do when you get lonesome around here?"

The country boys knew what the city boys did when they got lonesome, but they didn't let on.

"Aw, nothing much," one of the country boys replied. "Once in a while, there's a box supper or some other sociable. Iffen we ain't too tired, we go. That is about all we do."

The city boys looked a little funny. It was easy to see that they couldn't understand these country boys.

"I'm afraid you don't understand," one of the city boys said. "What we mean is this; don't you ever get tired of being around boys all the time?"

"Oh sure," was the reply. "But we jest git our gun and shoot rabbits by ourself. We know all about how folks has got to be to theirself once in a while."

The city boys looked at each other and shook their heads, all the time thinking that the country boys were even dumber than credited. They forgot all about how easy it was for a country boy to go to town.

Finally one of the city boys decided that he'd have to talk straight to these country boys so he said:

"What do you do when you feel like if you don't get to hug and kiss a girl you'll blow up?"

The country boys laughed. One of the said:

"Why didn't you say first off that was what you wanted to know? When we feel like that we go see Miss Lucy."

The city boys were so amazed to find this situation so easily taken care of, so they began wheedling to be taken on a visit to Miss Lucy. The country boys were doubtful a while, but they finally gave in, but not without a word of warning.

"Lucy's pa is mighty strict, but he works nights and Lucy likes a lot of company, so I reckon we can take you over tonight."

The city boys get to feeling right good. They had wanted to hug and kiss a country girl for a long time. So they rush off to get dressed in their best clothes.

That evening, all dressed up in white suits and white shoes, they met the country boys at the depot. "Them's mighty pretty clothes," one of the country boys said, and proceeded to lead the city boys across boggy land and muddy land and through thickets until they had gone about two miles and darkness had set in. Finally they came to an old house. The city boys thought it looked vacant, but decided it was because it was a country house.

They all walked up almost to the front porch. The country boys got the city boys together and whispered:

“One of us will go in with you to meet Lucy and the rest of us will stand around the house and watch for Lucy’s pa. Then when it’s our turn we’ll come in, and you can watch for us.”

That suited the city boys. They wanted to be first anyway. So they walk up on the front porch with one of the country boys. The others scattered around the house and one slipped in the back door. He eased up to the front room and was standing there in the dark while the city boys knocked on the door. In a thin girlish voice he said:

“Come in.” At the same time he pulled a gun from his hip pocket.

The city boys pushed open the door and walked across the threshold.

Then, like rolling thunder, the country boy began shooting. The city boys jumped backward out of the door. One of the country boys yelled, “Her pa’s home!” and scattered out through the woods.

The city boys, when they jumped backward, hit the muddy yard on the seat of their pretty white pants and streaked it through the thickets with no idea of the way home.

Next morning, quite crestfallen, they again were down at the depot waiting for the train. This time they boarded it.

And that’s how “Miss Lucy” became a popular legend in Shelby County.

TOM CAT, WEATHER PROPHET

Woodrow Hand

1939

He was just an ordinary cat with a white spot in the center of his forehead that broke the monotony of his bleak gray coat when John Gates picked him off the dust of his front yard one morning eight years ago.

So John named him "Tom" and gave him a breakfast of breadcrumbs and white meat. Tom ate and commenced browsing around for mice and the incident was considered closed by both John and Tom. They spoke when they met, but generally each went about his own business and attended to his own duties.

This casual state of friend ship continued for three years, each absorbed with his contribution toward maintain a happy and substantial household.

Occasionally, rifts would occur, as in any home. Tom's tail would get under a careless foot and he'd raise a howl until his nerves settled, or maybe he'd go unnoticed after his nose told him that meat was being cooked. If he continued to go without his share, his howls would continue into night.

But Tom wasn't always the victim. He has his faults, such as the time John found a mouse scampering gaily around the kitchen and Tom was nowhere to be found, and the week that Tom spent with his girlfriend.

However, these troubles were always ironed out to the satisfaction of both parties.

As said before, they were casual friends for three years. Then disaster struck; and the casualness tightened into a bond of unbreakable strength.

It was just before daylight and the early morning was chilly with the air of departing winter. May had just taken its turn in the New Year. A heavy thunderstorm had held sway most of the night, but had finally settled into a steady rainfall. Tom was asleep in front of the fireplace, his snores harmonizing with those of John, even though his bed was across the room.

Neither noticed the steady flicker of lightning that danced in the southwest, nor its steadily increasing intensity. When the rain began slapping the windows, neither knew that wind was taking over the night, and was fast growing into a gale.

The house swayed, then settled back to its foundation, and Tom and John slept on. They slept until the wind sounded like a freight train roaring over the house, then they awoke, with what sounded like another train coming toward them. It gave the feeling of missing one train and suddenly having another roar around the bend.

They opened their eyes to a universe filled with redly flickering glow ten times the brightness that bounces from the sky when great cauldrons of molten iron are being poured at the furnaces. They awoke too late. The house had gone like a puff of smoke before they could assemble their senses.

John picked himself unhurt from the debris and called for Tom. He failed to get an answer and it was three days before Tom showed up.

He crept into John's rude shelter at dusk; meowing pitifully for food. John fed him and that night, they shared a cot made from a door that had been part of their home.

Next morning, they faced a murky day. The sky was yellowish and although his knees felt weak from fear as he looked at low boiling clouds, John went about his task of salvaging.

There was a sudden clap of thunder and John jumped, turning as he did in time to see Tom streaking across the garden with his tail waving in the breeze. John wondered; felt sorry for Tom; then as it thundered again, he raced for the shelter of a large culvert. There he weathered a torrential downpour that threated to float him out of the culvert. But by spreading his legs, he managed to stay in until the rain was over.

Time and fair weather eventually allowed John to rebuild his home. However, on several occasions there had been light thunder showers and every time he had seen Tom – well in advance of the actual disturbance – race, tail up, across the garden.

For his own safety, John built a storm cellar. He made it large enough to sleep in, but he was at a loss as to when to use the cellar. He reasoned that night clear at bed-time could turn into stormy ones before morning, but he couldn't sleep in the cellar every night. It was too uncomfortable.

He thought a long time about when and when not to use the cellar for a bedroom. Then, he thought of Tom; and the way he raced across the garden at the first sign of bad weather.

So he fastened Tom inside one of the rooms and watched him.

We watched until he saw Tom commence to scratch wildly at the walls and leap at the windows. Then John went outside and watched. Eventually, a cloud began to come over the horizon.

John made a prisoner of Tom until a cloud had come and gone on several occasions. Tom always reacted in the same manner.

So John took Tom into his room and made him a tin box to sleep in, one that would make plenty of noise when Tom scratched.

That was five years ago. Neither John nor Tom has been caught by a hurricane in all that time.

WOLF BRAND

Woodrow Hand

(No date listed)

Shelby County voted dry in the recent prohibition issue and the people chorused: "Whiskey, whiskey everywhere; and not a drop to drink."

But they were only kidding. They knew that Shelby County was the one and only home of "wolf brand," a powerful beverage concocted from "shorts," or wheat bran, and whatever else chooses to fall into the mash pot.

Wolf brand cannot date its heritage from away back as can the whiskies advertised so prettily in all the leading magazines. It is instead, a child of the Depression; and as such, is popular.

Still, people blame the Depression with a lot of things.

These would be millionaires say: "I'd be rich today if the Depression hadn't come when it did."

Wolf Brand vendors say: "It'd be corn whiskey if the Depression hadn't come when it did."

Actually, neither could be without the other. If the would-have-beens could afford better whiskey, they'd buy it. Then wolf brand would be no more.

Wolf brand can be had for fifty cents a quart any place in Shelby within five minutes after the desire is known. It is a miracle of the retail trade.

When the moonshiners discovered that "shorts" could be distilled in the same manner as corn, their only trouble was tempering it down so that it would wait until inside the drinker before exploding.

Wolf brand distilling has progressed to a fine art during the past ten years, being now of such delicate texture that it hardly ever removes the skin from inside the throat.

Its appearance has improved also. It is now a tempting red-muddish hue when "charred" but may prefer its virgin color; which isn't color. It used to look like skimmed milk.

The name wolf brand has been under controversy as to origin. Some claim that the original distiller got drunk and while trying to say "wheat bran" twisted his tongue and said "wolf brand." Others say that the wildness of the country in which it is made gave it its name by the expression: "It's a wolfish whiskey from a wolfish country."

JOE'S TALL STORY

Woodrow Hand

1938

Maybe I would have disputed Joe Lowery when he told me how he got out of a coal mine explosion, but I didn't know enough about it to argue. Anyway, he forestalled any idea I might have had by saying:

"Funny things happen in a coal mine. Lotta time you get killed when you watch your step; and a lotta times you don't get killed when you oughta."

"Now, I wus supposed to get killed when Red Ash Mine exploded. I had a chance to get burned out, smoked out, or drowned out; but I got it all, and I coulda even been starved out.

"Here's how it wus:

"When I heard the explosion, I run outta the room where I wus workin' and found the slope fulla fire. Burnin' gas make a hot fire.

"Well, I got good and wet and run through the fire, but when I got outta that the smoke commenced to choke me.

"So I put my nose to the ground like a dog and smelled my way up the slope toward the surface. I helped myself up by pullin' along on the pipe line from the pump at the bottom of the mine. It wus about a eight inch pipe.

"I wus makin' it fine till I heard the roof of the slope cave in up above me and felt the pipe shake in my hand. I kept pullin' up to where I heard the fall, and when I got there, I found the slope blocked up tight. I couldn't find no way to get through or over it, so I jest had to set there.

"Nobody could get through from the other side to clean out the fall, I figured, on account of the smoke and fumes from the explosion, so I set there for what seemed like a month and I still couldn't see no way to get out. I commenced to get hungry and then after a while I got weak. I couldn't hardly hold the the pipe and when I'd try to keep my nose to the little trickle of water that seeped through the dirt and rock, I'd fall flat on my face.

"I wus beginnin' to get sleepy every once in a while; but I'd drop off, If I'd ever on to sleep, I'd have not waked up.

"I musta been dosin' when I heard the dirt and stuff move a little, but I didn't really get awake till I felt water runnin' all over me and getting stronger all the time. I had to grab a tight hold on the pipe, but water kept comin' so fast, I wus near about washed down the slope. It tugged at me like a team of horses and finally covered me over. If it hadn't stopped in fifteen or twenty minutes I'd have drowned, but when it did stop, there wus a nice big hole for me to go through and a clear path to the surface, but I couldn't leave the slope till night.

"The fall had busted the water pipe and damned up the water. It jest kept fillin' up till it got to the top of the slope and wus runnin' out over the grass. Then the water finally seeped through the fall till it opened up a hole. Then all that water run back down into the mine, nearly drownin' me on the way. If I hadn't kept a tight hold on the pipe, I would have been washed clear to the bottom.

“As I said, I couldn’t leave the slope till it got dark. That water rushed over me so fast and strong it tore all my clothes off and left me naked as a fresh telephone pole.”

So, as I don’t know anything about mining, maybe Joe was telling the truth.

A STEEL MILL WORKER AND HIS WIFE

Edward Harper

1938

Paralleling the great steel plant of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company on the south is one of the oldest residential sections in the Ensley district. Here dwellings, ranging from modern apartment buildings to small, cozy bungalows and three and four room shot-gun houses badly in need of repair line the broad avenues that connect Ensley with its sister city, Fairfield. The older residences are near the business area. Some of these small dwellings are of the cottage type; others, which in earlier days were the homes of the more prosperous class, are large commodious buildings, usually of massive frame construction. The newer homes are farther out toward Fairfield. Here the bungalow predominates. The terrain is flat and even and one lawn joins another like an endless green carpet bordered at intervals by well-kept hedges and studded here and there with shade trees, small cedars and other shrubbery.

At one time this section was occupied almost exclusively by families of the steel mill's employees, but with the advent of modern transportation facilities many older families moved to other sections of the city, leaving vacancies which were gradually filled by new comers of the district, many of whom have other occupations than of steel worker. However, the steel worker is predominant.

About a mile from the business area in this section is the home of Loyd and Edna Lewis. It is a small yellow bungalow enclosed in front by a low, well-kept hedge and narrow yard. There is some shrubbery on either side of the walk leading up to the steps.

The small porch, except for a few gay potted flowers and a rubber doormat, has no other appointments. The house has six rooms: living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bath, and there is also a small latticed back porch. It is not a new house, but it has recently redecorated and the floors and woodwork revarnished. Because the rooms are usually small, there has been but little opportunity for choice in the matter of arranging furniture, which for the most part, is new and modernistic design.

Loyd Lewis is an employee of Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. He works at the company's Pratt City plant where he is classified as a blacksmith-mechanic. He is twenty-seven years old, of medium height and weighs about 160 pounds. Decidedly brunette, his dark complexion and high cheekbones are hereditary characteristics from four generations back, where a male ancestor in his paternal line was a full-blood Cherokee Indian. He is neat in appearance and in the choice and wearing of his clothes shows attention to style and good taste.

His wife, Edna Lewis, also dark, is twenty-six. She is of medium height, slender, and her hair, dark brown and quite straight, is parted on one side and has a full boyish bob. She too, is carefully groomed, but seems to be less concerned with appearance that her husband.

The couple have been married about three years. They have no children. They moved to their present house about a year ago. Prior to that time they lived with Loyd's parents, an arrangement brought about by circumstances rather than choice, for as Edna says, "If we could have had our way about it we would have got a place of our own to start with, even if it wasn't nothing more than two-room shack; but we didn't have any money saved up, and he wasn't getting in much time at the shops either, so we just had to make out the best we could for a while."

Loyd's parents and their two other children, a girl, 23, and a boy, 17, live in the same community, within a few blocks of his home. His father, also, works for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. "He has been working there about fourteen years," says Loyd. "He's a sort of a all-around handy man, I guess you would call it; he's worked in nearly all divisions of the plant. He didn't have enough education to hold down a big job. He might have got through the third grade; and I doubt if Mamma got much farther than that herself."

Before coming to Birmingham in 1917, Loyd's parents operated a small farm in Elmore County. They came from agrarian families that were "well-to-do and well-thought-of" in that county. "Daddy was the youngest boy in the family," says Loyd. "So naturally he was spoiled; he never had any work to do. In fact, none of the kids on the plantation had much to do, because granddaddy Lewis hired men to do the work." Loyd thinks it caused him to be irresponsible as his father.

"When Mamma and Daddy got married," says Loyd, "they started farming a tract of land near the Lewis plantation. No, Daddy didn't own that farm; he didn't own anything that I know of except Mamma and us Kids. He was proud of us, but only because we were his. He didn't give a darn what we did, just so long as we let him feel that he was the boss. Everybody had to bow to his will; if they didn't he would get drunk and raise hell. He used to make blood boil, the way he bullied Mamma around. Yes, Mamma does drink too, now and then, but she never gets nasty about it."

Loyd has a son's affection for his mother. He admits that she has never taken much interest in housekeeping, but says that she always been a good mother and has always provided good meals for her family. He often buys presents for her and visits her regularly. Until recently, his sister, Julia, shared his affections. Her elopement with a bootlegger, however, aroused his indignation and he has never forgiven her he says, for "being such a darned little fool." For his father, he shows nothing but resentment, because of the way he used to treat their mother he says but he does give his father credit for being a good provider. He says, "We always had plenty to eat and wear. Daddy was always buying of knick-knacks and little treats for us kids. I guess he thought we ought to be grateful to him for it, but how can you be grateful to anyone you have learned to despise?"

Loyd has an eight-grade education. He says that he could have gone to high school, but that he "didn't see any use in it then." "I got nutty about the gals about that time," he explained. "I didn't have sense enough to study. I figured I had to get a job and make some money so I could keep up with the rest of the crowd I was running with. Daddy helped me get the job at the T.C.I. Work was good then, so I got pretty good pay to start with, and I spent all I made running around to parties and raising hell. I drank a good deal too, but I can't stand to look at the stuff now. I got dog sick on it two or three times and that cured me. Edna will tell you about one of the times; she had to put me to bed and nurse me back to life. That was before we got married. I haven't touched a drop since."

Loyd met his wife while visiting friends in West End. She was living with her grandmother and uncle. Her parents died when she was a small child. "I don't remember mother," she says. "Grandmother is the only mother I have ever known. She and uncle Jim treated me swell. I had anything they could afford. But Grandma was strict on me. She wouldn't think of letting me stay away from church or go to dances and other places that she used to say. Even after we got married many of our friends did not think we would make a go of it. They knew that Loyd and I didn't like the same things. He liked dances and wild parties, and I always felt out of place at such affairs. But I think he's about settled down now that we have our own home to think of. I bet we haven't been to a picture show in over a month. Loyd just stays home and reads most of the time when he is not working."

