

[Abram C. Hardin]

Moss, L.L. S-241-LA Dup

FORM A Circumstances of Interview.

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St. Lincoln Neb

DATE Dec. 22, 1938 SUBJECT American Folklore

1. Name and address of informant. Abram C. Hardin [6518?] [Holdrege?] Lincoln Neb.
2. Date and time of interview. Dec. 21-7,45 to 10 p.m. Dec. 28-9:30-2:15 p.m.
3. Place of interview. Home of informant.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Nyel H. Moss, 6934 Francis.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you.
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Living room well furnished, comfortable, well kept American style, suggests long years of tranquil life within its walls. House is average roomy 20th century home located just off the business street of Bethany suburb. A clever woodpecker knocker in fastened to the front door. The large spacious yard is the outstanding feature particularly in the summer. The flower display is one of the most noted and famous in the city. Mr. Hardin even extends his flower culture to the street curb in various designs and figures, the flower beds reach to the rear of the gardens on both sides of the dwelling. It is one of his hobbies. One unusual arrangement is a mill wheel which has swinging boxes of flowers for its water cups. C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St. Lincoln

DATE Dec. 21, 1938 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

NAME AND ADDRESS Of INFORMANT Abram C. Hardin 6518 [Holdrege?] Lincoln, Nebr.

1. Ancestry. English Scotch.
2. Place and date of birth. Moravia Iowa, Sept. 1, 1863.
3. Family. Wife, boys-girls.
4. Places lived with dates. Moraira Ia. 1863 to 1875. Beaver City, Neb. 1875 to 1911. Fairfield Nebr. 1911 to 1922, Lincoln 1922 to date.
5. Education, with dates. Country school Moraira Ia. 1869 to 1875. Beaver City, Nebr, country school on Sappy Creek 1875 to 77.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates. Farming stock to 1893. Mercantile business 1893 to 1922 operated & owned store in Fairfield, Nebr.
7. Special skills and interests. Flower culture, designer and maker of wood figures, novelties, games, toys, fixtures.
8. Community and religious activities. Christian Church, church officer.
9. Description of informant. Pleasant, unassuming mild mannered, pleasing voice, medium heavy build and height.
10. Other points gained in interview. Regular features, attractive, rudy complexion kind disposition, a [genius?] type in seeming good robust health and keenly interested in his

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hobbies and creative work. He has designed and made some of the cleverest wooden novelties, fixtures and toys to be found. One a round paddle with six chickens which peck and go thru the motions of eating when paddle is swung gently to and fro.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St. Lincoln

DATE Dec. 21, 1938 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Abram C. Hardin 6518 [Holdrege?], Lincoln.

I am afraid I cant tell you much which would be of interest to you. Perhaps much did happen which would make a good story but it has passed from my memory.

During those early days we were used to some hardships and a lack of any modern conveniences. I would like to have a dollar for every rag wick, that was woven in our house for the grease candles. These were dishes filled with grease and the rag wicks were placed in the grease and lit. Yes it did give some light but our eyes used now to bright lights would have had trouble to see much by it.

When we first had candles we would each take one to the school house and stick it on our desk or bench. The first lamp was a hanging lamp our neighbors came and were afraid to go into the room where it was. They said it would blow up and burn everything up.

I would like to spend \$100.00 right now on one of those good old fashioned suppers we folks used to have.

We would pour a trail or line of molasses across one corner of the table and I would sit at the end and when the molasses drew a swarm of flies, I would swipe my hand across the line and catch a hand full of flies.

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Flies were very bad and people made a custom of catching them this way.

The strange Jack o Lantern Lights in Iowa, were always a mystery to me. They seemed to move thru the air, about 10 feet above the earth. It was a soft light red glow and moved slowly. Jack o Lanterns

People naturally had all kinds of ideas about them. Some thought they were spirits or symbols, others that they were some sort of life from deep in the earth. Some tried to follow them expecting to be led to some strange spot, where old Spanish or Indian treasure lay hidden. They were a good sign or a bad sign according to the one who watched them. It was an unearthly glow but this was partly because of their unusual motion. People would say they were nothing but an overworked imagination but they were real to me. I can only explain them as pockets of luminous gas which escaped from some of the coal shafts and floated away. They would appear and disappear. But they remained more or less of a mystery.

We moved to Beaver City, Nebr. in 1875 and I attended country school on the [Sappy?] Creek in a sod hall or house. It was so cold in winter they would place pans of hot coals along the aisles to keep us from freezing. To Nebr.

In the 70's a perpetual motion [craze?] swept the country. Some people really went crazy on the subject. One such man suddenly appeared in our neighborhood, wild as it was and fixed a dugout in the side of a hill. He began to study the proposition and took to pacing back and forth straight southwest from his dugout. He wore a path several inches deep, about like a buffalo trail. One day without a word he left and we never saw him again. We searched his dugout but did not find anything in the way of drawings, models or writing. Perpetual Motion Deserted Dugout

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Up at Culbertson Nebr. they had a pretty wild town and now tenderfeet had quits a time of it. They used to shoot the heels off their boots to make them dance. These fun loving scout riders would also send them out to catch Buffalo and use them instead of oxen. One fellow did catch a buffalo calf which fell into a deep hole in the creek there and he raised it and did use it in place of an ox on the plow. [Tenderfeet?]

