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[Robbins, III.--A folklore in the making]

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Project worker Alfred O. Philipp

Project editor

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Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

AMERICAN FOLKSTUFF

FORM A

Circumstances of Interview Negro Folklore

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

No. of Words

4320

JUN 14 1939

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Alfred O. Philipp

ADDRESS 14th & Ridgeway Ave., Midlothian, Ill.,

Library of Congress

DATE April 6, 1939

SUBJECT Negro folklore- Robbins, Ill.,

1. Date and time of Interview No interview. I was there for 18 mo. I swung a pick and shovel in the ditches alongside these negroes of Robbins. As a consequence have 18 months of intimate contact with them, I worked as "common laborer" on -

WPA Project No. 3278 WPA " " 9007 WPA " " 9217

also, my own house, (where I've lived for 12 years.) is about 300 yds from Robbins boundary. Also, I organized the Unemployed Council in Robbins in 1933. So am writing at first hand.

2. Place of interview

3. Name and address of informant

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

1

FORM C - TEXT 1

ROBBINS, ILL. - A FOLKLORE IN THE MAKING.

Robbins, Ill., - the home of the suburban Negro - here is a new racial-social phenomenon in the making. The tenement dwelling city Negro and the plantation Negro are alike comparatively well known. Then there in the village or small town Negro who lives in a hovel on the ragged edge of a small community entirely controlled by white officials. But

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the dweller in Robbins is a true Negro suburbanite. This southwest suburb of Chicago is inhabited and run exclusively by (and for) the colored race.

The village was incorporated in 1917, and was named after Eugene S. Robbins, the realtor and subdivider. It is situated directly southwest of the city of Blue Island, and is approximately one mile west of Western Ave. at 139th St. It has an area of more than four square miles, and the boundary limits are: - on the north, 135th St.; on the south, 141st St.; on the east, Sacramento Ave.; and on the west, Central Park Ave. The present population is about 2,250.

The village officialdom comprises a Mayor and a Board of Trustees, the latter being six in number. All are Negroes. There is a Police Dept., a Fire Dept., (volunteer, but possessing a standard fire truck) a post office, and a fine grade school, - all named by Negroes. Claire Boulevard (formerly Rexford Road) is the connecting highway between the Midlothian Turnpike and Crawford Ave., and runs directly through the center of the village. Here the dusky village cops, equipped with speedy motorcycles, are ever alert and constantly on duty; and unwary speeders along this highway contribute very largely to the coffers of the village treasury.

The town also has its business aspects; although there are no Lions, Rotarians, or other high-pressure groups of go-getters. There are grocery stores, barber shops, filling stations; beauty parlors, and taverns; 2 about in the same proportions as in the average town of two thousand population. But the total volume of business is low, for the chain stores in Midlothian and Blue Island got most of the grocery trade, while the bargain counters of Chicago are also within easy commuting distance.

In the department of religion Robbins is outstanding, for the town boasts sixteen churches; although there is little ground for boasting when considering these temples of the Lord from the standpoint of architectural beauty. The principal seats are - Baptist, Methodist, Seven Day Adventist, and Church of God in Christ. There are no Catholic or Episcopal

Library of Congress

churches, but a small group of Robbins Negro Catholics attend services at the St, Christopher's Church, in Midlothian. There are eighteen "regular" ministers in Robbins (sixteen of them are on relief or W. P. A.) and a number of "preachers" and "deacons" of no recognized standing except an purveyors of Bible lore and "bringers of light."

As might be supposed from the preponderance of churches there is practically no ledge activity in Robbins, the church having supplanted the lodge. This may be explained by the fact that from seventy to eighty per cent of the population is on relief. And lodges cost money, whereas religion (as practised in Robbins) is almost as free as the air. Despite reports of various "Surveys" there is no "Alpha and Omega Masonic Club" in Robbins, nor any other official A. F. & A. M. organization. There are a few Masons, mostly elderly men who in better days were employed in well paying occupations. There are no jazz clubs, swing bands, or night clubs; and such limited social activities as prevail are strictly those of a small home-loving community. For, as previously stated, the Robbins' Negro is a true suburbanite and has little in common with the Harlan swingster or the South Side night club devotee.