Loyd says that it is the furniture bills, house rent and grocery bills that have him, "tied down." He still wants to "get out and raise a little hell once in a while," and he vows that he will yet, when he gets his debts paid out. "Why, just look at me!" he says. "All this sitting around the house is making me look like a stuffed toad. While we were going to dances I managed to keep a fairly decent figure, but look at me now! Why, I bought six suits of clothes a year ago and now I can't hardly get them on with a shoehorn. I bought Edna a lot of new dresses, too, but it looks like she isn't going to have a chance to wear them anytime soon."

Edna says that she likes pretty clothes but that she doesn't believe in being extravagant. She lets her husband select nearly all of her clothes, because she thinks he has good taste about such things. She also likes attractive furnishings for the home; pretty draperies, neat doilies and counterpanes. Loyd, also has this rather feminine accomplishment. Edna says Loyd began doing needlework when he was a small boy.

"Yes, it does seem like a strange hobby for a man," she said. "But not when you understand why he got started doing it. You see, he always hated the untidy habits of his family ever since he was old enough to notice them. He used to beg him mother to buy pretty pillows and counterpanes for his bed, but she paid no attention to the 'silly whims' as she described his longing for beauty. But after a while he learned how to embroider from some of the ladies in the neighborhood, and pretty soon he had every plain thing in the house decorated with his needlework. But he's no amateur now. Look at this piece. You see, it's better than any of my work." Edna takes pride in showing her friends dozens of pieces which she and her husband have made together.

Edna had two years in high school. She likes reading occasionally, but prefers visiting as a past time. She keeps a neat house and enjoys preparing appetizing dishes for her guests. She is especially fond of vegetables, but Loyd refuses to eat them; he must have his meats.

Loyd spends a great deal of his spare time playing bridge with friends in the neighborhood. Edna doesn't care for the game. Loyd's reading consists almost entirely of detective and mystery stories. On a book rack near his huge lounging chair are scores of magazines bearing such titles as *Thrilling Detective Mystery*, *Weird Tales*, and *Startling Adventures*. He may occasionally read *Good Housekeeping* and *Cosmopolitan* while waiting for new issues of his favorites.

It is about three miles from Ensley to the shops where Loyd works. He has a day shift of eight hours, from seven to three-thirty, with a half-hour for lunch. "I have to get up about five," he said. "I shave while Edna cooks breakfast; eat while she packs my lunch pail. A buddy pick me up about six. That gives us time to make it to the shops and get into our work clothes by seven."

Most of the work in the blacksmith division where Loyd works consists of repair jobs on the company's locomotives. Here worn parts are removed and replaced by new ones which are forged and machined by the blacksmith crew. The sop's equipment consists of a forge and a huge steam-driven hammer, and a number of other machines in the equipment of the average machine shop. "Suppose that a new driver is needed," said Loyd. "A steel bar of the right length will be heated in the forge and beat into shape under the hammer. A crane will be used to handle the bar. The hammer is operated by the hammer boy. The forge smith tells the hammer boy what strokes he wants and the hammer boy works the throttle so as to produce the right strokes. When the piece leaves the hammer it is in the rough. It has to be machined. That's where I come in. I used to be a hammer boy; that is, when I started about ten years ago. But now I operate the lathes and drill press.

"Last year the company signed up for apprenticeship classes with the I.C.S. (International Correspondence Schools) and a good many helpers enrolled for the training. No, I didn't start as an apprentice. If they had these classes when I first started to work there I would have taken the course. I started as helper because helpers get more pay than apprentices to begin with; but an apprentice has a higher rating when he becomes a mechanic than the man who started as a helper. There are different ratings. Mine is seventy-five cents an hour. In heat times we have as many as twenty-five men in our division, but work is on the dray at present. We are only working three days a week, but I think we will go on a four-day run beginning next week."

Loyd doesn't like his work; never has. Not that there is anything hard about it, but because "everything you touch is so dirty and greasy." He often wishes that he had never started working at the shops, but he doesn't think there is much chance of his changing occupations now. He gets along well with his fellow employees, but he seldom mingles with them socially. They call him "Mandy" a nickname which they gave him when he started working at the shops. "I guess they thought he was sort of sissy," says Edna, "because he always went and came from work all dolled up in his best clothes. I never see him in his work clothes, though I have to wash two changes of them for him every week."

Edna says she is glad that Loyd takes an interest in the home. He often helps her with her house work. He sweeps, mops, makes up beds, irons; but he can't cook, he doesn't like to wash cloths and he refuses to wash dishes. Edna enjoys house work and says she has plenty to keep her busy most of the time. After she gets Loyd off to work in the mornings she usually goes back to bed to get her "beauty nap" as she calls it. She wakes about ten, dresses and begins her day's work; first the dishes, then the bed rooms, then the floors, and finally dusting. By that time there probably may be a dozen of the neighborhood children congregating in the living room or following her from room to room clamoring for her to play games with them or make milkshakes, ice cream or other refreshments. Then she will leave her work for an hour or two and be hostess to this rowdy group of merry-makers. She has no children of her own, but a daytime visitor to the Lewis home seldom finds less than a dozen children there, all seeming very much at home, and "acting," says Loyd, "as if they owned the place."

Loyd says that Edna is to blame for the children's "hanging around all the time," and that he wishes they would stay away; but Edna says that Loyd is "just kidding." She says that he is as much to blame as she is for their rowdy visits."

"Yes," groaned Loyd. "I guess I started them. I used to buy all the funny papers in town and invite a few kids down here to help me read them. Pretty soon every little brat in Ensley knew about it and piled in here three-deep. Why, you couldn't see the floor for the papers and you couldn't see the papers for the kids. When one of them couldn't find a chair or a space on the floor to sit on, he just climbed on the back of the Chesterfield and tried to perch on top of the floor lamp. That's when I got mad. I was just about to take a whack at that little brat with my belt when Edna came in; but I would have licked him anyway if he had broke that lamp. That made me so confounded mad that I ran them all home, and haven't bought any more funny papers since."

"But they all came back next morning," said Edna. "They come every morning; but they always leave before Loyd comes home from work; or, if he doesn't go to work, they come in and sit around without much noise. They always look in the ice box, and if they don't see ice cream in the trays they will say, "Aunt Maudie, that's what they call me ain't you gonna make no ice cream today? And I say, yes. After a while maybe we'll make some. Then they just sit around or play till I get my work done, and I know there isn't going to be any peace till I have made ice cream, so what else can I do? After all, they are lots of company, and I really enjoy playing with them. I have always loved children and I have always had lots of them around me ever since I can remember. Loyd fixed up a big tree for them last Christmas. I'll bet you he spent close to a hundred dollars for presents for those children."

Three lovely Persian kittens have been given living quarters on the latticed back porch. These, are Loyd's pets; but he calls them "pests." "We let them come in the house sometimes," said Edna, "but they simply walk all over Loyd when they are in here, so we keep them out on the porch most of the time. Loyd likes to play with them, but they shed so badly now; just keeps him brushing hair off his clothes."

Anyone who visits the Lewis home is certain to receive a hospitable reception. No one can be more courteous and jovial than Loyd, and no one more kind than his wife. They probably have no acquaintances of long standing who have not received from them some little token of esteem; possibly a piece of needlework, a silken boudoir pillow, or a jar of Edna's delicious home-canned vegetables or fruits.

HOBBIES, PETS, AND CHILDREN

Edward Harper

1938

When my wife first suggested that we pay a visit to Loyd and Edna Lewis, I immediately began reciting an appropriate group of my cant excuses, which I have compiled and memorized for the sole purpose of winning a reprieve from social obligations when necessary. "And besides," I added by way of clinching my argument, "I expect to spend the evening working on some material on the lives and habits of steel mill workers."

"Well that's just fine," said my wife. "Loyd Lewis can help you. He works at the Pratt City plant of the Tennessee Company, doing some kind of work in the blacksmith division."

"How long has he worked there?" I asked; and as she chattered I drew a fresh sheet of paper across my writing table and began making notes in my usual methodical manner:

Loyd Wesley Lewis, 315 34th Ave., Ensley
Employer: Tennessee Coal, Iron & RR. Co.
Blacksmith division, 8 years
Age: 27
Education: grade school, 2 years high school
Married Edna Burke (age 26) July 1935
No children

“Edna and I were school chums,” my wife went on; “About the sweetest girl I have ever known; so even-tempered and sympathetic. I believe she would simply die if she thought that she had ever offended any one. This seems so strange when you consider that she never knew the loving devotion of parents. They died when she was very small, and her grandmother and uncle took her into their home. I’m sure they were kind to her. They certainly provided every means they could afford for her happiness. They lived only a short distance from my home, and Edna spent much of her spare time with me.

“It was at my house that she met Loyd Lewis among the gay crowd who used to visit with us there. They became engaged almost immediately, but when they married many of their friends predicted that they would never make a go of it, because their temperaments were so different.”

“Loyd was carefree and spendthrifty. He liked dancing and lively parties. His sort of life didn’t appeal to Edna in the least. Her grandmother’s religious discipline may have influenced her disposition; but Edna had some definite convictions of her own. Of course, she always accompanied Loyd when he participated in his friends’ gaieties but only because she felt it her duty to be with him and restrain him if he was disposed to drink too much; for, like his parents, Loyd had acquired the habit of drink very early.”

“Do you mean that both parents drank?”

“Yes, both; although his mother was not the addict that her husband was, I have often seen her shamefully intoxicated. Loyd’s parents, Robert and Lela Lewis, left a small farm in Elmore County and came to Birmingham in 1916. At that time they had two children, Loyd, who was six, and a girl, Julia, four years younger. Vainly shifting from one occupation to another for four years, Robert Lewis finally was given a job as helper at the Tennessee Company, where he had been employed in practically the same capacity ever since. He had but little education himself, but provided consistently and ungrudgingly for the education of his children. They seldom lacked food or clothing, and very often he was known to cater to their whims almost to the extent of extravagance. They, however, received little discipline and less cultural training at home. The daughter, Julia, quickly acquired the slovenly habits and indifferent morals of her parents, and at the age of fifteen ran away from home to marry a bootlegger who owned a small farm near Warrior. This humiliated and practically aroused the hatred of her brother, Loyd, who from an early age resented his family's manner of living.

"Loyd had been working at the steel plant for four years before he married, but he had saved nothing of his earnings; so it was through necessity, rather than choice, that he brought his young wife to live in the home of his parents. They bought new furniture on credit for their one room, and Edna decorated it with attractive wall pictures and draperies. It presented a marked contrast to the untidy condition of the remainder of the house occupied by Loyd's parents.

"After two years of patience and persistence Edna managed to save enough out of her husband's earnings to make the down payment on some new furniture, and they rented a small house in Ensley where they set up housekeeping."

"That was about a year ago, wasn't it?" I asked, checking over my notes.

"Yes", said my wife; "and we have had several invitations to call and have dinner with them. Edna is such a fine cook, that I think she might be called an artist in that line."

I made a note of this and underscored it. Then the suggestion caused me to look at my watch. "Too late for dinner," I said, "still I think we should call on them anyway."

The little bungalow which we approached an hour later is yellow and trimmed with burnt orange. It is back about twenty feet from an unpaved street, and the narrow yard is enclosed by a well-kept hedge. There is some shrubbery and the small porch boasts a few gay potted flowers.

Edna Lewis, an attractive brunette, invited us into a small, cozy living room, overcrowded by its modest but well-chosen appointments. Her husband, who had abandoned his dress shirt and shoes in conformity with the custom which hot weather imposes on the home habits of steel workers, laid down a magazine and rose to greet us. He is slightly taller than his wife, and his black hair was combed straight back from his high forehead. He possesses none of the physical characteristics that one is accustomed to associate with the blacksmithing trade. He was wearing grey tweed trousers, and his wife was dressed in a neat blue house frock with which she wore boudoir slippers.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, "you sure caught us off guard." She motioned us to a comfortable brown plush Chesterfield, and crossing the room, snapped off the cabinet radio which was blaring the music of a popular dance orchestra. "We were beginning to think that you were never coming to see us."

Loyd sank back into his huge lounging chair and extended an open package of Paul Jones cigarettes.

"What are you reading?" I asked, casually.

He picked up the magazine and handed it to me. It was *Good Housekeeping*. "I read these now and again while waiting for the new issues of my favorites." He pointed to a rack of magazines, among which I read the names: *Thrilling Detective Mystery*, *Weird Tales*, *Startling Adventures*, and other similar titles.

"Have much time to read?" I asked.

"Spend most of my spare time reading. Play bridge with the neighbors sometimes. We don't go out much now. Edna's got me pretty well tied down with furniture bills, house rent and grocery bills. Just can scrape up enough to see a movie now and then. We haven't been to a dance in ages. While we were going to the dances I managed to keep a fairly fit figure; but look at me now. All this time sitting around at home is ruining my waistline. Why, I bought six suits of clothes just before we went in debt and now I can hardly get into one of them. Maybe when the shop opens up full time again I'll be able to work off some of my surplus weight.

"What hours do you work?"

"From seven to three-thirty, day shift. Have to get up about five; shave while Edna cooks breakfast; then eat while she packs my lunch pail. A buddy picks me up about six. That gives us time to make it to the ship at Pratt City and get changed to our work clothes.

"You work in the blacksmith division, don't you? Did you begin as an apprentice?"

"No, I started out as helper. Helpers get a higher rate of pay than apprentices to begin with. Last year the company signed an educational agreement with the I.C.S. (International Correspondence Schools) and many of our helpers enrolled for apprenticeship training. I would have enrolled if they had offered this training when I began working there. An apprentice has a higher rating when he becomes a mechanic than the man who begins as helper. I started out as hammer boy. A hammer boy operates the throttle of the big steam hammer that is used to beat hot metal bars into shape for machining. Now I work with the drill press and the lathe; that is, I machine the jobs which the hammer turns out in the rough. Most of our jobs are repair work on the company's locomotives. In heat times we have as many as twenty-five men in our division; but work's on the drag at present. We are only working three days a week, but I think we will go on a four-day shift beginning next week."

"What is the average salary for blacksmiths?" I ventured, casually.

"We get paid by the hour," Loyd explained "and have various ratings. Mine is seventy-five cents an hour. We work an eight-hour shift."

He paused and peered through the window beside him as we heard the tread of passing footsteps on the gravel street.

"Hello, Mandy!" called a girl's voice from the street.

"Hello!" Loyd called back.

Edna, who in the meantime had been conversing with my wife, turned to me and explained: "All the folks 'round here call him Mandy. He picked up that nickname when he started working at the plant. The fellows thought he was sort of 'sissy' at first. I guess it was because he always goes and comes from work dressed up in the latest fashion. I've never seen him in his work clothes, though I have to wash two or three changes of them every week."

"They don't think that about you now, do they Loyd?" asked my wife.

"I hope to croak the first cockeyed nut that sticks out his neck like he thinks so," blurted Loyd, grimly.

"But the name has stuck, anyway," said Edna.

It was hardly the time for my wife to mention it, but I can't say that Loyd seemed to take any offense when she suggested that Edna show me some of the fancy needle work which her husband had amassed through years of painstaking devotion to his particular hobby. I say particular, because it is a rare thing to find a man of Loyd's occupation who can appreciate this particular art; rarer still to find one who is skilled in it.

Among the specimens that Edna brought out of a large cedar chest were embroidered boudoir and buffet pieces, table covers and napkins, and a variety of silken boudoir pillows.

"When did you form this strange habit?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't remember," said Loyd; "just picked it up a long while ago."

"I'll tell you when it started," Edna put in; "His mother told me all about it. He always hated the untidy habits of his family from the time he was old enough to notice them. He used to beg for pretty coverlets and pillows for his bed, and when his mother refused to buy them, some of the women in the neighborhood taught him and he began decorating his plain pillows and coverlets so that he might have the things he liked around him."

"Edna, you have loads of needle work of your own, haven't you?" asked my wife.

"Yes, but I've about quit doing it any more. Between us, we've got more than we'll ever be able to use; and I've given hundreds of pieces away."

"But you'll be doing some of a different kind in a few more years, I suppose?"

Edna looked at my wife and laughed. "No, I suppose not. We've about given up hope. Anyway I don't think Loyd wants any children."

"I don't want any?" exploded Loyd; "I don't want how many more, why don't you say? I practically raise all the neighbors' children now. I wouldn't have room for my own if I had any."

"I was beginning to think they were on the verge of a family quarrel when Edna laughingly explained that Loyd did not like the idea of having his house overrun by the neighborhood children.

"But it's mostly my fault," she continued. I've always played with the children, and when we moved down here away from Loyd's family I got lonesome while he was at work, so I began inviting the children in for company. I played games with them and always gave them milkshakes and ice cream. Pretty soon I had as many as twenty-five or thirty children coming in almost daily. I didn't realize that they would be such a big expense; and they never hurt anything."

