

## [The Arkansas 'shakes']

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 W. 12th St. New York City

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT MEDICINE SHOW TALES: "THE ARKANSAS 'SHAKES'."

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview

Interviewed in my quarters, 86 W. 12th [ST.?] New York

3. Name and address of informant William D. Naylor See "Medicine Show" (Sept 19-Oct. 5th) for information on Wm. D. Naylor.
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.

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NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER EARL BOWMAN

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street, New York

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT MEDICINE SHOW TALES: "THE ARKANSAS SHAKES"

1. Ancestry William D. Naylor American; probably Irish descent

2. Place and date of birth

New York - 72 years old

3. Family

Apparently has none

4. Places lived in, with dates

Could not learn

5. Education, with dates

Seems to be principally in the "school of hard knocks"

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### 6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Carnival, medicine Show and “pitch-[man?]”

### 7. Special skills and interests

None that I know

### 8. Community and religious activities

Unknown

### 9. Description of informant

Mr. Naylor is a man well preserved. 72 years of age, smooth-shaven, weight about 145 pounds (5'7"). Quite gray but not bald. [Has a pleasant though a?] bit cynical facial expression. Rather serious but an evidence of humor and somewhat repressed. His eyes are a light brown. In personal appearance as to dress is neat although it is obvious his suit has done service for a long time. See report of October 20th for further details.

### 10. Other Points [gained in interview?]

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 W. 12th St. New York City

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DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT MEDICINE SHOW TALES: "THE ARKANSAS 'SHAKES'."

"One of Doc. Porter's most powerful and popular Kickapoo Indian medicines, that we used to sell when I was with his medicine show, was his 'Chill and Ague Eliminator.' It was put up in a square pint bottle and Doc guaranteed that two bottles would drive out the worst case of chills on the market. Whether it would or not I don' know. But I do know it was mighty potent and....bitter.

"I think it was probably a straight "emulsion" of quinine and whiskey and the directions told the 'patient' to take enough of it before his chill started to make him go to sleep.

"Doc's theory was, no doubt, that if a person about to have a chill could be gotten drunk enough to go to sleep he'd sleep through his chill period and if he did have one in his sleep, he'd never know he had it when he waked up and naturally think he had missed it entirely and was cured!

"Doc's medicine was strong but it wouldn't have worked on the kind of chills people got down in the Ozark country of Arkansas, South Missouri and over in the Indian Territory where I spent a lot of time 2 in the carnival business and exhibiting 'dancing turkeys' and other things at country fairs.

"Down in that country people didn't call chills and ague, 'chills and ague'; they called it the 'shakes.' And that was the right name. For when a man [?] with the 'shakes' started to shake, he shook! He couldn't stop shaking till the chill was over.

"There were two kinds, the 'every-other-day shakes," and the 'every-day shakes.' I had both kinds. They started on me as the every-other-day kind and after a week or two turned into the every-day kind, then switched back and forth that way, first one sort and then the other till I finally got rid of them.

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“The 'shakes' Were so common in the Ozark country along back in the 1890's, about the time the Star [Gang?] was being busted up in the Indian Territory and Al [Jennings?] was holding up the M. K. & T trains, that practically everybody would have them some time or other.

“And people would talk about their 'shakes' with a sort of pride, something like a lot of people like to talk in these later days of their 'operations' after they've been to the hospital and had something cut out. The harder a man shook when he had the 'shakes' the prouder he seemed to be!

“That 'vanity of affliction,'” you might say, brought about one of the queerest contests that was ever pulled off, I suppose. To me, and I saw it, it had frog-umping matches, horn toad races, cock-roach fights, and all that stuff beaten a mile.

“It was out in the Arkansas River bottom-lands country not far from Van Buren, during the fall of 1897 or 1896, If I remember right. Anyhow, I know it was in the fall for two reasons, first 3 because the fall was when people had most of their 'shakes,' and the pecans were ripe. Pecans, you know grow naturally on the river bottom lands down in that country and the harvest of nuts adds quite a bit to the incomes of the natives who shake them down out of the trees and sell them.

“There were a couple of brothers-in-law, had married sisters, who lived on adjoining farms and like is sometimes the case among country people they suffered from a sort of mutual jealousy. Their names were Toliver Green and Hank Breckenridge. Each thought his hound dogs were better than the other's hound dogs; that his hogs grew faster and fatter, his cow gave more milk, his mule could kick harder, or he could shoot a squirrel out of a taller tree with a single ball rifle, or excell in some other way—and the result was a continual boasting when together.

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“They both happened to got the 'shakes' at the same time and it happened too, that their chills ran on the same hourly schedule and would hit them at about the same time each day.

“Toliver Green vowed that the chills he had were the hardest chills any man in Arkansas ever had or ever could have; Breckenridge had the same opinion and made the same boast about his own 'shakes.’

“The result was that they agreed to match 'shakes' and Green challenged Breckenridge to 'shake' it out in a pecan tree!

Each was to climb a pecan tree just as his chill was about due to start and see which shook the tree cleanest of pecans before it was over...

“The 'shaking match' took place in Tolivar Green's pasture in the Arkansas River bottoms. It was well advertised and a big crowd of natives came to see it. An old Justice of the Peache (I don't recall his name) was to judge the contest.

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“Although it was my 'chill day' too, I went out to see it and it was one of the queerest contents I ever witnessed.

“Green and Breckenridge picked out a couple of good tall pecan trees; each climbed his tree, straddled a limb, wrapped his legs around the trunk of the tree and started to shake...and after each started he couldn't stop till his chill had run its course.

“Well, at first those darned pecans began to sort of dribble down out of the trees, like slow rain or hail, then as the chills got to work in earnest and speeded up Green and Breckenridge's 'shakes' the pecans were coming down in a regular machine-gun tattoo as they hit the ground.

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“It lasted for an hour and then each climbed down...and there wasn't a pecan left an either tree! So, the old Justice of the Peace declared it a draw...and that's they way it ended. It was kind of funny seeing those two leather-[cheeked?] farmers up in those pecan trees with the 'shakes', the pecans raining down on the ground...I was sort of glad Doc. Porter's 'Eliminator' wasn't too all-fired potent— in Arkansas.”