3

The ladies have an organization which staggers along under the cumbrous load of two different names, i. e. - The Community Welfare Club, and The Women's Improvement Club. They meet every Friday, the place of assembly being the parlor of a member's home. The village girls of about high school age have a fast softball team which functions in natty romper-style uniforms of vivid green. The village grade school, an excellent brick idifice aptly named after the Great Emancipator - "The Abraham Lincoln School" - is located on 139th. St. just west of Claire Boulevard. It is presided over by eight colored teachers, and has an average attendance of about 500 pupils. The town has no newspaper of its own, but there is a local agent for the Chicago Defender.

The village has definate topographical advantages; being a level terrain dotted with four park-like lagoons. These are not abandoned quarries, or clay holes, but natural ponds.

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Thus the town has all the natural facilities for beautiful landscaping, despite the prevalence of shanties and dilapidated houses which mar its potential beauty. One Federal Writer (N. Hoen) tersely describes Robbins as follows: "The side streets are mudholes. The general appearance of the town is characteristic of a Negro settlement." The implication being, of course, that shabby houses and shanties are Negro characteristics. Let me repudiate this insinuation most emphatically. Shanties and dilapidated houses are not racial characteristics, but economic factors. Poor people all over the world (regardless of race or color) live in hovels and inferior dwellings; while rich people live in fine houses. And the Robbins Negro is striving mightily, under the most adverse economic conditions, to create a home for himself in a community of his own race. And he merits no little credit for his efforts. After this outburst of applause I take the liberty of extending a little criticism to my Robbins friends: - they might have exerted themselves a little more in the way of weed eradication and tree planting.

Whence came the Robbins Negro? Well, many of them are naturally from Chicago's teeming south side. They were motivated by the same objectives that prompt the white apartment dweller to throw his accumulated rent receipts into the landlords face as a final gesture of defiance and release, and [hie?] himself to a little home in the suburbs. A humble dwelling with a small plot of ground to raise corn, carnations, cabbages, and carrots; a few chickens; a luscious goose or two; and perhaps a shoat to fatten for next minter's larder. This is the perennial dream of the insipient suburbanite. But the Chicago suburban developments were restricted, and Negroes more rigidly barred. Then, in 1917, Eugene S. Robbins subdivided this area and incorporated it for the express purpose of providing a Chicago suburban village for the colored people. The Negroes of Chicago were not slow to grasp the opportunity. Some of them were workers skilled in the building trades, there was an ex-Pullman porter or two, many common laborers, a few college graduates, and a sprinkling of share croppers and plantation hands fresh from the south. Some purchased modest dwellings hastily erected by the real estate firm, while many could only muster the down payment for a lot. As there were no building restrictions these latter

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suburban aspirants haphazardly gathered a quantity of second-hand lumbers (perhaps some old car siding) some sheet tin, some cheap roofing paper, and assembled what was merely intended to be a temporary abode. Later, when they worked and saved a little money, they would build "real" homes. Certainly it was not their fault that these fond hopes were but infrequently consummated.

Thus we find in Robbins a conglomerate of various Negro elements. And in this melting pot of Suburbia these diverse elements are being welded into a definite type - the suburban Negro. That this classification has already assumed a concrete form is quite evident. A Chicago city Negro meets a friend from Robbins and the following jovial dialogues ensue:

"Hi yah, plow chauffeur," greets the Chicagoan.

"G'long, yo' flat-footed State Street Susie Q," answers the suburbanite.

"G'wan, yo' Robbins hayseed."

From which we logically infer that the Robbins Negro is considered as somewhat of a rustic as compared to the tenement dweller of the city. An intermediate, bridging the gap between the plantation Negro and the city Negro. And Robbins manifests a social pattern which is becoming increasingly indicative of a typical suburban Negro culture. But this racial-social pattern has not yet of itself assumed a definite character. There are still various diverse elements contributing to its formation.

* * * * *

W. P. A. Project No. 9007 is digging a series of drainage ditches much needed, but long deferred, in Bremen Township. A large part of the labor gang is made up of Negroes from nearby Robbins. It was a day of bright sunshine in early spring. About twenty Negroes of assorted ages were plying their shovels in the bottom of the ditch. I had staked out the

Library of Congress

ditch some days ago, and now had grade-lines drawn from stake to stake. At the moment I was walking along the ditch, drawing the lines taut, and confirming the slope with a line-level. Suddenly Joey Parker, a stocky Negro of about 200 pounds, leaped wildly up on the bank and commenced weilding his shovel as if in mortal combat with a dangerous foe. He had killed a small garter snake (*eutoenia proxima*) 6 about fifteen inches long. In the early spring this species is found in great numbers in the marshy, low-lying fields.