"Oh, no," snarled Loyd; "they never hurt anything. They just walk all over the furniture with their muddy feet; they turn over tables and floor lamps, raid the ice box and pillage every drawer on the place."

"Why, Loyd!" said Edna; "You know it isn't as bad as all that. And besides, you know that you are partly to blame for their coming down here."

"Yes," groaned Loyd; "I used to buy all the funny papers I could find and let some of them come in and read them. Soon every kid in Ensley knew it and crowded in here three deep. Why, you couldn't see the floor for the papers, and you couldn't see the papers for the kids. When one of them couldn't find a chair or a space on the floor to sit on, he just climed up on the back of that Chesterfield and tried to perch on top of the floor lamp. That's when I got mad. I wanted to take a whack at him with my belt, and I would have if he had broke that lamp. Lucky for him that I caught it just before it hit the floor. I ran them all home, and I haven't brought any more funny papers home since."

It was evident that Loyd was making an attempt to disguise his fondness for children. His chief difficulty seemed to be that he disliked having to pay the price of their companionship. He had failed to understand why he could not have the children and an orderly house at the same time.

"Did they come back again after being run home?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Edna; "They came back next day. They come every day; but they always leave before Loyd gets home from work, or they sit around quietly while he is here. They start coming in about ten o'clock every morning. I always go back to bed when I get Loyd off to work, and they know that I don't get up until ten. They always look in the ice box, and if they don't find what they are looking for they say: 'Aunt Maudie (that's what they call me), ain't you gonna make no ice cream today? And I say: 'Yes, after awhile maybe we will make some.' Then they just sit around or play till I get my work done; and I know that there isn't any way to get rid of them until I have made the ice cream, so what else can I do?"

"You could run them home," suggested Loyd.

"Yes," said Edna; "and by Christmas you'd have them all back again by fixing up a big Christmas tree and playing Santa Claus for them. Why, I bet you, last Christmas you spent a hundred dollars on presents and fruit and candy for those children."

Loyd grinned sheepishly. "I don't see how you get any work done with them hanging around all the time," he grumbled.

"Does it take much work to keep a compact little house like this?" asked my wife.

"It doesn't seem so," said Edna; "but it is so crowded that one can hardly use a mop without bumping the handle against the furniture." She rose and started toward the door leading to the dining room, saying, "Come, let me show you the rest of our little home."

All the rooms are of about the same dimensions as the living room, which appears to be about ten by twelve feet; and all the rooms except one are equally as crowded with such furniture as one finds in the usual modern home. There are two bed rooms. One is furnished with an ornate four-poster bedroom suite, with orange spread and draperies to match; the other with a plain iron bed covered with a blue spread.

"This," commented Edna, "is our spare room. When we have overnight company we give them our room and we sleep here. At first we used this as a junk room, but we got tired of sleeping on the floor when we had company, so we bought this extra bed."

The kitchen is immaculate. Small white curtains hang on the windows, and the ivory linoleum glistens in the light. The gas range is snow white porcelain, and there is a kitchen cabinet to match the color scheme. For lack of space the electric ice box had been placed in the dining room, which has modernistic furniture, and another linoleum of variegated pattern covers this floor also.

Loyd opened the door leading to the back porch and three beautiful Persian kittens emerged from the darkness and began purring about our ankles.

“The rest of our family,” said Edna. “We have to lock them out now and then to get a rest. They simply walk all over us when we leave them in. And they are shedding badly now; it keeps Loyd busy brushing his clothes and washing his hands.”

As we returned through the dining room, Edna paused and opened a cabinet, revealing rows of home-canned vegetables and fruits, jellies and spices. “Do you like homemade chow-chow?” she asked us. I acknowledged my fondness for it, and assured her that the whole display looked too tempting for a man of my appetite to gaze on too long. Then my wife introduced a question about recipes for fig preserves. Loyd and I perceived that this was our cue to return to the living room and leave the women to chatter of preserving and canning.

When we were about to depart, Edna brought a large paper bag from the kitchen and handed it to my wife. I could have guessed its contents, and was not surprised when, an hour later, my wife opened the bag and placed three jars of fruit among her own collection. To exchange samples of their canning achievements is a custom of long standing among women of the South.

SOME GROW OLD

Bennett Marshall

1938

"Some of us grow old. Some of us don't. We hang on and on; then we die." The wrinkled, but not unattractive woman, leaned forward, caught by her own words, and groped for more in a brain filled with the trivia of everyday.

"I guess" -- and the inspiration was gone -- "I'm just one of those who hang around."

"I've been in this world better than sixty years now. Nothing has ever happened to me. You'd better get somebody else to put in that book. I'm just around, been around for a long time. Won't be much longer though, I think."

"Will (her husband) is old. He's right shaky now. He can't pass a plate at the table. Can't make a living."

And the woman who wasn't old and who won't be, who lives with the idea of not becoming old settled back to contemplate one who is very, very aged. He is a scant two years older than she.

Some of her neighbors think Mrs. Sydney May Davis a "bit touched." She's funny, they say. Yet, at an age when most women have given in to either death or senility she is maintaining besides herself and husband, two children of an only son, who, upon marriage after an early divorce, has discovered that his second wife abhors children in general, and his in particular.

Mrs. Davis is a boarding house mistress. She is a type; different in only a few ways from hundreds of thousands of others throughout Birmingham, Alabama and the entire country.

Here in a section of Birmingham given over almost exclusively to the keeping of lodgers, she sits day after day, hampered by rheumatism, but not by age. She lives entirely for the present. The past holds no interest and the future has nothing to offer. It's apt to be much too short.

Not that the idea of death disturbs her. Agnostic to the extreme, though she is not an atheist, she has no worries upon what death will do to the body which has been hers for years. How many she won't tell. "Better than sixty" is the way she expresses it, and that's all.

Of the past, she says, in substances, is dead. Let it lie. But pressed she will speak.

It's a pathetic story she tells, a tale of pathetic futility. It concerns a girl who tried to be intelligent in an era when women were not valued for brains, but for beauty, for soothing, gentle hands, the bearing of children, and little else besides household drudgery.

She wanted to be a doctor. She is ending life as the proprietress of a boarding house.

Here's the story and it's she who is telling it:

"I was born in Texas in some little town; I don't even know the name. I was the last of three kids and the wildest. Pa and I fought almost from the day I could talk until the day he died.

"I didn't even cry at his funeral.

“I got married when I was fifteen to old Doctor John D. Pitchford. Pretty? Sure I was pretty and the owner of what any old man wants in a girl who has grown before her time.

“Doctor John told me that he’d make a doctor of me if I’d marry him. I wanted to be a doctor. So we were married. He was going to send me to school. After we married, though, he didn’t have much time for me in schooling.

“He died of typhoid when I was twenty-two and I was left with a baby boy and nothing else.

“So I married Will Davis, a brick mason. I was right fond of Will, and I needed a husband.

“We came to Birmingham in 1901. This wasn’t much of a place then, rough and wild. It has grown up since. I started keeping boarders as soon as I bought the house here. We’ve been in it ever since.”

The house is a two-story frame structure, so insecurely put together that a winter wind might bring great discomfort to the majority of its inhabitants. It is furnished in the heavy style of the decade which preceded the last world conflict.

“With the boarders and everything, we’ve had a pretty good bit of money in our times. During the war I worked for the telephone company and after it I worked in a real estate office. We sent John (the son) through Howard College and medical school -- paid for his divorce, too.

“If it hadn’t been for the boarders, we’d have had a hard time getting through the depression. After John got his job with the T.C.I. as a doctor, had the kids, and got the divorce, we had to take the kids. He married Louise right after he divorced Mary. Mary had got to running around and drinking. At that she was a better wife than Louise will ever be. Louise hates children. Always afraid that they're going to break something.

"Will's working hasn't been much since the years got started into thirties. He's got a palsy and that makes him not much use. He won't try to get on with the WPA.

"He'll die pretty soon, I think, but I'd bet that he outlives me. These sickly ones always do manage to live longer. I'll just pop off one of these days."

And Sydney May Davis stopped talking. She had said enough hadn't she? She had mentioned the "kids," a girl of fifteen and a boy of thirteen. She has mentioned the seven boarders, who with what she knows to be the triflingness of all men, sometimes neglect to pay their common seven dollars a week. If I was interested, she'd tell me something about Mary, the negro cook who has a paralyzed husband who she wishes to get on "the disability." Taxes? Sure she managed to keep them paid, but you don't take forty-two dollars a week and try to do something. It's hard.

"John's supposed to let us have twenty-five dollars a month to keep the kids up. But it's not always that he gets it in. Times are hard for him too. And when he married Louise he married the whole family. They're a no good bunch.

"It takes money to send children to school. John Junior'll be starting high school pretty soon and that means more money."

And now the woman was positive she had spoke plenty. She was tired. But not old! Even if she was going to bed at seven o'clock because her stomach hurt; even babies have stomach aches.

She is tired with the contemplation of existence. She has worked for the better part of a lifetime for something and some ones who have not reciprocated. She has lived, pathetically, with two men, for either of whom she could feel more than a mild affection. She has borne one a son, who husband Will says is an ill-tempered skunk.

It is a drab but poignant story of futility and frustration that Mrs. Davis will leave behind when she is blotted out finally and completely.

But she thinks not. It's dull to her, unspeakably dull. She isn't concerned with it. She's worried now about the stomach ache, sleep and tomorrow morning's breakfast.

BOOK BINDERS

Bennett Marshall

1938

The timid fingers of the blind man spread hesitatingly over the page, cautiously consulting its texture. He has read!

The bold, clutching hands of a school boy, or a coal miner, grasp eagerly, hold forth, twist, turn, and they have read and learned – all from books today made possible by the Works Progress Administration through a Birmingham, Alabama Book-Binding Project – a Jefferson County agent of rejuvenation.

Magic word that, but the book-binding group, headed by Mrs. Daisy Jinnett, knows that it has become a bestower of new life. Certainly, blind students at the Talladega School for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind might believe so. Even more assuredly might the thought go with hundreds of school teachers in Jefferson County and their thousands of pupils.

For this Birmingham project is providing books to all where there might have been none. It has taken tattered books, old books, soiled and grimy books, books from which none would ever read again, and given them another being.

It has taken weary works, bowed with the regrets of a mishandled life, an outlived usefulness and made of them serviceable volumes, clad in comfortable color. Books slain by slovenly care are daily being reborn under the skilled hands of these women work relief employees, who may have found for themselves rejuvenation in a task which provides food for empty stomachs.

The workers have been and are engaged in the complicated task of binding Braille works for the Talladega School. They have bound almost uncountable books for the Jefferson County Board of Education, project sponsor, and nearly as many for numerous community recreation center libraries.

The work, as valuable as any produced by WPA projects in the city, began no later than 1936.

Birmingham, steel capital of the South, was even then still in the midst of the "great depression." Steel mills, industrial heart of the industrial city, were yet far from reaching their pre-crash levels of production. Workers were idle, and, for the first time despondent. Above all stood the fact that some were hungry.

What had started in 1929 still showed no great signs of final expiration. Relief agencies had given almost to exhaustion. The Works Progress Administration had provided work; was, in fact, still providing much. But there had to be more. People must eat.

Solution of the problem admitted of but one rapid remedy – the establishment of more work relief projects.

Among those organized to meet the need was the book-binding group, formed, in the language of authority, "to provide employment for needy persons to bind and repair books in community reading rooms and school systems in the city of Birmingham, county of Jefferson."

Its establishers gave not much thought to the possibility that the product of the work might be of little consequence. The workers as untrained as they might be, had to eat. To eat, they must work. That they have done excellent work is evidenced in a two-year story of struggle, labor, and always, continual progress under the direction of Supervisor Jinnett.

She and two others supervisors, and 130 women workers under them at the project's opening; 130 women housed in an 80 by 125 foot room. There was scarcely room for the workers, much less equipment, supplies and books to be bound.

The building which the 130 occupied had been renovated by residents of Pratt City where it was located, but their kindliness far exceeded any skill. The roof, very mildly speaking, leaked. Anything but conservative speech would have it that the thing poured.

Of the book-binding equipment there was none. Its arrival was so delayed that the project did not bind a single book until February of 1937, four months after opening. From all this inauspiciousness has come, however, a truly fine work of the WPA.

The working list, in the interest of efficiency, has today been cut to seventy, the supervisor to one, too many cooks spoiling any broth. Equipment has been added to the extent that a tattered remnant of what was once a book can be started at one end of the project's room, and with the whole series of its workers, emerge completely rebound in a few hours. A total of 82,324 had gone through the plant in early September.

The work for the Talladega students is a fine example of the technical excellence which the group has achieved in its not quite two years of actual book-binding.

Its first four months were a far cry from actual work. For that period, the members of the project were engaged in hardly more than learning something of the technique which they were to master.

By the time the equipment with which to work was thought permanently in place, the renovation efforts of the Pratt Citians had given completely and absolutely away, and the book-binders were faced with the job of moving or bailing out after heavy rain storms. They moved.

An ex-factory building, which supplies the group's commodious quarters, was selected as the new site. It was hardly a commodious structure then, however. Fire, which had recently swept through it, was necessitating more renovation. That was going on when the project arrived to set up shop. Unable to get in, the workers stacked their now plentiful equipment in one clear corner and settled down for another wait. Happily the delay was this time short. WPA carpenters quickly making the building ready for occupancy – and book-binding.

Book-binding began speedily, for the first four months of very non-intensive activity had given those in authority ample time to train what was in the beginning a completely untrained set of workers, study their aptitudes and decide for them a definite place in the organization's permanent setup. Speed and efficiency have, of course, increased with experience, but at no time has there appeared any of the blundering which might be found in such an effort.

Progress afterward was as rapid as could be wished.

There have been instituted now an "apprenticeship" period for each new worker, a regular daily schedule, production sheet, and a record of the activities of each woman employed.

To insure against haphazardness in early book-binding, any new worker must now go through a three-months training period. During the time she works at each of the fourteen necessary procedures, and, at the end of the period, is expected to bind one volume completely without assistance. A grade on each of the jobs determines her ultimate placement.

Only the task of titling is withheld from some, the intricate placing of names on books in brass or foundry type being handled almost exclusively by those members of the project who have obtained high school education. A surprisingly high percentage are high school trained, for most of the younger generation which has been reared among, for the most part, educational advantages.

The task of titling has, youth and education notwithstanding, provided the supervisor with more trouble in finding suitable workers than any other job.

Poorly spaced, sometimes haphazard titles were often impressed upon the first books bound by the project. Today, however, though more work, clear, even and orderly titles are found on every volume. A hand-operated machine is used.

It is one of the few in evidence on the project, most work being done by hand in much the style of the old masters of the art, and it is an art. Work on books here is an ever-rapid procession of quick and clever hands and heads, hurrying where apparently there is no great demand for speed. It is probably because of the youth of the workers, for youth of any class, is seldom willfully slow.

Youth, and its rush, is what has gained most of the workers their place on the project. Authorities feel that a 20-year old, besides performing the exacting duties in better fashion, might have more use for knowledge of a trade than the 60-year old grandmother. The art of hand book-binding is apparently gone with the centuries, though. Most binders of today are mere operators of fast producing machines.

On the Birmingham project there are only five machines of any sort. These are operated by hand and all other work is done by hand. Machines used are for pinching (before renewing the book's sections), trimming, backing, cutting and titling. After a book has gone through each of these, and has had additional hand work done upon it, it is placed in a hand-manipulated press for final forming, taken out, and checked back through a central supply room which has given it a school and series number upon first entrance.

The first step after preliminary checking has the old back ripped from the book, its pages cleaned, and insofar as is possible, repaired. A punching machine drills regularly spaced holes along the back, and through these threads are run to sew the book into one steady form. A new fly leaf which has been added is folded into place, glued down and the pages are ready for the trimming machine.

After gluing of threads along the back, the book is rounded or pounded according to classification (library books are rounded, text books pounded). Round volumes show the typical arc of pages found in most works, pounded works taking a squared shape. A huge hammer is used in the work, it leading to the placing of a "joint" in the back of the book – a hinge upon which it may turn – the placing of a strip of fabric along the back of the book, the boards on the outer edges, adding of a new case, covering of it, titling and pressing for final forming.

The procedures are, for the most part, not too complicated. The careful handling necessary in the bind of Braille volumes makes the task not so simple. The upraised symbols which serve as letters can be pressed down easily to a point where distinguishing them from the level of the page is impossible. Especially constructed presses are used in the final work on these.

