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Unwritten History
or Folk Lore.

Hugh Amick, District Supervisor
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Questionnaire categories incomplete or missing: list below with rea-
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whether the questions are not applicable to your territory.

Signed Arthur T. Foster
Area Supervisor

A TRAMP SPEAKS.

by : Arthur T. Foster, Research Assistant, Sr.

Persons Consulted, Lester Adams, no permanent address. Temporary address, 223 West Eighth Street, Harper, Kansas.

Did you ever hear the life story of a "tramp", a "bum", a "hobo", or a "floater"? Such was the ^{writer's} ~~writer's~~ good fortune recently. And this experience has given to the ^{writer the} opportunity to secure answers to some questions that are of interest to our polite society of today. The writer recently (May of 1937) heard a knock at his door, and on answering it, he found a man asking for a cup of coffee. The stranger was given his breakfast. While eating, he said that he had ^{works} promised him with a farmer near Milan, Kansas, as soon as harvest ^{should} ~~should~~ begin, and that he figured that the harvest would begin about the tenth of June. As this was the latter part of May, the harvest was only about two weeks off. As the poor man had slept in a box car the preceding night and had eaten no supper, the writer offered to let him ^{work} ~~work~~ for his board for a few days. After some time he became friendly and confidential, and finally related his life story. It is given as nearly as possible in his own language.

" My name is Lester Adams. I was born in the little mining town of Ashur in Pike County, ^{Indiana} ~~Idiana~~, in 1902. My father was a coal miner. They tell me that my mother died when I was three years old, but I do not remember her. After her death, father remarried and kept the family together. When I was five, father was killed by the premature discharge of a blast of dynamite in the coal mine. I had an uncle, Max Adams, who had promised father that if anything should happen to him, he would take the two boys. So Uncle Max took me and my brother two years older than myself to his farm near Evansville, Indiana. He pitied us and was good to us. While living with him we attended a country school in his district. But after two years with him, we were put into the county orphans home in the west part of the city of Evansville. Here we attended the West Heights grade school, but when

I was ten years old the manager of the home got me a place with a farmer near town. The latter was to take care of me and give me a horse and buggy when I should be twenty-one. But I did not like this man, and after a year I made up my mind to leave him."

"Meanwhile I had gotten acquainted with an old dairyman name Hagerdine living in the same community and I went to work for him. He sent me three times each day to haul malt from the brewery to feed the cattle, and I also helped to milk and care for the cows. But after a year with him I one day boarded a freight train and got off at Terra Haute, Indiana. with only a few cents in my pocket. This was in May of 1914."

" When I asked about getting work in the town, I was told that the Catholic sisters who operated the school called St. Mary's of the Woods, five miles west of town, wanted to hire a boy, and on applying I was employed at thirty dollars per month and board. During the summer I saved up some money and in the fall the sisters offered to keep me during the winter and send me to school in return for what work I could do outside of school hours. They were kind to me and I enjoyed going to school there. That year I completed the fifth grade. But when school closed the next spring, I wanted to go to new places and see new things and I made up my mind to come west. And so I caught a freight train coming ^{west} and started my travels, which have never stopped thus far."

" I was now only thirteen, but since I had never really known any home, I felt no attachment to any particular place or group of people, and I did not care where I was to stop. But I was put off the train at Marland, Oklahoma. The "101" ranch of Col. Zach Miller was located between this place and Ponca City and I thought that it would be nice to work at a place of that kind. So I walked out to the ranch and applied for work. I was employed to care for the horses, and, as it was at the beginning of the show season, I was soon out on the road with the show. We shipped the entire outfit by

freight and traveled over several states, all the way from Oklahoma to Pennsylvania. I enjoyed the work very much, and when the traveling season closed in the fall, I gladly accepted their offer to stay with them in their winter quarters and work for my board. During the next summer(1916) we were again out on the road, but when winter came, instead of staying and working for my board, I took a freight train and got off at Baxter Springs in southeastern Kansas."

" When I got off the freight train, I walked up town and struck a job with a man named Lit Martin as a teamster, hauling sand and gravel for the construction of buildings in the town. Mr. Martin paid me \$1.75 a day and my board. He kept me in his home. I liked him and I stayed with him two years. By that time the work ran out and we found that we had worked ourselves out of a job. Among other buildings in Baxter Springs, we built the First National Bank building."

"I had saved up a little money and I now went to Eldorado, Kansas, on a freight train. This was in the latter part of 1917. The World War was going on and there was work for everyone. And so, though I was only fifteen, I got \$2.50 a day in the oil fields. My job was to drive a team and string out the pipe for the construction of a pipe line. I would haul out my load, unhitch from the wagon, and use the team for placing the pipe. At Eldorado, I fell into bad company. In particular, I got to running with two boys whose names I shall not mention. They proposed that we should hold up an oil company paymaster, and I agreed."