“Whassa matter? Whassa Matter?” shouted a fellow worker. “Yo' gone plum' crazy, boy?”

“Its a snake!” panted Joey. “An' one o'dem dam stripped adders, too!”

I perked up my big ears. It was the first time I'd heard a common garter snake cakked a “stripped adder” since my boydhood days in New England.

“Say, Joey, what part of the east are you from?” I asked, at a venture.

“Ah comes fum Georgia,” Joey answered.

Leaman Smith prodded the dead snake with his shovel. Smith was a Negro graduate of the University of Iowa. His speech was always precise and grammatical, although seemingly rendered with a concious effort.

“Are all the colored boys in Georgia such clowns?” inquired Smith.

“Whadda yo' mean, boy?” snorted Joey. “Yo' jes' let one o' dam stripped adders sting yo', an' yo'll be a doggone dead clown.”

“Don't be silly, its just an inoffensive little little garter snake,” asserted Smith. “Its entirely innocuous and harmless.”

“Aw, climb down offen dat pile o' books,” retorted Joey. “Yo' mean t' tall me dis yere snake ain't poison?”

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“Certainly, its a non-venomous species,” affirmed Smith. “It has no venom glands, and it has no fangs. If you'd just take the trouble to open its mouth and look for yourself you could plainly see that there are no fangs there.”

7

FORM C - TEXT 7

ROBBINS, ILL. - A FOLKLORE IN THE MAKING.

“Yeah, well how 'bout dat lil' stinger it shoots in and out? Yo' jes' let one o' dem stripped adders git you' wid his atinger an' sees”

“Why, that's just his tongue flicking in and out, through which he senses vibrations,” I told Joey. “Sort of a substitute for hearing, in which department snakes are said to be rather non plus, or something.”

Thus overwhelmed, two to one, Joey had jumped back into the ditch, and was grumbling incoherently over his shovel. This was bad tactics on my part, for with a little encouragement on my part I might have heard some tall snake stories et the Georgia variety. There was some compensation, however, for a few minutes later old Jenks remarked:

“Hey, if you' sees one o' dem lil' green snakes save 'im fo' me. Ah needs medicine bad.”

Old Jenks had been a carpenter of considerable skill. During the war he had worked in the Government ship yards at Pascagoula, Miss. After the war, attracted by the high wages that accompanied the building boom, he came to Chicago, where he prospered for a time. He was about fifty-five years old, of strong build, but he habitually wore the sodden and bleary look of a confirmed drunkard. Clarence Peck, a retired Pullman porter now living in Robbins on a small pension, told me about old Jenks.

Library of Congress

“Ah uster know ol' Jenks in Chicago,” Peck told me. “Them was th' days when th' ol' buildin' boom was really boomin'. He worked steady an' made good money them days, an' he built himself a right nice house in Robbins. Then come Ol' Man Depression, an' Jenks commenced slidin' down th' shuts. No mo' work, his wife died, an' he done lost his house. Now he's jes' licked. No mo' chance fo' an ol' colored man in th' carpenter business, ah reckon. An' ol' Jenks is jes' licked, tha' all, he' jes' licked.”

8

FORM C - TEXT 8

ROBBINS, ILL. - A FOLKLORE IN THE MAKING.

“Well he's sure adding to the punishment with that bug-juice he guzzles,” I commented. “He calls it whiskey. I tasted it the other day. It sure as hell don't taste or smell like any whiskey I ever met up with. Where does he get it?”

“They sells it at a place on th' south side,” Peak answered. “A half-pint bottle fo' twenty cents.”

The next day old Jenks got his snake. One of his comrades had massaged a tiny grass snake (*liopeltis vernalis*) with the flat side of a shovel. The tail was still wriggling (the usual reflex action) when old Jenks picked it up gingerly and steered it head first into a bottle of whiskey. It reminded me of museums specimens preserved in jars of formaldehyde,

“Boy, now ah got me some real medicine,” beamed old Jenks. “Nuthin' lak' snake medicine fo' misery in do stumik.”