The project is not different from others in the city in its work schedule. It works customarily a seven or eight hour day, has a record of production for each worker. Each day's work is planned as far ahead as is possible, with each worker assigned to her task for the day in advance. All are changed as often as possible to avert monotony. Apparently the move has accomplished the desired results.

There is about the place nothing to indicate cheerlessness that might be found. A bright group, the women employed here, some of them quite pretty, which could under other circumstances become dull.

Their working quarters are as pleasant as could be hoped for – airy in the summer, comfortably warm during the winter months. Gratifying indeed is the fact that rainy weather does not, has not and very likely won't bring a scurrying to other shelter. There is plenty of room to work at what is a splendid community service; room to bring life to moribund books, youth to the old, color to the drab and knowledge infinitely closer to places where knowledge could, itself, die.

THE WILLIAMS' FARM

Mildred Thrash

(No date listed)

Nettie Williams is an old woman, every bit of eighty, I judge. You would never know it, though, from her tall straight figure and easy walk. Her hair is white and her face is a bit wrinkled, but her mind and ways are as alert as ever.

There have been ten children. Three of them died and the others live with or around her. The two girls, Maude and Mae, married and live in town. They could hardly be called girls because they both have grown families. The boys Wheeler, Jim, and Frank live at home. Claude, who has been more prosperous lives in town and has a home and business that is well fixed. Lee, the last son, has a family and a farm of his own.

Mrs. Williams says she likes large families and believes in them. Just look at what hers have done for themselves and there are the boys who are left to look after her since her husband died some fifteen years ago. The boys, like their father and forefathers, are farmers at heart.

Mrs. Williams attended a country school, but she and her husband were both far better educated than her children. All the children attended school until they had a fair education, but none of them graduated as she would have liked. They were either needed at home or married early.

Those at home have many ambitions although they are past the age of youth and cannot have the chance that they would like. A little money stored away, in much the same way as they store their grain each year is one of their ideals. They have a car, but it could be replaced by a much better one. They are on their way owning they land they are now working.

They have been in the same place for the past ten years, and are trying to make it their permanent place. It is the place that is ideal to desire. One almost immediately feels at home in it. The yard is large and shaded by big oaks. Though the house is more weather-beaten than painted it has the look of serene friendship. The porch is board and vine covered and as cool as a sultry fall day would permit anywhere. The land is good and rich, ideal for raising cotton and corn and a good garden.

Things are much better with Mrs. Williams and her family now than they have ever been. All along there were the children coming up and things were strenuous on the purse. Now it is much easier and they find that the necessities and a few of the luxuries of life are coming their way. Their money is not idled for there are too many places that it can be used instead of spending it foolishly. A mother and father have wisely taught their children that.

Although they are proud of their work they find that a steady income would be more welcome. The farm has its good points and after all you can't get a thing out of your blood when it's born in you. There are disadvantages and wondering what the crop returned will be is one of them.

They are rather set in their way of farming. Although they listen to the radio programs with great interest they will return to the soil with the same method that has provided them well for so many years.

Only one member of the family living on the farm votes, that is Frank. He is really a Democrat, but he is inclined to vote for whomever he thinks will be the best man for the job. Or rather than vote against his party he will probably not vote for that office at all. Claude lives in town and is inclined to be influenced a bit by the talk that he hears. He too, is a Democrat, and fair in not being influenced by bribery.

The whole family is greatly influenced by the Bible and religion. They are all Baptists in church membership, but they do not go regularly. They are broad minded in their thoughts about their grandchildren and nieces and nephews that belong to this modernistic era. Mrs. Williams is perhaps more understanding than her children about the young generation for she never lets an article on youth go by her watchful eye without reading it.

Even with such a large family they are not sick every month. They have spent very little on medicine and less on hospitals. Mrs. Williams says that she feels that the right kind of food and lots of exercise in the open, with proper care of oneself in the winter has kept her family in good condition.

She says that she never could understand so much about all those talk of vitamins and such. She does know that ever standing rule of fresh vegetables, fruit, and milk and eggs, and she keeps it in motion throughout the year. In the summer she has abundant supply of fresh foods and in the winter they rely on her stock of canned goods and fresh meat.

The four room house is spotless and as scrubbed as could be. There are some pieces of furniture in it to be proud of. One is the spool bed that is over a hundred years old. An old sideboard is another piece that is very old. Both of them are mahogany. An old wash stand is the third piece that Mrs. Williams prides. It is mahogany and has a marble top. All of the pieces have been sought after by antique collectors in this section.

Mrs. Williams is very proud of these pieces and feels flattered that so many people want them. No money can buy them though and at her death they will go to some of her children and grandchildren. She really hasn't decided which ones.

The whole family is fond of amusements. Not so much moving pictures, but tent shows and circuses that come into town. They read a good bit and love to listen to the radio. They like ball games especially. Baseball is their favorite. Sometimes they visit their neighbors or entertain them. They frequently come into town to spend the day with one of the girls, or Claude. Sometimes there are dances or parties out their way and the boys almost always go to represent the family.

They have an advantage that is rapidly coming to the far, electricity. It enables them to use lights and radio the same as we enjoy in the town. The water supply is one of the best in the country. Artesian water from their well has filled many a bucket. The disadvantage of it is that it must be carried from an overflowing well in front of the house, up the hill to be used in the kitchen. For this reason there is a lack of flowers around the house that they would like so much.

There isn't any courting in the family. They feel that they are too old for that. Jim has been married, but his wife died and he has never married again. Frank and Wheeler have never married; and if there has been a love affair or some great disappointment, it is yet to be found out.

On the whole the family is very happy. With most of the conveniences that town folk enjoy, and with the added attraction of the fruit trees, a garden, and a cot, it is easy to see that they should find very nearly what they want on their place.

COURTING THE WITCH'S DAUGHTERS

Levi D. Shelby, Jr.

1937

Once upon a time there was a very ugly and mean old witch who had three very beautiful daughters. In a town not very far away lived an old man who had three handsome sons. The sons had seen the witch's daughters and fallen in love with them. They decided to call on the girls but by her magic the old witch learned of their plan and told them she would kill them if she caught them coming to see her daughters. This only made the boys more determined.

One day the witch had to go on a journey, so she cautioned the girls not to let the boys come to the house while she was away.

The boys had found out when the witch was going away, and as soon as she left they got ready to go see the girls. As they left they told their sister; "Put a tub of water on the stove, and when it turns red turn the dogs loose."

These three dogs were very smart, and their names were, Billy-Bow, He's-So-Smart and Hidoeo-Young.

The old witch had a set of watching teeth which she always placed above the door when she went away. When she returned the teeth would tell her who had been in the house while she was gone.

Soon after the old witch left the three boys arrived and the girls invited them in, because they were in love with the boys.

The girls took a tub of water and put it on the stove, telling the boys: "When the water begins to turn blue, mamma is on the way home and you will have to go. She told us not to let you come here while she is away."

Then the boys and girls started lovemaking and were having a wonderful time when the youngest girl chanced to notice the water in the tub on the stove. It was beginning to turn blue. The girl said, "Look, Mamma is on the way home." Then the boys left in a hurry to keep the old witch from catching them.

When the witch came home she asked the girls: "Has anyone been here since I left?"

"No," answered all the girls together.

The witch did not believe the girls. She went to her watching teeth and asked: "Teeth, has anyone been here since I have been gone?"

The teeth click out, "Most certainly have! Most certainly have!"

"Who was here while I was away?" She asked then.

"Three boys. Three boys," Clicked the teeth.

"Could I catch them if I try?"

"Too far gone. Too far gone."

There was nothing the witch could do about it at the time but she made up her mind that she would catch the boys when they came again.

The girls had told the boys that the mother would be away again the next week. Impatiently the boys waited for the time to arrive, so that they could go see the girls again. They knew they were taking a desperate chance, because the old witch would kill them if she caught them.

It was night when they went to call this time. And again, before they left home they had their sister put on a tub of water on the stove. When the water turned red it would mean they were in danger and she was to turn the dogs loose so they could go help their masters.

When the boys reached the home of the girls they were welcomed warmly. They invited the boys in, set the tub of water on the stove to warn them of their mother's return, and then they devoted themselves so fully to lovemaking that they forgot to watch the tub. The boys stayed and time went on, and time went on and the boys stayed. They forgot time completely.

There was a strange sound outside and the youngest girl thought of her mother. She ran to the kettle and looked in. The water was a very deep blue.

Very much alarmed, she cried out: "Look, the water is dark blue. Mother is almost home! You boys had better run as fast as you can, because she is very near!"

The boys left, running as fast as they could, but the teeth were too fast for them. Soon the oldest boy said, "You go on! I can't go any farther!" He stopped beside a tree, caught his breath and climbed to the limbs.

The others ran on and on. Soon the next brother said to the youngest, "You go ahead! I can't go any farther! I have given out!" He too climbed a tree with his fast beating heart.

The youngest brother ran on. He had almost reached home when he became too tired to go any farther. So he also climbed a tree. As soon as he could do so he began calling the dogs: Billy Bow, Billy Bow! He's So Smart, He's So Smart! Hidoeo Young, Hidoeo Young!"

At home his sister had been sitting by the stove, watching the tub of water. When it began turning red she ran out and turned the dogs loose.

Meantime the witch came home and went straight to the teeth. "Teeth, who's been here since I've been gone?"

Again the teeth answered, "Three boys, three boys!"

"Can I catch these boys?"

"Aye, aye, if you will hurry."

She took the teeth, wound them up and threw them in the air, crying, "Catch the rascals, catch the rascals!" Away flew the teeth with the old witch flying behind them.

The teeth flew to the tree where the first boy was, and fell to the ground. In a few minutes the old witch fell to the ground behind the teeth.

"Cut it down, cut it down," she told the teeth.

The teeth began cutting and quickly cut the tree down. The witch seized the boy, blew her breath on her hands and wipes them across the boy's face. When she did he fell dead.

Then the teeth and witch flew after the other boys. When they reached the tree where the second boy was the teeth cut down the tree, the witch seized the boy, blew her breath on her hands, wiped them across his face and made him fall dead.

Again the teeth flew away, after the youngest boy. When the teeth fell to the ground the three smart dogs were there. They caught the teeth and broke them to pieces. Then the old witch fell behind the teeth and the dogs caught her and killed her.

The youngest boy climbed down from the tree, blew his breath in the palm of his hands and wiped them across the old witch's face. Then he went back to find the brothers.

When he came to the next brother he wiped his hands across the dead boy's face, and the boy came back to life. Then they went on to find the oldest brother.

When they came to the oldest brother, the youngest brother wiped his hands across the dead face, and the oldest brother came back to life.

"The old witch is dead," said the youngest brother, "so we can go see the girls whenever we feel like it."

"Let's go back now," said the oldest brother.

TAX UTOPIA

Pettersen Marzoni

(No date given)

Fairhope, Alabama, on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, is the only community in America the refunding of taxes is a general practice. There are no individual landowners, all of the property being held by the Fairhope Single Tax Colony, which was established in January 1895 by a group of Des Moines, Iowa, residents, who decided to put the theories of Henry George into practice.

Other original settlers with similar theories from Ohio, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Pacific coast states joined the Iowa group and purchased land on the high bluff overlooking the bay. The town of Fairhope was incorporated and a form of single taxation developed. This has worked well. Fairhope is a prosperous vacation center of winter homes for out-of-state visitors and summer homes of Alabama citizens. Its population was 1549 in the 1930 census, with an estimated population of 1,800 in 1937.

There has been no deviation from the original theory of taxation that a just tax on the land should pay all expenses of government that are now derived from so many other sources of levy. A simple form of taxation was set up within the complicated structure of State, county, and municipal taxes. No land is sold by the Fairhope Single Tax Colony, but is leased for ninety-nine years at so much per year, which is considered a tax. The rate varies annually, dependent on economic conditions. From this land rental the Colony pays all State, county and city taxes.

In turn the lease holder pays the usual State, county and city taxes on all improvements. This payment is then deducted from the rental paid to the Colony. If the regular taxes equal or exceed the Colony charge, the Colony charge is refunded. In the middle 1920s several leaseholders were paid the difference between the Colony rental and taxes on improvements, when the latter was in excess. Even automobile taxes were included, but this practice has since been abolished.

Fairhope is also the center of a successful educational experiment. The School of Organic Education there is one of the first intuitions of progressive education established in America. It was founded in 1907 by Mrs. Marietta Johnson, one of the leaders in the new school of teaching, lecturer, and author of *Youth in the World of Men.* The school has been visited by educational leaders of America and Europe and praised for its efficiency. The average enrollment is between 150 and 200, with a faculty of 35. Students are admitted to the first grade and graduated with sufficient credits for college entrance. Aircraft, handicraft, and outdoor classes are stressed. No effort is made to force education on the children who are allowed to develop with a minimum of restriction. The majority of students come from without the state. In addition to the regular curriculum classes are conducted for teachers.

The principal aspect of Fairhope to the visitor is not the experiment in economy and education, but that of a resort, with comfortable hotels and cottages and ample facilities for fishing and water sports. It is eleven miles south of the junction of US 31 and US 90 at the eastern end of Cochrane Bridge across Mobile Bay.

FISHING PETER

Maggie Boswell

1936

Near Panther Creek in a remote section of Lowndes County lived an old Negro named Peter. He was known as fishing Peter because that was his chief occupation.

He considered Sunday his lucky day, for he thought he would catch more fish on that day than any other and included his friends to go fishing with him on that day. They accepted his invitation for a while, but soon thought they were doing wrong and told him, "Six days shall we work and rest on the seventh." He went alone after his friends refused. One day (Sunday) after he had had an abundant catch, a ghost appeared on the water in the form of a black robed man and said, "Peter, for a long time you've been fishing on Sunday and haven't kept the Sabbath day Holy. Peter, you shall never fish again."

Peter was very frightened and rushed home telling his family and friends what had happened. He was immediately taken very ill from which he never recovered and was never able to go outside again. He warned his friends, while he was sick, never to fish on Sunday, but keep it Holy.

THE HAUNTED GRAVEYARD IN LOWNDES COUNTY

Maggie Boswell

1936

In a remote section of Lowndes County there is a neighborhood know as Hopewell; here is located a graveyard thought to be haunted.

To pass the graveyard after dark and especially on dreary nights is a dread of horror. Some think they can hear singing, others imagine they can hear prayers and still others see forms of persons. A young man was returning to his home at a late hour on Sunday night was forced to pass this haunted cemetery. As he passed this spot a form resembling that of a woman crawled across the road before him. The beautiful horse he was riding bucked and snorted and the young man became frightened. He rode home at full speed and of course told the story.

Before this story became generally known a boy of early teens was going for the doctor for a member of this family. It happened that he also had to pass this dreadful spot. Upon reaching it, fearfully frightened with the ghost stories he had heard long before, a ball of fire appeared and was whizzing ‘roun and ‘roun above the road ahead of him. His horse began bucking and threw both rider and saddle beneath the fiery ball.

These and similar stories have been handed down from one generation to the other by residents of the Hopewell community. Today, when on visits the little community the residents like to tell the story of their “haunted” graveyard.

OLD COURT STREET CHURCH GHOST

O.O. Lowery

(No date listed)

Among the superstitions of the negroes in this section is the belief that when one dies his spirit returns to "hunt" enemies and "perteck" his loved ones. Such is the belief that clings to a ghostly tale repeated by the negro maid employed at the new government building on Lee and Church Streets.

For more than a hundred years this was the site of the Court Street Methodist Church, when it decided to remove the church to Cloverdale, there arose a great deal of hard feelings among the members, some of whom refused to transfer their membership with the new church.

The negroes, particularly those who serve the second floor of the government building, see a "spirit" or "hant" walking around at night about ten o' clock. When the first negro saw it she said nothing to anyone, but when the next time it appeared another and different negro saw it, they each had a "funny" feeling, and "cold chills" just like they always had when "hants" wuz around.

It was suggested that it might be the spirit of a particular government official, who had recently died, but they said no, that they felt sure it was a former member of the old Court Street Methodist Church, who had returned because of ill feeling toward those who had favored the moving of the church. Others say it is the ghost of an old lady who "long time ago on a dark, cold night, care worn and weary had sought shelter in one of the vestibules of the church and was found lifeless next morning by the sexton.

At any rate, no one has been able to approach the sauntering figure, before it disappears suddenly from sight, only to re-appear another night about the same hour, and the unsolved question in the minds of the negro employees of the government building is discussed freely by them.

UNUSUAL PERSONAGES

Mabel Farrior

1936

On Vandiver Street in the little suburban town of Chisolm and six miles from Montgomery, dwells an internationally know palmist. For 27 years, Mrs. W.E. Holmes, familiarly know as Leota, has been an outstanding personality in this section.

