

[In Adamsville]

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TOPIC Study of Folklore in Franklin County Coltrain & Shelborne Falls Mass. 1938-9

In Adamsville, one of the more hilly sections of the town of Coltrain, is a run down farm. The buildings and barns are neglected and leaning inward and the farm land has grown up with brush and weeds. Any resident will tell you how successful the place once was. "Why they was a medda (meadow) so big on thet place thet it would take ya five minutes to go from the barn to the other end of the medda by machine. They had about seventy or eighty head of stock and a big amount of land, now 'bout all they is left of the farm is one caow and a pair o' hosses.

The Old Charlie White, father to the boy that has the place now, was "clost" on money. When he was livin' they was plenty a' money in the family and he kep thet big farm in apple-pie order. Yuh, Charlie was thot to be pritty wealthy. But "Babe" thet's what people call his son George, he wa'nt nothin like his old man. He was the only boy and he got himself inta more fixes. His father had to pay most of his notes and then George went right thru all the money his Father left him when he died. He spent his money on hosses. He dealt foolishly you know, swappin' and tradin' - and a good team cost seven or eight hundred dollars a lick. 'mounts up but he never paid no heed and he's right where we knew he'd be. He want like his father an' none of his children are - like him - just an odd one, I guess. They was an old Yankee family hereabouts too.

George is a great big fella, a little stooped shouldered and he wears big rubber boots. He sure looks funny. And he's got a swagger that ud beat all. He chews tobacco and while

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he's tellin' one of his 2 yarns he will sway back and forth from side to side when he walks across the floor to spit in the stove. he's the darndest bragger. When he's tellin' one of his tall yarns his eyes will bulge and he glares at whosoever listenin' to him. His face gets all red and he's so convincin' he believes his own tales. His stories are mostly 'bout his big, dealin's with hosses and he describes the teams and how hard he worked 'em and then palmed them off on someone when they wan't no more use to him. He'd take a young team or just a "green" team and work 'em so hard on a lumber job without feedin' em right and when they was done in, he'd swap em back to the fella he got them from or some poor cuss that didn't know what they'd been thru. It wan't that he didn't feed his teams but he didn't feed 'em right for the work they was doin'. One day he'd fill them up with more'n they could eat and then when the feed was gone mebbly they'd go three or four days without anythin' and he'd still work 'em just as hard on the loggin' jobs. Don't know how many hosses hev died on him. Now he's down 'bouts low as he can git.

One of George's favorite pastimes when it came the season, was to go down to the Franklin County Fair in Greenfields lass, Mass. and enter his teams in the pullin' contests. If he wan't entering a team, he still hed to go and watch the contests and it was a good place to swagger around and git in a mite of thet braggin' of his'n. I'll lay thet more people know George than any other man in the County and they don't know too much good of him neither. Yessir, George is a 3 great fella for hosses and braggin'."

Shelborn Falls, home of Yankee families almost entirely since 1760 has a wealth of peculiar persons whose individual traits are subjects of common conversation and amusement. Proud old English families have degenerated through poverty or certain members of the families have by their extreme differences separated themselves from their families. Such a one is Frank Knowlton, descendant of a fine, old family. They were once a wealthy family. Frank's father was a plumber but the family was well-to-do for a number of years. Frankie is a town character and has been for a long time. He is now almost eighty years old and has a string of pins for going to Sunday school without missing a session for twenty-five years. Frankie lived for some time in an old wood shed that he

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had propped up to keep it in an upright position. He papered the outside in strategic places and lived a quiet, solitary life here. Frank's guardian called the hill on which the old woodshed home was situated, "Knowlton Heights". It pleased Frank immensely and people accepted it seriously and though Frank no longer lives there the hill is often referred to as "Knowlton Heights."

Frankie has an amusing voice. It is a distinct shock when one first hears it and will cause a person to look in the direction from which it is emanating almost instantly. One will smile too before seeing the source of the sound and the smile unless subdued will continue to grow as Frank appears in one's line of vision. Frank's voice is well known too. He hangs around the different stores listening and talking and some one is always ready to start a conversation with him knowing it will provide amusement for every one within range of his talking. It is a high, squeaky voice with a slight nasal twang but Frank likes to use it and people like to mimic him. So it is a vicious circle. Frank thinks it is all very complimentary and so he talks even more and in an higher and more excited voice.

To all appearances Frankie would seem to be a poor old man. He isn't but he wants to appear that way. His father left him some money but Frankie prefers his poverty as long as he can keep his hobbies. He dresses in clothes almost as flimsy as he is himself and keeps them up in his own individual style. They are the cheapest clothes the stores in town sell and winter often finds him in cotton trousers in his own effort to be economical in his personal needs. Another example of his extreme economy is his determination to live in places that barely afford a shelter. Since his guardian persuaded him to move from his woodshed on Knowlton Heights because of the difficulty of reaching it in the winter and because it was dangerous to leave such an old man alone, Frankie has found an ideal place. It is, as Shelburnites locate places, two farms in luck of the Field Mansion. In an old chicken house behind the farm house, Frankie has found a home to his liking. The chicken house is in much better repair than his old shed home [n]Frankie is satisfied. Here he "stirs

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up “his” 5 vittles”, carries on his “work” and his amusements, entertains “visitors” and his one “pal” and thus he lives a very full life.