“What is that supposed to be?” I inquired, “a serpent slumgullion?”

“Naw, dat's medicine,” old Jenks assured me.

Library of Congress

“Medicine for what?”

“Fo' mah stumik. Ah got powerful pains in mah belly.”

“I should think you would have, from what wood alcohol you drink. All the snakes in the world couldn't counteract that twenty-cent poison.”

“Just what are the alleged curative properties of that mess of crap you've got in the bottle?” demanded Smith.

“Lissen, smart an' loud, yo' don't know ever'thin'. “old Jenks answered. “Mah ol' Mammy was th' bes' doctor in mah part o' Mississippi. She done cure ever' thin'. An' fo' misery in de stumik she allus mak' snake medicine.

9

FORM C - TEXT 9

ROBBINS, ILL. - A FOLKLORE IN THE MAKING.

Reckon some o' de ol' folks knowed mo'n some young college punks. Dis yere's real medicine.”

Old Jenks ducked out of sight, into a clump of willows, to verify the potency of his new medicine.

“The old boy is in his dotage,” said Smith, “and going back to his childhood days.”

“Which means, I suppose, going back to the superstitions of the Mississippi swamps, or where ever he spent his childhood.” Smith and I, it should be explained, discussed all subjects without restraint, and with the utmost candor.

A stalwart, smiling young chap standing nearby broke into the conversation.

Library of Congress

“Glad ah won't have far to go back when ah reaches mah second childhood,” he remarked.

“You've lived in Robbins about all your life, haven't you?” asked Smith.

“Yeah, almost. Ah was born in Chicago, but we moved out here when ah was only fo' years old. So when ah gits old and foolish like old Jenks ah only got a lil' way to go to git back to mah childhood place. Jes' back to lil' old Robbins.”

And by that time Robbins will have assumed a definate suburban Negro character of its own, a mixture of ingredients; comprising the culture, superstitions, virtues, and evils of many Negroes from many sections of America; each one contributing his or her little portion of sectional lore into the community life of this most unique of Chicago suburbs.

10

FORM C - TEXT 10

THE VILLAGE BOARD MEETS IN ROBBINS

It was the regular scheduled monthly “Village Board Meeting,” which is held the first Tuesday of every month. So upon this particular Tuesday evening (May 2, 1939) we resolved to be present and watch the village fathers function, for here is a civic-political assembly unique in the Chicago region. It is the only incorporated area in Illinois administered exclusively by Negroes. In the Village Board of Robbins we find the usual complement of elected office holders, i, e. - the President of the Board of Trustees, six Trustees, and a Village Clerk. But in Robbins the top functionary in never alluded to as “The President of the Board,” as is customary in towns of similiar size. Here he is invariably known as The Mayor of Robbins, with capital letters. Since the twenty odd years of its incorporation the town has elected a number of individuals to the office of President of the Board of Trustees, a title reserved exclusively for legal use. But to the constituency each and every one was known, in turn, as The Mayor of Robbins.

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The officially designated time for the monthly Village Board Meeting is 8 p. m. But no meeting hold within the memory of the oldest inhabitant has ever been known to start at that hour. 9.30 to 10 p. m. is the usual starting time, and meetings have been known to last until two or three o'clock in the morning. I was fully aware of this, but, being a paragon of punctuality I was determined to be on time. Besides, I had no place else to go. So shortly before eight o'clock I strolled into the village of Robbins, and into the Village Hall. The Robbins' Village Hall is located on the old Midlothian Turnpike about eighty yards west of Claire Boulevard (formerly Rexford Road). The Midlothian Turnpike was an historical dirt road (now graveled) of the old ox-cart days. But since 11 this region is now criss-crossed with fine state and county highways the old Turnpike is no longer used, except by the villagers of Robbins.

The Village Hall is an edifice of historical interest. Built of solid stone blocks, in 1875, it served for many years as the Bremen Township public school. The building is about thirty by sixty feet, and appears rather forlorn and dilapidated, showing a general lack of repair and upkeep. Here the official business of the village is conducted entirely by Negroes, elected or appointed.