Born more than fifty years ago in Bristol, England, she received her early education in that country and soon after came to the United States. In a business way she soon became connected with the P.T. Barnum Circus, where she tamed and trained lions. She relates having had many combats with the wild animal, and that her work carried her to all parts of the United States. During the time that she was employed with the great show, she married Mr. Holmes, who was a direct descendant of the noted Oliver Wendell Homes. Mrs. Holmes is an interesting conversationalist, and tells many stirring incidents for her experience, with earthquakes, cyclones and other disastrous phenomena while traveling with the circus.

After severing her connection with the circus, having made several visits to this city, she decided to settle in Montgomery and try her luck as a palmist, a line in which she had mad an extreme study. So well known has she become, and such a success has she made, that today she possesses as attractive little brick home equipped with every comfortable convenience. Mrs. Holmes states that not only is she known locally as an able palm reader, but is patronized by many foreign cities.

She is still a lover a of pets, and her grounds are fitted with an attractive little house for parrots, individual doghouses, cement pool for gold fish and another pond for her snow white ducks. In personal appearance, Mrs. Holmes has every indication of a "fortune teller" bedecked in numerous jewels and finger rings, and always clad in showy apparel, her hats more or less loaded with plumes and trimming. But, she says, "No, I am no fortune teller. I ask no questions, nor tell you any more than I see in your palm."

A unique idea of Mrs. Holmes is the preservation of the wagon on wheels, in which she began her career as a palmist, and in which she lived for years with her husband, while traveling with the circus. To the right, as one enters the grounds, is a little white building over which an artistic latticed shed has been built, on the tip top of which is a small cupola. The wheels of the wagon have been enclosed by a lattice the same as the rest of the building. One at first wonders what the queer little structure represents, but on mounting the white brick steps, flanked on either side by large flower filled urns, the fully equipped little living quarters is at once visible. It is her memoir of by gone days.

The fee for readings is $1. Her hours are from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m., except Friday. Her address is Montgomery, Alabama, Route #3.

Appendix A – List of Writers Employed by the Alabama Writers' Project
Original list created in 1977

The archivist who created this list notated the authors listed in the life histories section of the State archives' files with a checkmark, which is misleading because several of the writers can be found in the short stories and folklore sections as well. While conducting research for this thesis, I found writers not included in this list. Those new additions are notated below with an asterisk.

NAME – County, District
1. Aubrey, Earline – Randolph, 2
2. Baker, Benjamin D. – Mobile, 6
3. Barnard, George S. – Dale, 3
4. Barton, Alice S. – Greene, 4
5. Beverly, Frances V. – Mobile, 6
6. Bigbee, Bessie – Houston, 3
7. Bishop, Agnes W. – Dallas, 3
8. Boswell, Maggie – Montgomery and Houston, 3
9. Bowman, Annie Leigh – Escambia, 6
10. Brantley, Clarence – Mobile, 6
11. Browning, Willie E. – Tallapoosa, 3
12. Bruce, William H. – Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
13. Burch, M. M. – Clarke and Baldwin, 6
14. Burgess, Janet – Cleburne, 2
15. Burke, William P. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
16. Burns, Nell – Autauga, 3
17. Cain, Maude (Mrs. O. O.) – Tallapoosa, 3
18. Carter, Emma – Bullock, 3
19. Chism, Eunice – Walker, 4
20. Clark, Luther - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
21. Clinton, Mary J. – Chilton, 3; Monroe and Washington, 6
22. Coleman, Victoria – Calhoun, 2
23. Countryman, J. H. - Jefferson, 5
24. Clark, G. L. – Sumter, 1
25. Couric, Gertha – Barbour, 3
26. Cox, Zelma – Wilcox, 6
27. Crow, E. C. – Lee, 3; Jefferson, 5
28. Crittenden, Elizabeth – Bullock, 3
29. Cunningham, Laura – Marshall, 1
30. Cunningham, Lillie Mae (Mrs.) – Clarke, 6
31. Cunningham, William – Calhoun, 2
32. Curtis, Daphne – Baldwin, 6
33. Dean, Annie Dee – Conecuh, 6
34. Dennis, Florence Y. – Butler, Elmore and Montgomery, 3
35. Diard, Francois Ludgere – Mobile, 6

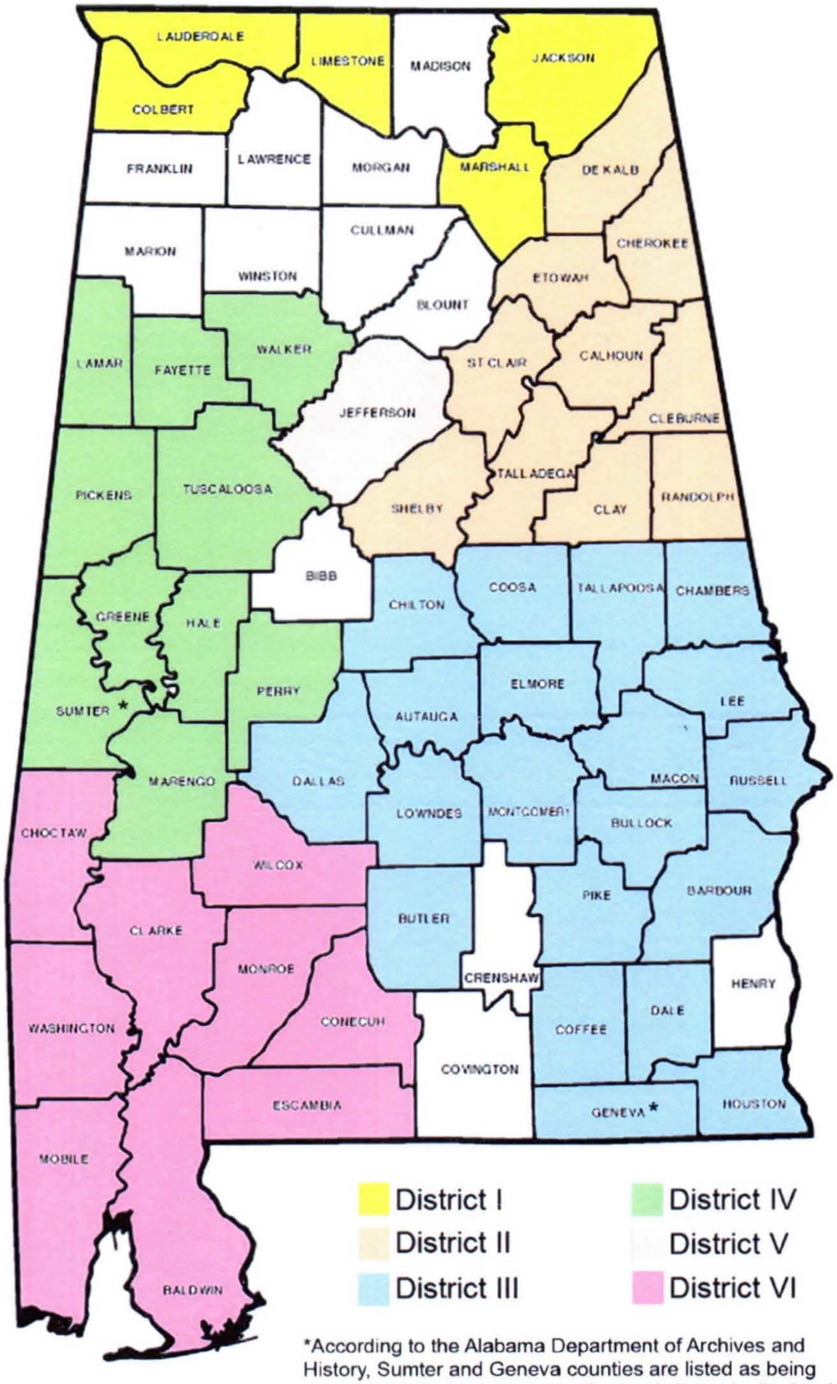
36. Dobbins, Lucy – Shelby, 2
37. Dobson, Noma – Talladega, 2
38. Dombrow, Mitchell - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
39. Donigan, Charles M. – Colbert, 1
40. Drayspings, Mary – DeKalb, 2; Montgomery, 3
41. Driesbach, Maude - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
42. Drummond, Anna – Mobile, 6
43. Dudley, Mary B. – Dallas, 3
44. Ellis, Ralph – Etowah, 2
45. Elliot, Hannah – Colbert, 1; Cleburne, 2
46. Ellison, William W. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
47. Engs, Elizabeth V. – Mobile, 6
48. Evans, Lawrence F. – Baldwin, 6
49. Eubanks, Evie – Jefferson, 5
50. Farrior, Mabel – Colbert, 1; Lee and Bullock, 3
51. Fields, Lois – Cherokee, 2; Colbert, 1; Pike and Tallapoosa, 3
52. Finnell, Lillian – Tuscaloosa, 4
53. Floyd, Katherine – Russell, 3
54. Forrier, Mabel – Montgomery, 3*
55. Foster, Allen C. – Jefferson, 5 (research editor)
56. Fowler, Margaret (Mrs.) – Cleburne and DeKalb, 2
57. Foster (no first name listed) – Tallapoosa, 3
58. Franklin, Charles L. – Jefferson, 5; Shelby, 2 (editorial department)
59. Gibson, (no first name listed) – Pike, 3
60. Golden, Clarice H. (Mrs.) – Elmore, 3
61. Hall, Covington – DeKalb, 2
62. Henderson, Ida – Monroe, 6
63. Hallonquist, R. L. – Elmore, 3
64. Hammond, Alice – Talladega, 3
65. Harper, Edward F. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
66. Hand, L. Woodrow – Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
67. Hartley, Helen S. – Mobile, 6
68. Harvell, Mary G. – Washington, 6
69. Heflin, William L. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
70. Henry, Vera L. – Hale, 4
71. Hix, Pixie T. (Mrs.) – Hale, 4
72. Hicks, James C. – Mobile, Clarke, Conecuh and Washington, 6
73. Holt, David – Mobile and Baldwin, 6
74. Hooten, W. B. – Choctaw, 6; Clay, 2; Coffee, 3; Fayette, 4
75. Ingram, Jane – Cherokee, 2
76. Jackson, Louise G. – Jefferson, 5
77. Johnson, Alexander B. – Butler, 3; Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
78. Johnson, Lula M. – Jefferson, 5
79. Johnson, Nioma – St. Clair, 2
80. Jones, Mary Pride – Mobile, 6
81. Jordan, Ira S. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)

82. Jordan, W. F. – Lee, 3
83. Klein, Preston C. – Lee, 3
84. Kyser, Halsa Alison – Dallas, 3
85. Kytle, Jack - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
86. Lamb, Willie M. – Geneva, 3
87. Laity, Jesse D. – Chilton and Coffee, 3
88. Lavender, Annie D. – Hale, 4
89. Leake, Mable Ford – Butler and Coosa, 3
90. Lee, Mary – Talladega, 2
91. LeNoir, Mary Bruister – Choctaw, 6
92. Livingston, Mary E. Autauga, 3
93. Long, Bessie – Jefferson, 5
94. Lowery, O.O. – Montgomery, 3*
95. Lucky, R. D. – Tuscaloosa, 2
96. Lynn, Lois - Choctaw, 6
97. McClug, Littell – Lauderdale, 1
98. McClure, Margret – (no county or district listed)
99. McEven, John K. – Consultant
100. McEniry, Hugh - Jefferson, 5
101. McDonald, N. S. - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
102. McDowell, Charles B. – Coffee, 3
103. Marzoni, Pettersen - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
104. Max, Sally V. – Mobile, 6
105. Miles, Myrtle – State Director of project; Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
106. Marshall, Bennett - Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
107. Mills, John P. – Coosa and Montgomery, 3
108. Moore, Bessie Haley (Mrs.) – Walker, 4
109. Mundro, Achmet H. – Jefferson, 5
110. Oden, Demps A. – Lauderdale, 1; Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
111. O'Brien, Susie R. – Perry, 4
112. Padgett, Frank – Etowah and Cherokee, 2
113. Perry, Celia – Jefferson, 5
114. Perry, Rhussus L. – Macon, 3 **(listed as colored)**
115. Petterson, Josephine F. – Mobile, 6
116. Pittman, Sallie (Mrs.) – Randolph, 2
117. Poitevent, Myrtle – Clarke, 6
118. Pollard, Maggie – Fayette, 4
119. Poole, Mary A. – Mobile, 6
120. Porter, Louise – Mobile, 6 **(listed as colored)**
121. Powell, Arnold - Lauderdale, 1; Jefferson, 5 (editorial department, reviser)
122. Pratt, Hester – Pickens, 4
123. Prine, Ila B. – Mobile, 6
124. Purdue, Florence B. – Wilcox, 6
125. Reese, Marie – Lowndes, 3
126. Reinecke, Rowena – Mobile, 6
127. Rice, Edward – Jefferson, 5

128. Rogers, Adelaide – Montgomery, 3
129. Russell, Susan – Colbert and Marshall, 1
130. Russell, (no first name listed) – Washington, 6; Tallapoosa, 3
131. Samek, Genevieve – Colbert, 1; Jefferson 5
132. Shelby, Levi D. Jr. – Colbert, 1 **(listed as negro)**
133. Simms, Edith – Chilton, 3
134. Singer, Lennie – Choctaw, 6
135. Skinner, Johanna – Elmore, 3; Jefferson, 5
136. Slaughter, Lena P. (Mrs.) – Washington, 6
137. Small, Epsie – Macon, 3
138. Smith, Gordin – Cleburne and Shelby, 2
139. Smith, J. Morgan – Jefferson, 5
140. Smith, Janie Kate – Etowah, 2
141. Spitzfaden, P. F. – Mobile, 6
142. Springer, A. R. – Lauderdale and Colbert, 1
143. Southhard, Shelby – Limestone, 1
144. Stoddard, H. G. – (no county or district listed)
145. Stamp, Cleveland – (no county or district listed)*
146. Strickland, William B. – Fayette, 4 (and possibly Jefferson editorial department)
147. Stringer, Albanese – Clarke, 6
148. Swint, Mary – Jefferson, 5
149. Tartt, Ruby Pickens – Sumter, 4
150. Taylor, Mildred Scott – Butler, 3
151. Teague, Charles C. – Geneva and Washington, 6
152. Thrash, Mildred – Dallas, 3
153. Tompkins, Stanley – St. Clair, 2
154. Trueman, A. W. – Mobile, 6
155. Waldrep, R. V. Jr. – Jefferson, 5 (editorial department)
156. Warren, Mary A. – Mobile, 6
157. Webb, Annie – Clarke, 6
158. White, Lula Gloe – Lamar, 4
159. Williams, Jeannie Sue – Jackson, 1
160. Williamson, Barbara – Marengo, 4
161. Williamson, Keane – (no county or district listed)
162. Wood, Walter B. Jr. – Chambers, 3
163. Woods, Josephine C. Walker, 4
164. Wright, Mary Lou – Escambia, 6

*Not included in the original list of writers. I believe there are more writers who have not been included in this list.