Recognizing the fact that personalities are best shown by anecdotes this little one which almost everyone knows about Frankie may be told.

Frankie does his own cooking and has done it most of his life and by now he is aa fairly good cook.

He is as frugal with his food as anything else in his scheme of things. While he does not stint himself too much on his eating he does make inexpensive dishes and is very careful to make every ingredient count and that there are no “left-overs.”

One morning Frankie's bosom friend - his only intimate companion - paid him an unexpected visit while Frank was cooking his breakfast.

He was having pan cakes and had just turned over a few nice brown ones when his friend sidled up to his cook stove. The old fellow allowed that the pan cakes looked good but Frank said quickly - almost too quickly to be friendly - “You can look but you haint goin' to git any!” The old fellow told of the incident down town and the story “got around.” People bothered Frank a lot after that about being stingy with his “vittles.”

Frank had little schooling but in some ways he showed interest in things that more intelligent persons might choose. He is a camera fiend.

Pursuing the subject for some time he has never-the-less learned little of the actual rudiments of taking food or even interesting snap-shots.

He just has an idea that a picture should be taken and proceeds impulsively to do so. Frank was a little 6 disconcerted when a store which he had taken some time to photograph from an unusual angle turned out to be upside down. Frankie develops his own films and maintains quite a outfit for the process in his humble abode. Not all of it is

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useful but it provides atmosphere. Another of Frank's hobbies is playing old phonograph records. He has quite a collection of both phonographs and records because anyone in town who has an old phonograph that they don't really want to throw away, gives it and their stack of records to old Frankie. Among his collection is an old Edison cylindrical machine with a monstrous "morning-glory" horn attached to it for amplification. He has one cylinder record for his machine of which he is inordinately proud. It is a recorded speech by Calvin Coolidge made when he was President of the United States. Anyone who visits Frankie is immediately ushered in to hear this speech and one is forever in Frank's good graces if they show marked enthusiasm for the selection. When anyone gives him a number of old records, he plays them all and if he finds one he likes very much he must share it. He tries to interest his guardian first of all but if he is not available then his old pal "Bill" is sought. Frank spends a lot of his time looking for someone with whom to share his music". Probably Frankie's greatest passion is going to Sunday School regularly. It has been mentioned that he has gone for twenty-five years of consecutive Sundays without missing and has won all the attendance pins several times. He is even more proud of these pins than of his President Coolidge speech record. This is almost the first fact one will find out about Frank.

All the time that Frank can spare away from his camera work or his phonograph playing is spent in working. Frank mows lawns whenever he has the chance and for convenience and ease in moving his lawn mower he has it mounted on two old baby-carriage wheels. With this "riggin" he can move from lawn to lawn with little trouble.

The other work that Frank does includes his crony Bill Davis, better known as "Barnacle Bill - the Sailor Man." Bill is almost the character that Frank is, which explains their friendship somewhat. An identifying mark about Bill are his "puttees". He always wears them.

Bill differs from Frank in that he did find a woman who would marry him. They raised a big family of children but Bill doesn't know where any of them are now. One very rarely

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sees Bill's wife. She stays very close to the house. Once in a great while, she may be seen hanging clothes on the line.

Bill, however, "gets around." His and Frank's work always takes them around the town quite a lot. They pick up rubbish and boxes for fuel.

People and stores set their old cartons and packing boxes out and the men pick it up. Sometimes Bill picks up a little too much so that if there is anything one doesn't want to be taken they must lock it up. It's all grist that comes to Bill's mill.

Bill and Frankie have a large two-wheel push cart in which they gather their "fuel". It is an ingenious affair and is somewhat like the convenient, movable "table" that paper-hangers use. The cart has large wheels and built up sides so that they can pile in quite a load.

They did have one before they picked up this newer cart - with huge "buggy" wheels on it. It became a little unwieldy however in the cramped spaces into which they had to go to get the rubbish. Frank and Bill are quite a sight tugging and pushing their old cart around with boxes and odd pieces of wood and cartons stacked high on it. The men are getting pretty old now. It shows in their work. There is a long, but not too steep hill from Shelburn Falls center up to where Frank lives and the two old fellows have to push their cart up hill here of course. About half way up the hill they have to stop and rest.

If this isn't evidence of native cleverness in practical affairs, then nothing is. There is also not a little artfulness in them. It is not necessary for either Frank or Bill to gather rubbish like they do. Frank has money but he wouldn't think of using it - not so much that he is saving it to will to any relative because he has no very near relatives. He just wants to keep it intact. And Frank will never tell anyone he has money - in fact he will impress one with the opposite. Bill hasn't as much as Frank. Raising a large family would not allow a less than ordinary man to accumulate too much money. However he hasn't had his family for a few years now and thru skimping and saving and accepting everything but actual charity he must have a little "laid by". Still, old as they are and descendants of a proud

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group of ancestors - the English - they will almost [more*1] work *1 than their bodies can stand and degrade themselves to salvage other people's wast materials just to save a few dollars they could well afford to spend.