You enter the building through a small door and stop into a narrow passageway, which is flanked on either side by two small ante rooms. In these two small chambers the reluctant brats of fifty years ago hung their homespun jackets, headgear, and dinner buckets while undergoing the severe process of "larnin'." They were all white children (except, perhaps, behind the ears) for this was a fertile farm section; and there were but few Negroes in this region outside the city limits of Chicago.

Three or four steps brings you to another door, leading directly into the Village Hall, a room measuring about thirty by forty feet. Immediately at your right, as you enter, stands a rusty coal heater designed to furnish the necessary warmth during the minter mouths. Sundry hunks of baling wire keep the old stove from entirely falling apart.. At the other end of the room is an old counter top resting upon two carpenter's horses. This is the presidium of

Library of Congress

the Mayor during Board meetings. On court days it becomes the local Bar of Justice, for then the Police Magistrate occupies the Mayor's chair. Directly in front of this is another "table," two 15-inch planks laid across two smaller carpenter's horses; and here the six Trustees sit facing the Mayor, their backs to the spectators. Two long benches and about eighty rickety folding 12 chairs provide the seating arrangements and this comprises all the furniture of the room.

On the wall above the Mayor's chair hangs a full length engraving of Abraham Lincoln in a large gilt frame. No other picture or decoration adorns the stained and grimy walls. Set into the walls are the four original blackboards, venerable reminders of country school days in Cook County. These blackboards are still in use. Where one the faltering juvenile hand scrawled $15-8 = 9$, we now see chalked notices such as - "THE LADIES AUXILIARY OF THE FIREMEN will meet Friday afternoon."

Robbins is generally known as a suburban village of about two thousand population. But nailed to the wall beside Lincoln's picture there is a square of brown cardboard upon which these statistics are marked in black crayon according to the local version. It reads:

"Population of Robbins, Nov. 1, 1938.

Village - 1,379

Suburbs - 658

2,037"

This used not too greatly disconcert us, for it does make biological sense. After all, we are told that "small fleas have still smaller fleas on them." So it logically follows that a small Chicago suburb can have a "still smaller suburb of its own.

At the farther end of the building, behind the Board's tables, another room has been walled off. This is the Police Department, including the 13 village jail. It but seldom houses an

Library of Congress

involuntary guest, for most of the arrests made by the village police are for minor traffic violations. And the more serious offenders are tendered free board and lodging at the County hoosegow.

By eight o'clock there were about twenty men gathered in the Village Hall. The Mayor was not present, nor were any of the Trustees. Many of those present were old friends and acquaintances of the writer, so there was nothing awkward in the fact of my being the only white man present. I simply sat down, stoked and ignited and pipe, and prepared to wait.

“Do they always maintain night club hours at these meetings?” I asked Bob Andrews, an old white-haired Negro.

“Aw, sho'; don't no meetin' nev'r git started 'til 'long 'bout nine-thutty,” Uncle Bob answered. “Ah 'mamber one time, 'bout six years ago, we done had a meetin' didn't git started 'til 'most two o'clock in de mornin'.”

“What was the occassion? I asked, although I already had more than a faint suspicion.

'Dat was when ever'body done lost day jobs, an' wasn't no W. P. A. Ever'body on straight relief, which was jus' bags o'cohn meal, beans, cracked wheat, an' lil' ol' dried-up prunes. We done org'nized a Unemployed Council, an' 'bout de same time fust gov'mint work program done started. But Mayor an' Village Boahd we had dat time didn't want no gov'mint work job in Robbins, an' all de unemployed folks did. So de Unemployed Council got itself all org'nized up to bring lots o'people to de Boahd meetin' an' demand out real loud dat de village 'ficials git a gov'mint work program quick 'foh we all done starved an dam hog vittles an' wrinkled up prunes fum de relief station.”

Leaman Smith, young College educated Negro, broke into the conversation.

“Say, that was a meeting I'll never forget,” Smith declared. “About 14 a hundred of us jammed into the hall waiting for the Board to assemble. And I'm telling you that we were

Library of Congress

really desperate. We meant business when we said we would force the village officials to do something. Well, we sat and waited around. Then we sat and waited some more. About eleven o'clock a couple of Trustees showed up, sat around awhile, and then told the crowd that there would be no meeting of the Board as there wasn't a quorum present, and besides the Mayor was out of town."

"Heh, heh," chuckled old Bob, "but we brung 'em to time."