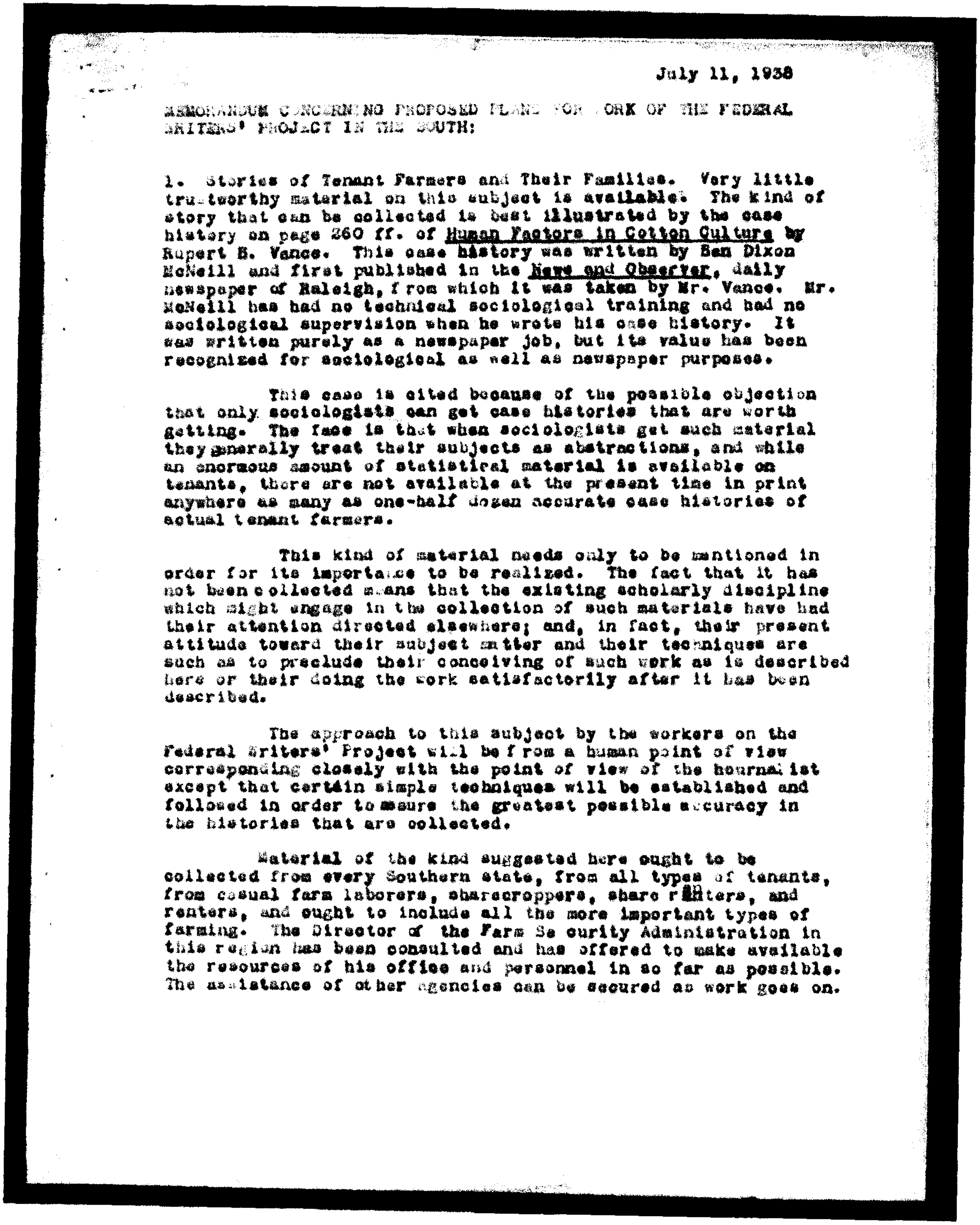
Appendix B - Alabama Writers' Project District Map


LAUDERDALE
LIMESTONE
MADISON
JACKSON
COLBERT
FRANKLIN
LAWRENCE
MORGAN
MARSHALL
DE KALB
MARION
WINSTON
CULLMAN
CHEROKEE
ETOWAH
BLOUNT
LAMAR
FAYETTE
WALKER
ST CLAIR
CALHOUN
JEFFERSON
CLEBURNE
PICKENS
TUSCALOOSA
TALLADEGA
SHELBY
CLAY
RANDOLPH
BIBB
CHILTON
COOSA
TALLAPOOSA
CHAMBERS
GREENE
HALE
PERRY
ELMORE
SUMTER *
AUTAUGA
LEE
MARENGO
DALLAS
MACON
RUSSELL
CHOCTAW
LOWNDES
MONTGOMERY
BULLOCK
WILCOX
PIKE
BARBOUR
CLARKE
BUTLER
MONROE
CRENSHAW
HENRY
WASHINGTON
CONECUH
DALE
COFFEE
COVINGTON
ESCAMBIA
GENEVA *
HOUSTON
MOBILE
BALDWIN
District I
District II
District III
District IV
District V
District VI

*According to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Sumter and Geneva counties are listed as being in two districts simultaneously. Sumter is listed in districts I and IV, and Geneva in district III and VI. This could have been a typo by the archivist when the files were reorganized in 1977. The counties could have been reshuffled into different districts by the AWP. However, there are no records to confirm either case. I have listed Sumter and Geneva counties in the district in which they make the most geographic sense.

No writers were listed for the counties in white.

Appendix C – Proposal for the Southern Program Written by William Couch



July 11, 1938

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING PROPOSED PLANS FOR WORK OF THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT IN THE SOUTH:

1. Stories of Tenant Farmers and Their Families. Very little trustworthy material on this subject is available. The kind of story that can be collected is best illustrated by the case history on page 260 ff. of Human Factors in Cotton Culture by Rupert B. Vance. This case history was written by Ben Dixon McNeill and first published in the News and Observer, daily newspaper of Raleigh, from which it was taken by Mr. Vance. Mr. McNeill has had no technical sociological training and had no sociological supervision when he wrote his case history. It was written purely as a newspaper job, but its value has been recognized for sociological as well as newspaper purposes.

This case is cited because of the possible objection that only sociologists can get case histories that are worth getting. The face is that when sociologists get such material they generally treat their subjects as abstractions, and while an enormous amount of statistical material is available on tenants, there are not available at the present time in print anywhere as many as one-half dozen accurate case histories of actual tenant farmers.

This kind of material needs only to be mentioned in order for its importance to be realized. The fact that it has not been collected means that the existing scholarly discipline which might engage in the collection of such materials have had their attention directed elsewhere; and, in fact, their present attitude toward their subject matter and their techniques are such as to preclude their conceiving of such work as is described here or their doing the work satisfactorily after it has been described.

The approach to this subject by the workers on the Federal Writers' Project will be from a human point of view corresponding closely with the point of view of the hournalist except that certain simple techniques will be established and followed in order to insure the greatest possible accuracy in the histories that are collected.

Material of the kind suggested here ought to be collected from every Southern state, from all types of tenants, from casual farm laborers, sharecroppers, share renters, and renters, and ought to include all the more important types of farming. The Director of the Farm Security Administration in this region has been consulted and has offered to make available the resources of his office and personnel in so far as possible. The assistance of other agencies can be secured as work goes on.

2. Stories of Farm Owners and Their Families. There is not as much interest in this subject at present as there is in tenants, but the collection of material on it is just as important.

3. Stories of Mill Village Workers and Their Families. At present no life histories of mill village workers are in existence which can make any claims to accuracy. There have been fictional works, there have been discussions of educational policies, religious leadership, welfare work, and numbers of studies which have applied sociological techniques. It is noteworthy that in a revies of Lois Macdonald's Southern Mill Hands, Winifred Rauschenbusch commented,"It is to be regretted that she did not include life histories of the more important mill types."

Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages, by J. J.Rhyne is typical of the kind of work which has been done by sociologists in this field. It illustrates the values as well as the limitations of technical sociological procedure as conceived by sociologists at present. In this book of 214 pages no individual mill worker appears as a living person who has a past and a pessent. These is not one single life history in the book of either an individual or a family.

As I have indicated above, the sociologist's training is such that he tends to discount the value of such material. He regards it as "journalistic," or "literary," and while he will use such material after it has been prepared when it suits his purposes to do so, he cannot be relied upon to encourage the collection and writing of it.

It is clear to anyone who has had experience in presenting material to the reading public, namely the publisher or editor of a newspaper or the head of a publishing firm, that material of this kind will be of interest to the public and will be read if it is made available in good form.

The presentation of material of this kind will for the first time open up a wide field of literary activity. It will not only provide source materials for authors, but will show the possibilities of the use of techniques of other disciplines in gathering material. It may possibly create a new literary genre. It is not proposed to do here what has been done in naturalistic novels. The authors of naturalistic novels generally have not had at their command the simple techniques which may be applied to insure the accuracy of material.

4. Stories of Persons in Service Occupations in Towns and Cities. No one knows anything about elevator boys, waitresses, beauty shop girls, soda jerks, grocery clerks, Five-and-Ten cent store girls, and other employees who work in establishments on the main streets of our towns and cities. Some literary attention has been paid to this group, but no one knows how much accuracy there has been in the literary portrayals that we have. In sociological works such persons appear as arabic numerals in statistical compilations, as abstractions, who, as a group, have attitudes, customs and habits, and other sociological characteristics. Now and then articles on the lives of such people appear in newspapers, but these usually are only "slices of individual experience, whereas the idea here is to present this experience as a whole.

Steel Mill and Coal Mining, Important.

The case history technique has been used in many disciplines from psychoanalysis, through all branches of surgery and medicine to the social sciences, but always it has been used to illustrate, to prove or disprove some point. No one has attempted to collect such material purely for its human interest, purely for the value of accurate portrayals of individual lives.

5. The same kind of material can be collected on miscellaneous occupational groups, such as those in lumbering, mining, and fishing.

6. Rural and Urban Slums. This would require the taking of a large number of pictures which, ti be at all effective, would have to be done by expert photographers. As a matter of fact, the Farm Security Administration already has in its files a large number of photographs which could be used, and has indicated to me that it would be glad to have them used for the purposes suggested here. The Farm Security Administration is still making photographs, and arrangements might be made to get more photographs made to round out the rural slum pictures. The Writers' Project might use its own photographers to get pictures of urban slums. Writers on the project could prepare the text matter to go with the pictures; since this matter would be descriptive and of a non-technical nature. Material of this kind would be of interest to architects, to contractors, to social workers, and, in fact, to everyone who is interested in matters of public importance. It would be a serious mistake to have the material presented in a technical manner. It would preclude its reaching the public that is interested.

The jobs listed under 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are the most important ones to be done by the Federal Writers' Project in the South. Some of the personnel of this Project is as well fitted to do this work as any personnel that can be found.

7. Legal Cases on Rural Southern Landlord-Tenant Relations. Professor Fred McCall of the University of North Carolina School of Law has been consulted as to this problem, and has indicated to me that he will assist in directing the collection of this material. The worker who does this job will have to learn how to use legal indexes and will then have to use them to locate cases in reports, which will be copied by a typist. Two persons -- one to locate cases in reports, and the other to copy -- will be adequate to do this job. It will be necessary to check the carefulness with which cases are located, and the accuracy with which the reports are copied, but this can be done without any difficulty whatever. Such material, carefully selected and accurately copied may be of great value even if it is never published. At present no such collection exists, and no one anywhere has made any move or ever made any suggestion that any such collection should be made, in spite of the obviously great importance of rural southern tenant-landlord relations. It is probable that at least one very valuable book could be published as a consequence of this work.

8. Eating and Drinking Habits. From the little material which has already been collected on this subject by the Federal Writers' Project, it is known that there is the widest variation in eating and drinking habits throughout the country. This is a subject of great importance to the South. The cooperation of dieticians, and the advice of physicians and sociologists would be used in collecting this material. The work done on this subject would not give special attention merely to picturesque habits, but would collect basic information which later could be used by many disciplines and agencies.

9. Southern Health and Disease. On this subject nothing of any consequence is in print. That which is available is scattered and fragmentary. A comprehensive work, carefully done, with technical advice and guidance but presented in an untechnical manner, so that it could reach a large public, would be extremely valuable. Difficulties that might seem insuperable at first, would disappear under the proper kind of direction of the project. Technical direction would be unesirable for two reasons. Technical disection would be undesirable for two reasons: first, the kind of work desired would have to be presented in an untechnical manner; second, the cooperation of several disciplines would be necessary and if any one discipline dominated the procedure or determined the mode of presentation of the materials, the result might be a work of technical importance, but not the kind of work that is contemplated here. This job would be more difficult than any previously mentioned. It would involve careful selection of personnel from the Writers' Project, and it would be necessary for this personnel to have easy access to physicians,

dieticians, sociologists, and all of the various disciplines which would be able to give assistance. Of course, it might be impossible to get the technical guidance that would be needed. For instance, if the heads of the State Boards of Health refused to give advice and criticism, the attempts to do this would fail. However, there is every reason to believe that full cooperation would be given in the great majority of instances.

10. Poor Whites in the South. There is an actual road named Tobacco Road in Georgia, and the people and scenes on this road are supposed to be the ones Erskine Caldwell used in his novel. In Virginia, less than 100 miles from the Nation's Capitol, several years ago before the Farm Security Administration found and relocated them, there werein isolated hollows in the mountains, degenerate families comparable in some ways to those of Mr. Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*. These people are samples of the South's poor-white problem. The existence of this class of persons, their ancestry, their physical and mental characteristics, their occupations, customs and habits have been a controversial subject for a century and a half. The Carnegie Corporation a few years ago spent a lot of money to make a study of poor whites in South Africa, but no agency has seen fit to make a similar study for the Southern States. Such a study would overlap to some extent with others indicated above, but it is sufficiently definite and distinctive to be handled as a separate project. The historical side of this problem is dealt with in an essay entitled, *The Tradition of Poor Whites*, in *Culture in the South*, edited by W. T. Couch. The best example of technical procedure in the study of a group of poor whites is *The Hollow Folk* by Sherman and Henry of the University of Chicago. It would be highly desirable to apply the techniques of Sherman and Henry to a few Southern communities, but it would be impossible for the Federal Writers' Project to follow the technical procedure of this highly specialized job. The task of the Writers' Project would be to locate such communities and prepare non-technical descriptions of them. There is need for one volume of a non-technical nature on this subject.

11. Biographies of Negroes who Have Achieved Distinction. Every Southern State has a number of Negroes who have achieved positions of importance in their communities. Several volumes could be made on this subject, and it is probable that ways could be found to publish them.

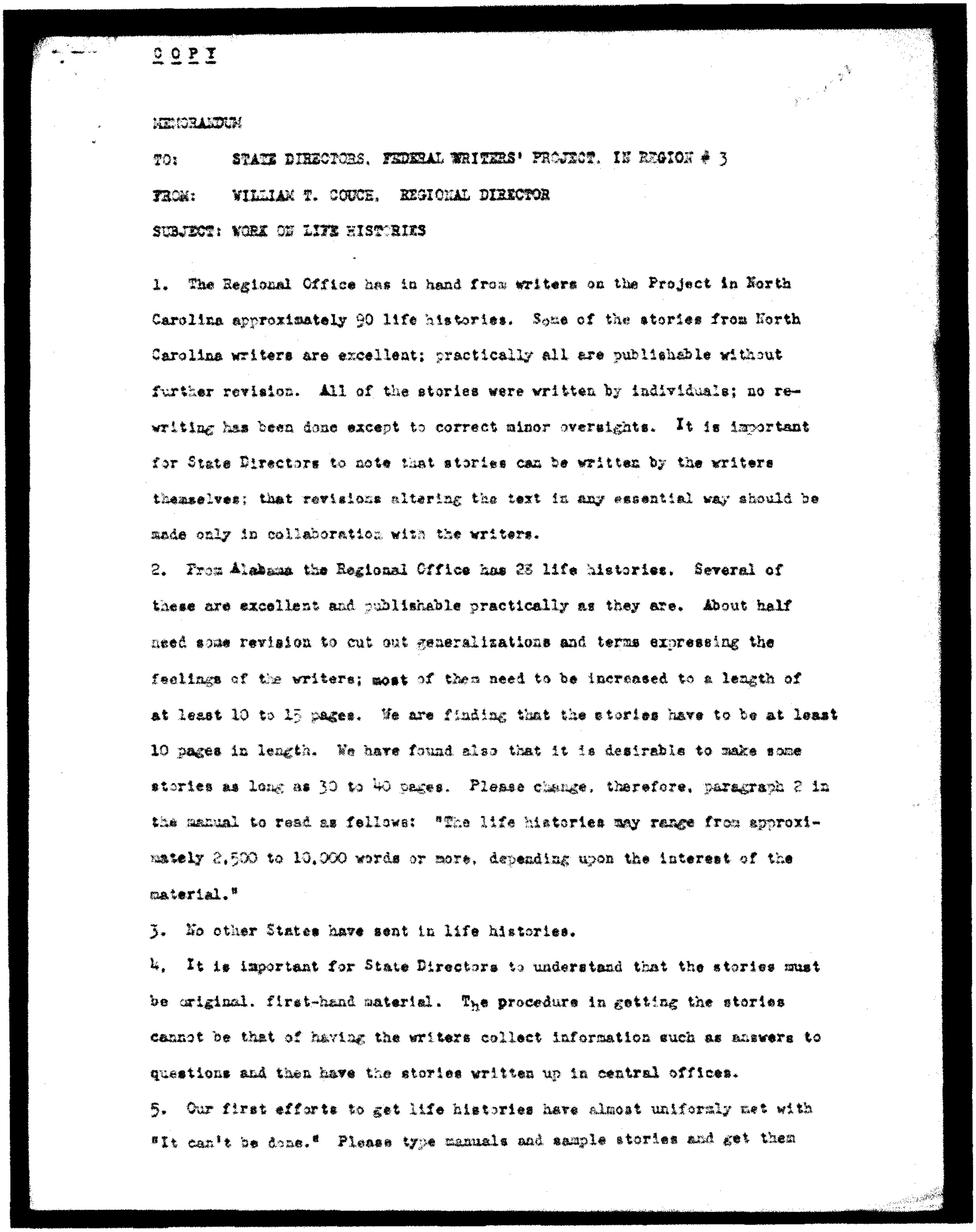
12. Folk Lore, Folk Songs and Legend. Some material in these fields has been collected, but the surface has hardly been scratched. At least three popular books could be written on these subjects, and a large volume of material could be collected for the use of specialists in these fields. Heads of the Folk Lore Council of the University of North Carolina and the Southeastern Folk Lore Society have expressed to me great interest in this phase, and have requested Federal Writers' Project assistance in the collection of materials.