" So one afternoon about five o'clock, when the paymaster came driving up to a ^{certain} ~~retail~~ oil station in Eldorado, the three of us were waiting for him. I called out, 'Hands up', but instead of putting up his hands he reached for ^a gun. I shot him and he slumped over in the car seat dead. Officers came up and captured me, but the other two boys got away with the money. This was more of a thrill than I had anticipated. The police took me to Wichita for safe keeping, and there I had my trial. I plead

guilty to the charge of killing the paymaster and was sentenced to twenty-one years in the penitentiary. At this time I was only sixteen and the court made my sentence as light as possible on account of my youth."

"When I got to Lansing I made up my mind to obey every rule of the prison and win a reduction in my sentence. I was sent to the coal mines, and, although the work was hard and dangerous, I did my best to learn the business, and in five years I won a parole. The prison warden had recommended that I should be ^{put} ~~put~~ out on parole and sent back to Indiana, as I was regarded as a citizen of that state. And so, early in 1923, after I had served a little over five years, I was duly paroled, put on a train, and sent back to the state of Indiana. I was expected to report at regular intervals as to my whereabouts and conduct, and if these were found to be satisfactory, I would not again need to return to the prison. I had been well treated at Lansing and I ^{have} ~~have~~ no complaint to make. However, while there, I injured my eyesight by trying to read by the electric lights on the outside of the cell and have never been able to get glasses to help me. I am almost blind in one eye and partly so in the other."

" When I got back to Indiana, I got a job as a coal miner at Bicknel. Here we got sixty-one cents per ton for the coal we mined, with work for five or six ~~hours~~ days each week. If we were to work on Saturdays, the whistle would blow at eight o'clock the night before in order to notify us. We were making about \$5.50 a day, but the boys voted to go on a strike. As a result, the mines were closed for two months, and when we went back to work, it was at a rate of fifty cents a ton, which allowed us to make about four dollars a day. I have never known a labor union to win in a strike. The next spring I went to work on a farm in the southwest corner of Indiana, not far from Mt. Carmel, Illinois, for \$1.50 and board with Mr. T.J. Watkins, but returned to work in the mines in the fall. Again the next summer I worked for Mr. Watkins, but did not return to the mines in the fall. Instead, I stayed in the neighborhood of the

of the Watkins farm and helped to bale straw. The next spring (1928) I decided to go west."

" So I boarded a freight train and kept going. I passed through Pueblo and Salt Lake City. Then I went up to Blackfoot, Idaho, where I worked for an Indian family all summer on a farm. They were civilized and acted very much like white people. In the fall I went to Idaho Falls to pick up potatoes and then came back to Denver for the winter. This was in the fall of 1928."

" One day down town I got acquainted with a man named Jimmy Brown. He told me that he had contracted to ballast the Santa Fe railroad track out of Clayton, New Mexico, and he wanted someone to have charge of his teams on the job. As I was a good teamster, I was employed. This construction work lasted about two years and during this time I lived in the work camp and made it my home. After the work closed on account of the great depression, I went to Ordway, Colorado, and found work with a farmer, Mr. J.A. Nelson, on a small cattle ranch. Here I worked two years. In 1932 Mr. Nelson's lease on his ranch land expired, and, as the owner would not renew it, he had to vacate. But he found a farm near Walsenburg, Colorado, and we moved there. Here I stayed another year. That summer I was kicked by a mule and my arm was broken."

" When I had partly recovered, I took a freight train and landed at Auburn, Nebraska. Here I found a job at shucking corn, but my wrist hurt me so much that I had to quit. But the farmer told me that I might stay and work for my board until I got better. And so I passed the winter there. When the spring of 1935 came, I felt better and in April I went back to Colorado and worked a short time on a dry land farm at Eads. In June I took a freight train and landed at Milan, Kansas, where I harvested for Jim Springle, a farmer living north of town. After harvest I went back to Denver and found work again on a road construction job with the Brown Construction Co. again."

When winter came I went to Walsenburg, Colorado, to live with J.A. Nelson again, but I got work in the coal mines there."

" When the spring of 1936 arrived, I again went to work as teamster for the Brown Construction Co. ^{at} ~~on the~~ ^{Colorado,} Lavita Pass, building a mountain highway. After a while this was made into a WPA project, and, as unmarried men would not be employed, I was out of a job. So I came to Milan, Kansas, and harvested again for Jim Springle. In the fall I went back to Colorado and worked in the San Luis valley at picking up potatoes and stacking hay. At the latter work we had a bunch of college students working. Most of them knew nothing about handling horses and, as a result, they had a hard time. But they were brave, and they finally learned how to work with the bronchos.

" When the work was done, I went back to Indiana and worked a short time in a coal mine, but in the latter part of January, I returned to Colorado, and in May (1937), I came to Kansas. I am to harvest again at Milan, and after that I do not know what I will do. I could go to work in the mines at Leadville, Colorado, but the altitude is too much for me. There are lots of men on the road today without homes or families. Most of them would like to settle down, if it were possible."

" Some of these men are communists. Of course, I have heard them talk. They are really similar to a labor union. But in the last election they failed to cast ^{many} ~~many~~ votes. They are neither for nor against religion, as it does not concern communism. I am a Republican myself. I have never married because I could not provide for a family. Some men tell me that I have as good a right ^{as any other man} to marry and starve a woman, ~~as any other man~~, but I do not want to do that."