"I'll say we did," Smith commented. "While some of the crowd held the two scared Trustees in the hall, the rest of us went out to round up the Mayor and the other Trustees. First we went over to the Mayor's house. But he'd got wind of our coming and sneaked out by the back door. So then the gang split up, half of them starting out to look up the missing Trustees, while the rest of us stayed to hunt for the Mayor. We spread out and finally found him out in the prairie, hiding in a clump of weeds. We dragged him back to the hall, and pretty soon the rest of the gang showed up with three more Trustees.

"So we got ready for the belated meeting. But no sooner was it called to order then the hall suddenly started to fill with smoke. One of the Trustees had sneaked over to a corner and set fire to a pile of rags in an effort to smoke out the meeting. And they sure succeeded for a while,"

"Sho' was a mess o'stink," declared Uncle Bob. "Nev'r did see so much black smoke. Ever'body was wipin' dey eyes, an' women was cryin', an' de whole kaboodle scrambled out o' do's an' winders. Boy, nev'r will forgit dat night."

"But the ruse failed," Smith continued. "We put out the fires then opened all the doors and windows to clear the smoke, and everybody piled back into the bell again. And, believe me, the Board went back in with us. I 15 don't think a single person went home. It must have been about two o'clock in the morning by that time. But the meeting finally got started, the Board was duly informed what was expected of them, and it was almost four o'clock before the meeting was ajourned. But the same day the Mayor was down in the

Library of Congress

County Building, and before the next meeting we had an Illinois Emergency Relief work program in the village.”

“Dey was a write-up 'bout dat meetin' in de Chicago paper,” Andrews stated. “An' I still got de clippin' at home.”

By 9.30 there were about one hundred people in the hall, of which twenty were women. They had drifted in singly or in small groups, and everyone was engaged in amiable chatter. A leisurely and indolent atmosphere pervaded the place. There was no impatient jerking out of matches and peevish exclaiming of “this meeting is supposed to start at eight o'clock and here it is nine-thirty already!” No one appeared conscious of the sad, but immutable, fact that somewhere watches were ticking off the precious minutes. The atmosphere also had its material aspects. For every window and door was closed, and practically every man in the crowded hall was smoking a cigarette, cigar, or pipe. By this time Mayor Richardson and the village Trustees had arrived, and were mingling with the crowd.

Mayor Richardson is a large smiling man with an impressive personality, and he is perhaps the most popular Mayor Robbins ever had. Under the present economic conditions his job is certainly not one to be envied. To cope continually with the problem of maintaining water, electric, and transportation service with the village broke and three-quarters of its population in relief is a task which would tax the ingenuity of any man.

16

As a rule the Village Board meetings are sparsely attended. But this night was a special occasion. Trustees are elected for a term of four years. Elections are held every two years, when three new Trustees are elected. Thus, every two years there are three new Trustees. And to-night there were to be three “outgoing Trustees” to be replaced by three “incoming Trustees.” Hence, this meeting attracted a larger crowd than usual.

Library of Congress

At about 9.30 the village officials all retired into one of the small ante rooms, and from behind the closed doors there came a low buzz of voices in subdued conversation. At about 9.40 the door was cautiously opened, and the officials keenly surveyed the hall with the appraising looks of actors giving the bare stage a final "once over" before rushing out in front of the footlights. Suddenly came tense exclamations of "Ready!" "Everything O. K.?" "Yeah!" "Let's Go!"

Out charged the brigade, -the six Trustees, Mayor, and Village Clerk, - down the center of the room they marched in single file at a fast and furious pace, and quickly to their seats. Outside of costuming, the only other theatrical ingredient lacking was a circus band playing the "Entry Of The Gladiators" march. A sudden hush fell over the crowd, and every cigarette and cigar was immediately extinguished. I also snapped to attention, only to learn (to my embarrassment) that I was still nonchalantly sucking on a pipe, and the only person in the room smoking.

The mayor rapped for order and every person in the room arose to his, or her, feet. I also stood up, without knowing why, until I observed the bowed heads and heard Brother Jones address God and ask for guidance and blessings upon the proceedings about to commence. Then, with bowed heads, 17 we all recited the Lord's Prayer in unison and sat down. Mayor Richardson then called the meeting to order and instructed the Clerk to read the minutes of the previous meeting. This was done, and duly approved. There was no correspondence read, or no committee reports.