13. The scope of the work outlined here should be the states classified in the Census as Southern. It is understood that the regional director of the Southeastern States, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, would receive the cooperation of directors of other Southern States. This would be necessary in order for the work outlined above to be done satisfactorily.

14. The proposals of work made above are not intended to be exhaustive. In working with the personnel of the Writers' Project the Regional Director will certainly find persons who are qualified to do other jobs, and he should be expected to watch for such personnel and to find ways to help them do the kind of writing they are best qualified to do. This part of his task will be of great importance.

* *

Appendix D – Story Request Sent to Southern Regional Directors



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MEMORANDUM

TO: STATE DIRECTORS, FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT, IN REGION # 3

FROM: WILLIAM T. COUCH, REGIONAL DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: WORK ON LIFE HISTORIES

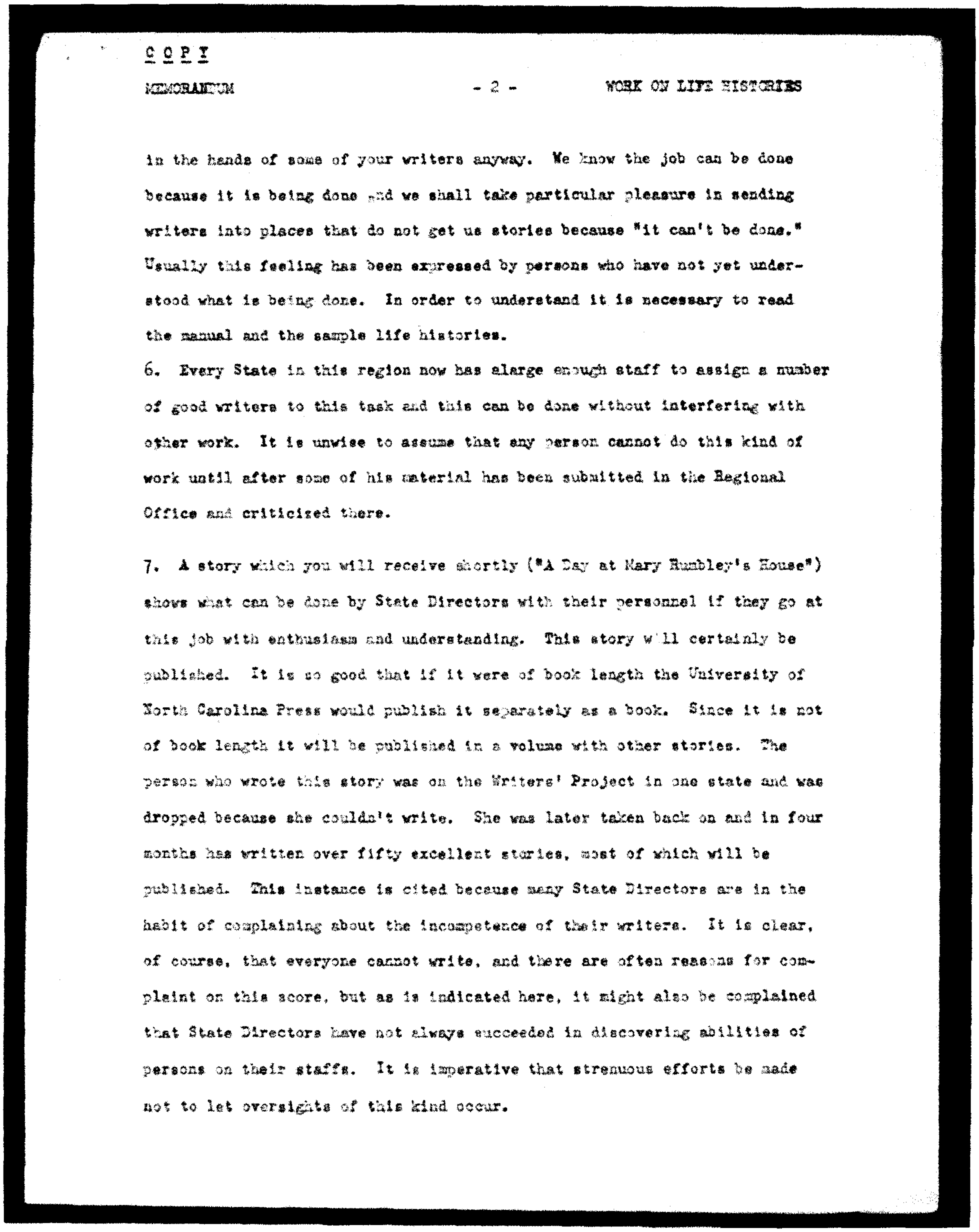
1. The Regional Office has in hand from writers on the Project in North Carolina approximately 90 life histories. Some of the stories from North Carolina writers are excellent; practically all are publishable without further revision. All of the stories were written by individuals; no re-writing has been done except to correct minor oversights. It is important for State Directors to note that stories can be written by the writers themselves; that revisions altering the text in any essential way should be made only in collaboration with the writers.

2. From Alabama the Regional Office has 28 life histories. Several of these are excellent and publishable practically as they are. About half need some revision to cut out generalizations and terms expressing the feelings of the writers; most of them need to be increased to a length of at least 10 to 15 pages. We are finding that the stories have to be at least 10 pages in length. We have found also that it is desirable to make some stories as long as 30 to 40 pages. Please change, therefore, paragraph 2 in the manual to read as fellows: "The life histories may range from approximately 2,500 to 10,000 words or more, depending upon the interest of the material."

3. No other States have sent in life histories.

4. It is important for State Directors to understand that the stories must be original, first-hand material. The procedure in getting the stories cannot be that of having the writers collect information such as answers to questions and then have the stories written up in central offices.

5. Our first efforts to get life histories have almost uniformly met with "It can't be done." Please type manuals and sample stories and get them

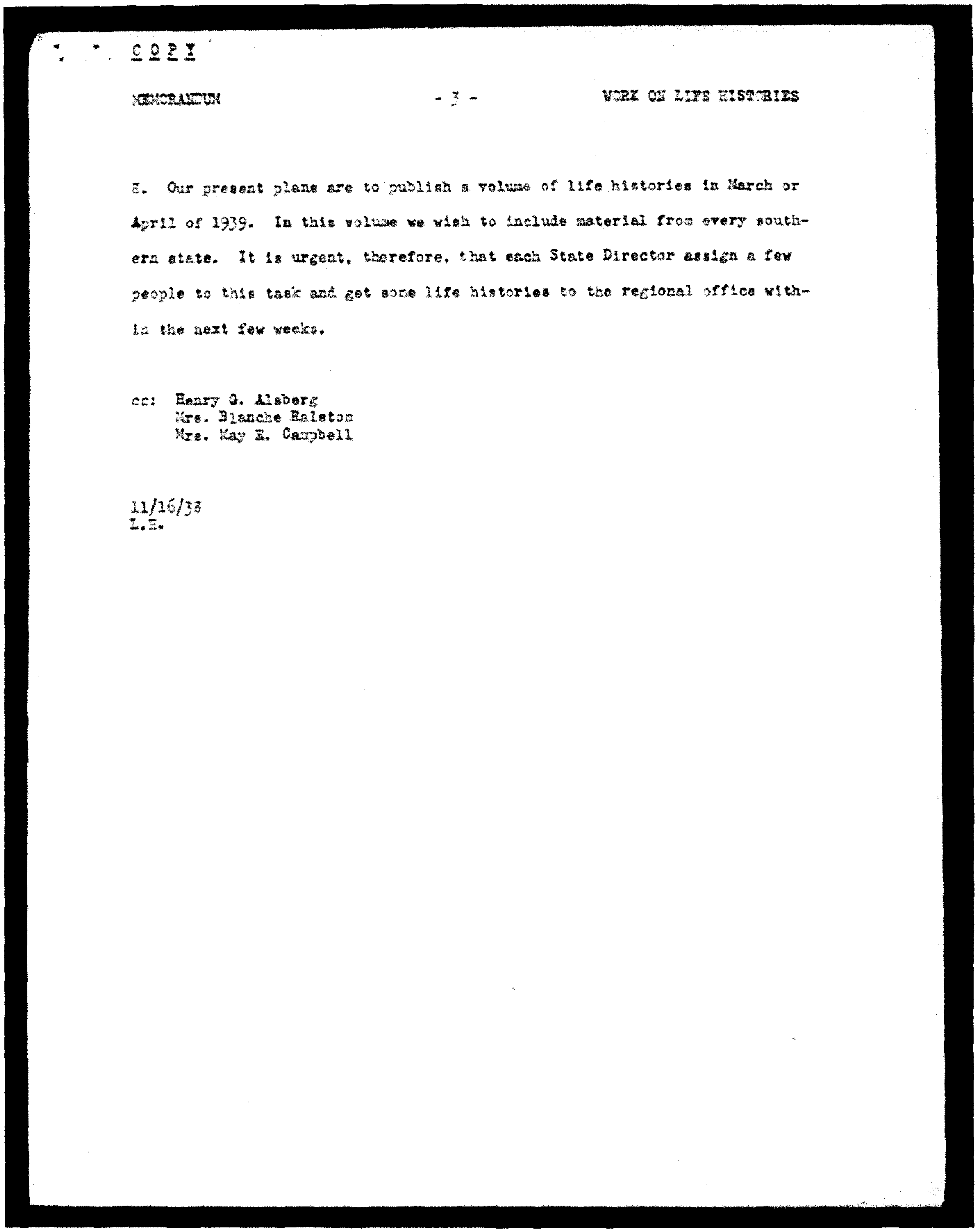


C O P Y

in the hands of some of your writers anyway. We know the job can be done because it is being done and we shall take particular pleasure in sending writers into places that do not get us stories because "it can't be done." Usually this feeling has been expressed by persons who have not yet understood what is being done. In order to understand it is necessary to read the manual and the sample life histories.

6. Every State in this region now has alarge enough staff to assign a number of good writers to this task and this can be done without interfering with other work. It is unwise to assume that any person cannot do this kind of work until after some of his material has been submitted in the Regional Office and criticized there.

7. A story which you will receive shortly ("A Day at Mary Humbley's House") shows what can be done by State Directors with their personnel if they go at this job with enthusiasm and understanding. This story will certainly be published. It is so good that if it were of book length the University of North Carolina Press would publish it separately as a book. Since it is not of book length it will be published in a volume with other stories. The person who wrote this story was on the Writers' Project in one state and was dropped because she couldn't write. She was later taken back on and in four months has written over fifty excellent stories, most of which will be published. This instance is cited because many State Directors are in the habit of complaining about the incompetence of their writers. It is clear, of course, that everyone cannot write, and there are often reasons for complaint on this score, but as is indicated here, it might also be complained that State Directors have not always succeeded in discovering abilities of persons on their staffs. It is imperative that strenuous efforts be made not to let oversights of this kind occur.



C O P Y

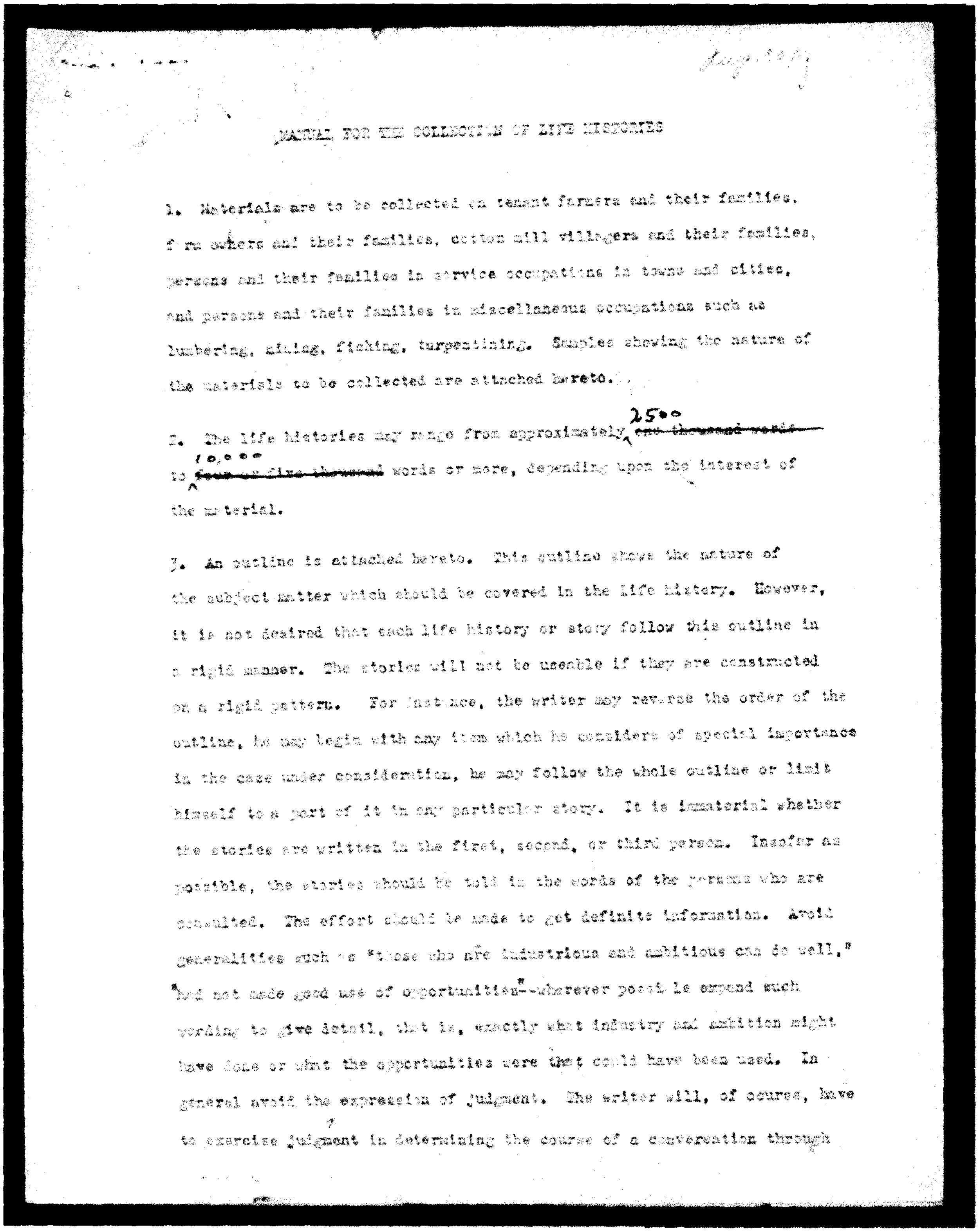
MEMORANDUM - 3 - WORK ON LIFE HISTORIES

8. Our present plans are to publish a volume of life histories in March or April of 1939. In this volume we wish to include material from every southern state. It is urgent, therefore, that each State Director assign a few people to this task and get some life histories to the regional office within the next few weeks.

cc: Henry G. Alsberg
Mrs. Blanche Ralston
Mrs. Kay E. Campbell

11/16/38
L.E.

Appendix E – Writers' Manual by William Couch



MANUAL FOR THE COLLECTION OF LIFE HISTORIES

1. Materials are to be collected on tenant farmers and their families, farm owners and their families, cotton mill villagers and their families, persons and their families in service occupations in towns and cities, and persons and their families in miscellaneous occupations such as lumbering, mining, fishing, turpentining. Samples showing the nature of the materials to be collected are attached hereto.

2. The life histories may range from approximately 2500 ~~one thousand words~~ to 10,000 ~~four or five thousand~~ words or more, depending upon the interest of the material.