A man and his wife and family moved from Kansas to our neighborhood and settled on some land. They sat up as doctors and began to attend the sick. We found out they were the Bender family, who allegedly murdered an unknown number of travelers in Kansas. There they ran a wayside inn and when these emigrants came along they would seat them at the table so that they sat just in front of a curtain stretched across one side of the room. Either the man or woman would come up on the other side of the curtain and hit them on the head with an axe or sledge. The Bender Family

The blow was struck thru the curtain but they were either killed or knocked out and their bodies fell back into the curtain. The bodies were thrown into the cellar and buried. These fiends took their horses and anything else they had. Finally some man arranged to avoid the blow and got away. Officers searched the place and found many skeletons, but I guess no murder charge was proved or else they were released from prison later. Wholesale Murder

Diphtheria was a dreadful disease in those early years. We helped to bury seven children from one family who all died within a few hours of each other. Diphtheria

People thought it was caused by the mildew under the freshly turned sod. They did not know it was contagious and there was no quarantine.

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People had to treat illness with their own home made remedies, since there were no doctors to speak of.

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The main medicine, which was given for everything was "Wild Gourd Root Tea." It was bitter as gall and I was always in doubts about its healing qualities. For Typhoid "[Boneset Tea?]" was the favorite remedy. [Panacea?] for all ills

Vinegar, fat salt pork and black pepper was applied to the throat or chest or any external part of body for aches, pains, colds, and most anything. Aches & Pains

I worked on railroad grading work when the Burlington built west. I drove a team and "slip" or scraper. There were no foreign laborers then, mostly just American settlers like ourselves. I've been working on the railroad

Everybody was happy and contented in those early days rough as life was. They learned how to live and enjoy the things at hand. My wife's father used to say he just felt like jumping up and cracking his heels together, it was so good to be his own boss. Here he owned his land, where he came from he was at the mercy of the land lord. Liberty & Contentment

In later years I worked in the store business and then had one of my own. I could notice during these years up to 1922 the growing discontent of many people. They complained more and were hard to please.

When I retired from business, I decided to take up some work as a hobby. New and unusual flower culture and designing and making wooden fixtures, toys and ornaments give me many happy hours and days. I have raised roses six inches in diameter and flowers just naturally seem to do extra good under my care and attention. My Hobby

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To me it is not work in that sense but a pleasant pastime or play. I like to design and make new and different toys and wooden devices for the house. You saw the woodpecker knocker on the door frame facing.

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My "chickens at Dinner" or "Chickens Dinner" was one of the most difficult and best jobs. It is not, so far as I know, commercialized. This is the "Tumbling Twins" who run a race down the ladder. This jumping jack, was made 62 years ago by myself. This negro tap dancer works pretty good. I have made many cut out figures and characters, which appear in the flower gardens and on the curb parking in season. Novel Wooden Devices

All these are made from old box lumber, fruit crates and baskets. Here is "Donald Duck," "Peacock" "Mickey Mouse" "Cranes" "Red and Blue Birds" "Boy and girl sprinkler," "Rabbits," "Watermelon Boy" and "Fisherman."

A good many years ago, I made a discovery about the feeding habits of geese. I placed an almost perfect circle of corn grains on the ground with the grains touching one another or almost so. Then I got three tame geese to approach this. They waddled up to the circle of corn and lowered their heads. But they would not eat. They just hissed and drew back with their heads held low. They would not eat. Then I broke two gaps in the circle and they came right up and ate the corn. Feeding the geese

Later I repeated the experiment. Again they refused to eat. This time I drove them over the ring of corn. Some grains were knocked out of the circle by their feet. The geese turned right around and eat the corn.

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I never found out why geese do this. Some old instince probably. I make chests and gadgets for the house but none have ever been offered for sale.

The stoy of the geese, refusing to break into the circle of corn is a good example of how much stronger and secure is that group or organization of people who stand united in perfect form without gaps or breaks. The weak spots or breaks in any formation encourage the evil influence or hostile force to step in and destroy the whole of it.

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Supplementary.

This interview was indeed revealing and though it is hard to express on paper this gentle spoken, mild mannered man is an outstanding example of a glorious life lived to the fullest and with this splendid sequel to a youth and middle age of hardship, labor and accomplishment.

He has found happiness and contentment in these now interests, which completely fill the void which faces many in the sunset years of life. His back ground is one distinctly nebraskan and by way of variety he has alternated his activities and broadened his horizon. This is success in its highest form and Americanism to the n th degree.

To appreciate his work, one must see it. One gains much from a contact with Mr. Hardin, which is beyond the spoken or written word. His philosophy of life utter contentment and unselfish attitude toward others is surely an inspiration.