Mayor Richardson then announced that it was the immediate duty of the present Board to close all unfinished business, so that the new incoming Board could commence with a clean slate. He called upon the acting Treasurer (one of the Trustees) for a report. Reading of the financial status of the village was short and sweet. It was zero. Most of the report consisted of a list of names, people to whom the village owed certain stated sums of money for various services rendered during the past two years. In the list eight policemen were mentioned as having served the village at various times. And it wall the bounden duty

Library of Congress

of the present Board to wipe these names off the books, as per the Mayor's instructions, so that the new Board could "start with a clean slate." Just how these debts were to be "wiped off the books" without money I, being now to politics, was at a loss to comprehend.

But comprehension soon came. It was a cinch. Mayor Richardson simply instructed the Board to vote the Treasurer an order for the issuance of tax anticipation warrants to every person on the lists and for the sum opposite the name. This was quickly done. The Mayor then announced that there was nothing more to be done except to extend a vote of thanks to the outgoing Board, and adjourn. The vote of thanks was extended, but with little enthusiasm. The motion to adjourn was then made, seconded, and carried. Whereupon the Mayor rapped upon the table, and proclaimed:

"I hereby declare this meeting adjourned."

18

I was wondering if this was the cue to go home and go to bed. But not so. The three "outgoing Trustees" immediately got out of their seats and left. And with the same speed and dispatch three Negro gentlemen emerged from among the spectators and took their places. These were the "incoming Trustees." As soon as they were seated, amid some alight applause, Mayor Richardson again rapped on the tables and said:

"I hereby declare this meeting open agin."

First order of now business was the appointment of committees. The Mayor handed each of the six Trustees a typed list with the explanation that these were the committees for the next two years. There was a Judiciary Committee, later Committee, Transportation Committee, Electric Committee, Streets and Sidewalks Committee, License Committee, and five or six others. Three men on each committee. There were no committees nominated or elected. The Mayor simply told them. Who had decided what Trustee was to serve on which committee, and why, was not disclosed.

Library of Congress

The next order of business was a little bawling out for the Mayor. Trustee Brown charged that His Honor had issued licenses indiscriminately to anyone who wanted to operate a tavern in the village, and people were actually running taverns in their homes, contrary to the state laws. The Mayor entered into an extended explanation. He explained that there was never a dollar in the Village Hall with which to conduct the affairs of the town, and when a villager showed up with some loose change for a license he simply issued it without investigation and took whatever money was offered, for the village needed it. But he promised to be more discreet in the future. In fact, hereafter he would turn all applications over to the License Committee to be investigated before giving out a permit, thus passing the buck to the Board.

19

Next came the matter of transportation. Robbins had no motor transportation whatever. The Safeway company had a franchise with the village and had agreed to run one of its OAK FOREST - 119th. STREET buses through the town. But it been years since the streets of Robbins had seen a Safeway bus, the company claiming that there were not enough passengers in the village to pay for the gas, let alone other operating expenses. And now it appeared that everyone in town who owned a jallopy was operating it as a taxi whenever he, or they, felt like it, or could pick up a jitney passenger; and usually without the bothersome formality of securing a license.

Trustee Brown made a motion that only one individual (he had such a one in mind) who could furnish a bus to run on schedule between Robbins and the city limits and also a taxi to be in service at all times, should be given an exclusive franchise to operate in Robbins, and -Trustee Reeves leaped to his feet with strenuous objections. One man was as good as another, he declared, perhaps even better. Any man who owned an eligible car and the price of a license was entitled to operate a taxi. Why should one man have the exclusive privilege, etc.

Library of Congress

There was a dreary hour of wrangling over this grave matter of transportation. Finally, as it was approaching midnight, the evident restlessness of the spectators indicated that everyone was of the opinion that it was about time to drop the matter for the present and go to bed. So the Board voted unanimously to instruct the Treasurer to accept a dollar, for a 30-day permit, from anyone in Robbins who might desire to operate a taxi. The matter being thus easily disposed of, until the next monthly meeting, it was decided to ajourn and call it - all things considered - a good nights' work.

20

SOURCES AND REFERENCES:

None. I simply went over and attended the meeting, then wrote what I saw and heard.