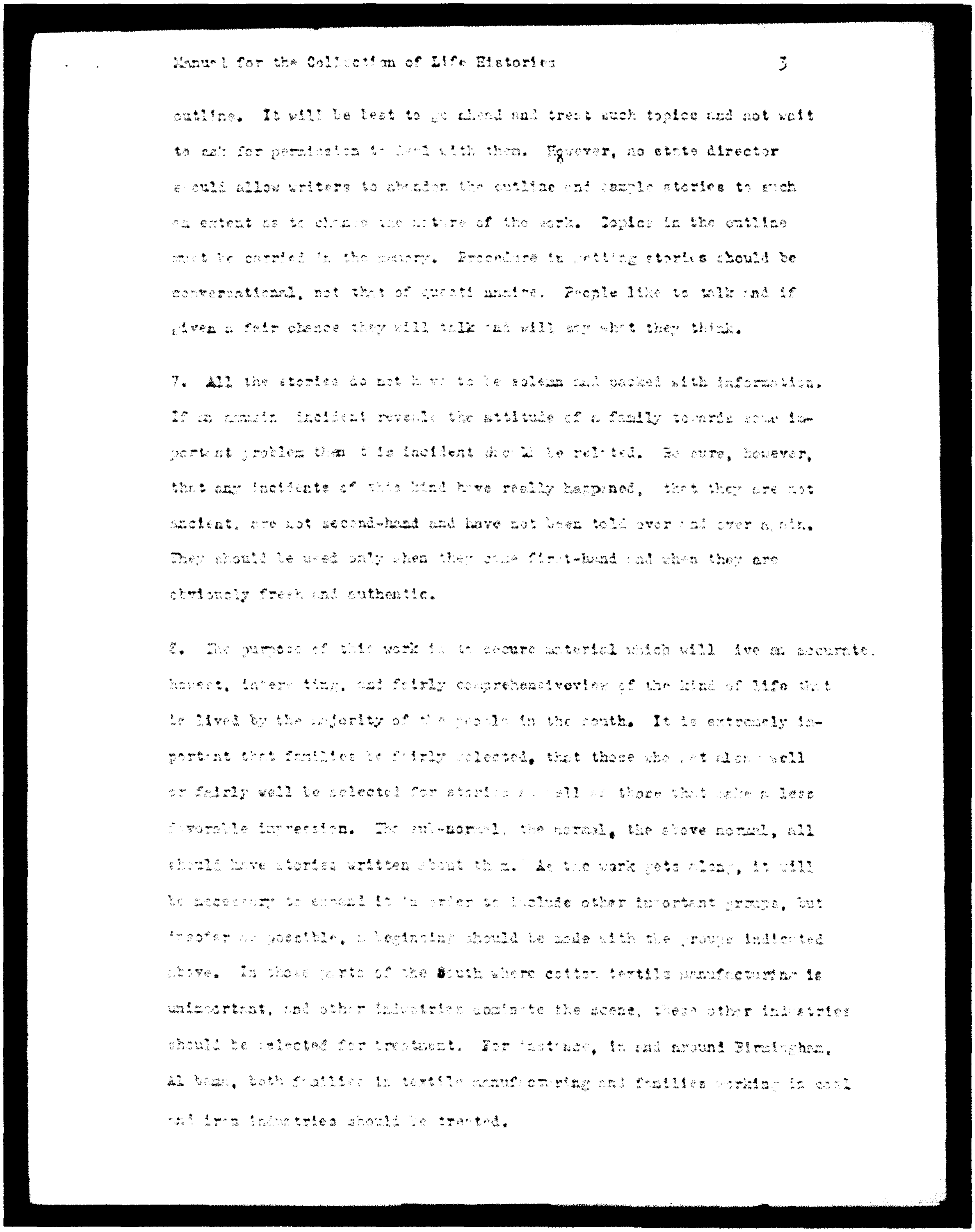
3. An outline is attached hereto. This outline shows the nature of the subject matter which should be covered in the life history. However, it is not desired that each life history or story follow this outline in a rigid manner. The stories will not be useable if they are constructed on a rigid pattern. For instance, the writer may reverse the order of the outline, he may begin with any item which he considers of special importance in the case under consideration, he may follow the whole outline or limit himself to a part of it in any particular story. It is immaterial whether the stories are written in the first, second, or third person. Insofar as possible, the stories should be told in the words of the persons who are consulted. The effort should be made to get definite information. Avoid generalities such as "those who are industrious and ambitious can do well," "had not made good use of opportunities"--wherever possible expand such wording to give detail, that is, exactly what industry and ambition might have done or what the opportunities were that could have been used. In general avoid the expression of judgment. The writer will, of course, have to exercise judgment in determining the course of a conversation through

which he gains information, but aside from this, he should keep his own opinions and feelings in the background as much as possible. For instance, if he sees people living under conditions which he thinks are terrible, he should be most careful not to express his opinion in any way and thus possibly affect the opinion of the person to whom he is talking. He must try to discover the real feeling of the person consulted and must record this feeling regardless of his own attitude toward it. Any story in which this principle is violated will be worthless.

4. Writers should not limit themselves to the types of stories shown in the samples. It is hoped that original modes of presenting the material will be developed. The criteria to be observed are those of accuracy, human interest, social importance, literary excellence. It may not be possible to combine all these in any one story. However, accuracy and literary excellence should be present in all. But a story of some very exceptional family, may be of great human interest but of minor social importance. The best stories will be those which combine all these elements.

5. While the majority of stories should be about families and should attempt to include information on all the points listed in the attached outline, it may be best in some instances to write about a section of a village or a community dealing with all the families in that section or community; or a story may be written about any one of the items in the outline, such as, for instance, the size of the family, the coming of children and the effect their coming has on the fortunes of the family. Any town, community, village, or open country from which a number of stories are secured should itself be described in a separate story. See sample.

6. Some topics of importance may come up which are not covered in the



outline. It will be best to go ahead and treat such topics and not wait to ask for permission to deal with them. However, no state director should allow writers to abandon the outline and sample stories to such an extent as to change the nature of the work. Topics in the outline must be carried in the memory. Procedure in getting stories should be conversational, not that of questionnaire. People like to talk and if given a fair chance they will talk and will say what they think.

7. All the stories do not have to be solemn and packed with information. If an amusing incident reveals the attitude of a family towards some important problem then this incident should be related. Be sure, however, that any incidents of this kind have really happened, that they are not ancient, are not second-hand and have not been told over and over again. They should be used only when they come first-hand and when they are obviously fresh and authentic.

8. The purpose of this work is to secure material which will give an accurate, honest, interesting, and fairly comprehensiveview of the kind of life that is lived by the majority of the people in the south. It is extremely important that families be fairly selected, that those who get along well or fairly well be selected for stories as well as those that make a less favorable impression. The sub-normal, the normal, the above normal, all should have stories written about them. As the work gets along, it will be necessary to expand it in order to include other important groups, but insofar as possible, a beginning should be made with the groups indicated above. In those parts of the South where cotton textile manufacturing is unimportant, and other industries dominate the scene, these other industries should be selected for treatment. For instance, in and around Birmingham, Alabama, both families in textile manufacturing and families working in coal and iron industries should be treated.

9. Each story should carry on the first page the date when the first version is written, the name of the writer and the name and address of the family written about. This information needs to be given for purposes of verification. Names will be changed in any material that is published.

10. It is hoped that out of this material four or five volumes will be secured which can be published under a series name such as LIFE IN THE SOUTH with individual names for each volume.

11. Writers assigned to this task while interviewing persons for life histories should be on the lookout for good informants in the field of folklore. Any writers who succeed in locating good informants should notify their state directors, who, in turn, should notify the regional director and the federal director, marking letters attention: folklore editor.

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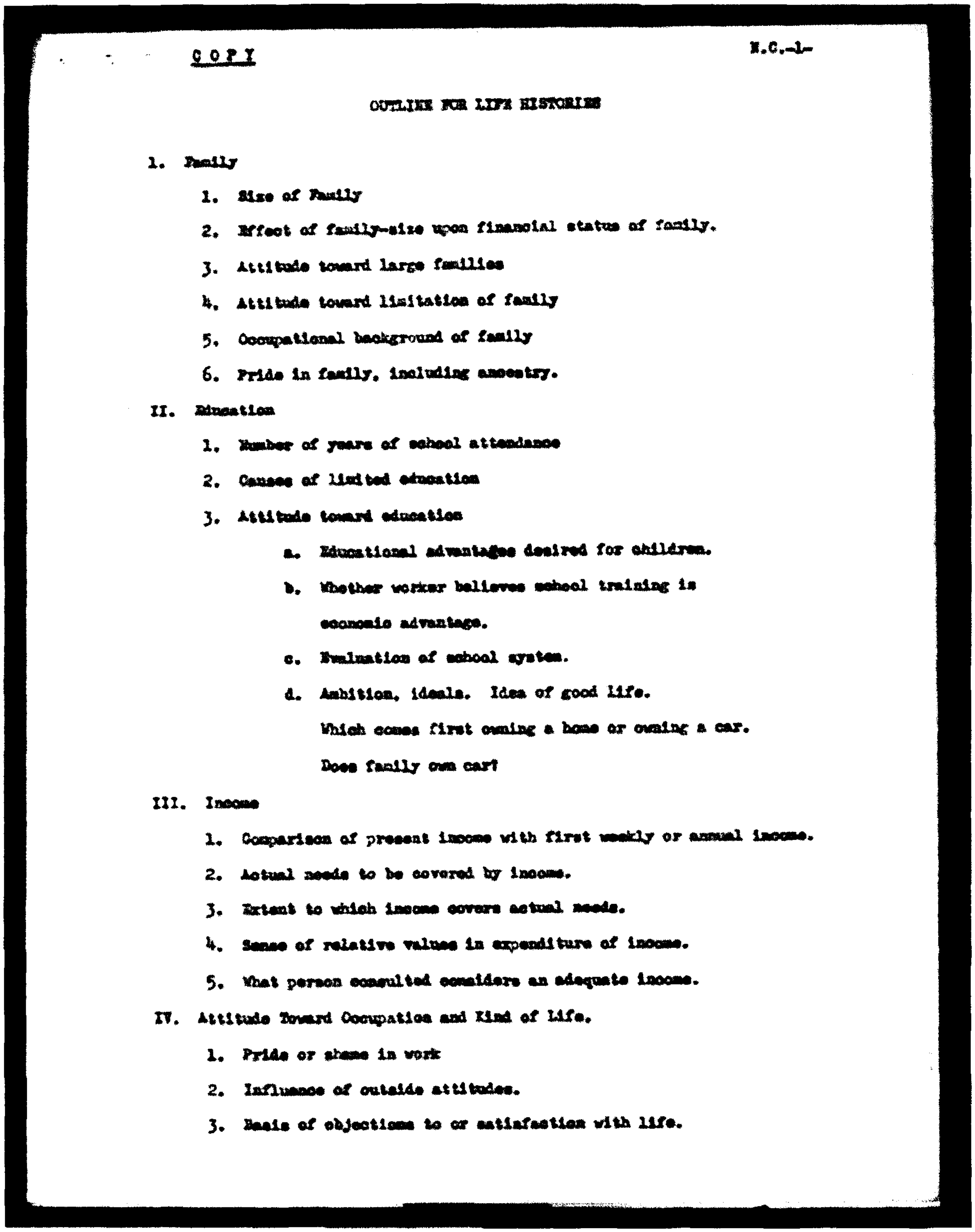
Appendix F – Outline for Collecting Life Stories Source Material



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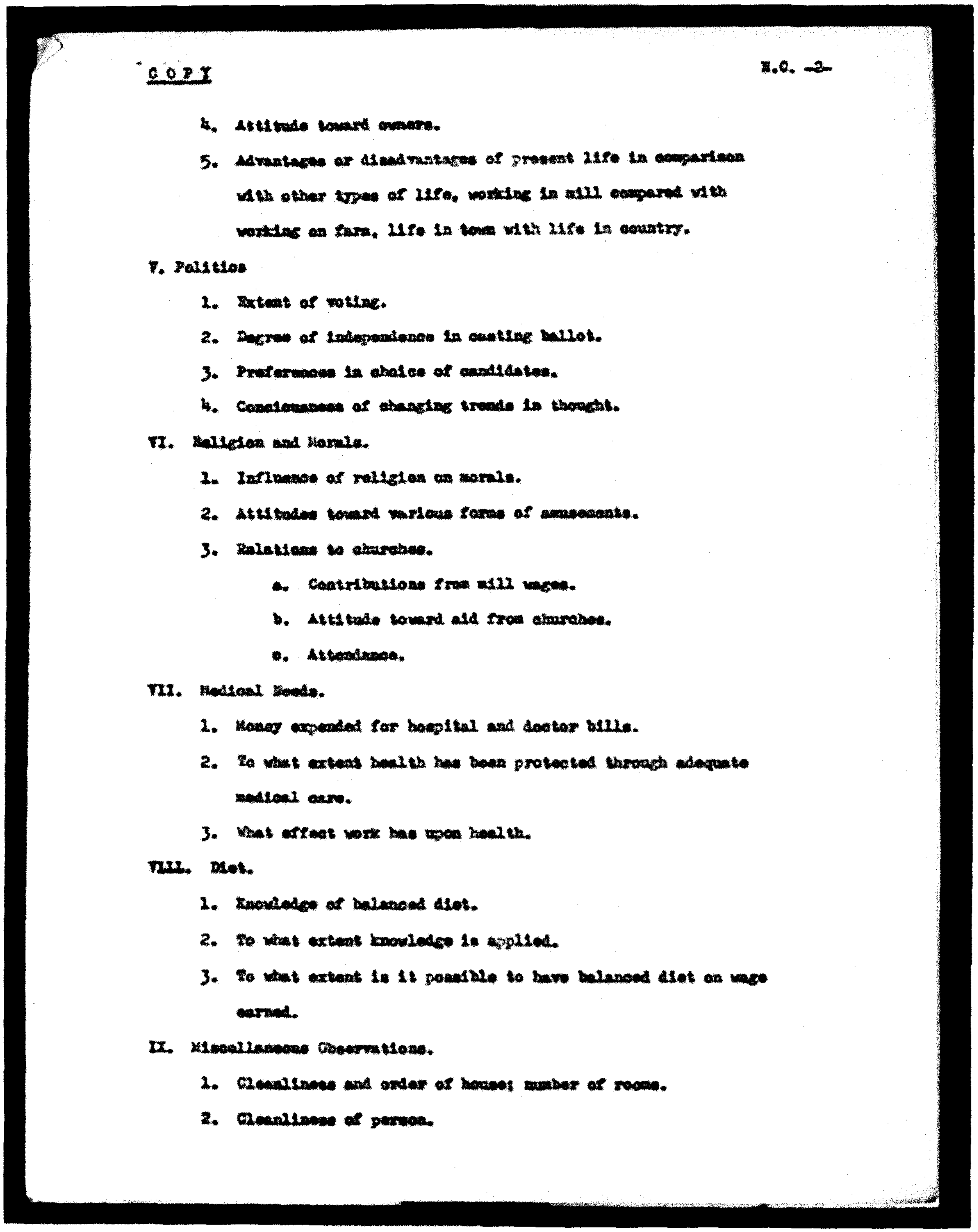
OUTLINE FOR LIFE HISTORIES

1. Family
    1. Size of Family
    2. Effect of family-size upon financial status of family.
    3. Attitude toward large families
    4. Attitude toward limitation of family
    5. Occupational background of family
    6. Pride in family, including ancestry.

II. Education
    1. Number of years of school attendance
    2. Causes of limited education
    3. Attitude toward education
        a. Educational advantages desired for children.
        b. Whether worker believes school training is economic advantage.
        c. Evaluation of school system.
        d. Ambition, ideals. Idea of good life.
        Which comes first owning a home or owning a car.
        Does family own car?

III. Income
    1. Comparison of present income with first weekly or annual income.
    2. Actual needs to be covered by income.
    3. Extent to which income covers actual needs.
    4. Sense of relative values in expenditure of income.
    5. What person consulted considers an adequate income.

IV. Attitude Toward Occupation and Kind of Life.
    1. Pride or shame in work
    2. Influence of outside attitudes.
    3. Basis of objections to or satisfaction with life.



COPY N.C. -2-

4. Attitude toward owners.
5. Advantages or disadvantages of present life in comparison with other types of life, working in mill compared with working on farm, life in town with life in country.

V. Politics
1. Extent of voting.
2. Degree of independence in casting ballot.
3. Preferences in choice of candidates.
4. Consciousness of changing trends in thought.

VI. Religion and Morals.
1. Influence of religion on morals.
2. Attitudes toward various forms of amusements.
3. Relations to churches.
    a. Contributions from mill wages.
    b. Attitude toward aid from churches.
    c. Attendance.

VII. Medical Needs.
1. Money expended for hospital and doctor bills.
2. To what extent health has been protected through adequate medical care.
3. What effect work has upon health.

VIII. Diet.
1. Knowledge of balanced diet.
2. To what extent knowledge is applied.
3. To what extent is it possible to have balanced diet on wage earned.

IX. Miscellaneous Observations.
1. Cleanliness and order of house; number of rooms.
2. Cleanliness of person.

3. Furnishings in house.
4. Sleeping accommodations
5. Bathroom facilities.
6. Pride in possessions.

X. Use of Time.

1. Annual routine

    Preparation of soils for planting - planting - cultivation - laying by - occupations and amusements during interval between laying by and harvesting - harvesting - settlement - morning.

2. Daily routine during the different periods indicated above.
3. Amusements, visiting, courting. Where do courting couples go? Whar do men spend their leisure hours?

11/16/38
MS

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