

[Mrs. J. Bennett]

[Washington 13?] Tales - Anecdotes

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [10/19?] [?] 8 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Ave.

DATE Oct. 18, '38

SUBJECT [Folk-Stuff- Stories Told by Mrs. J. Bennett?]

1. Date and time of interview

Oct. 13, '38. Evening.

2. Place of interview

Residence of informant.

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs J. Bennett, 862 First Ave.

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

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[No / one. I became acquainted with informant [?] as a result of her living [?] in the same house [?] I live in

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

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

I interviewed Mrs Bennett in the kitchen of her a three-room apartment on the second floor, facing First Avenue. She had a wood fire crackling in [the?] stove as she [?] feels chills quickly. She keeps her apartment scrupulously clean, but with a faint note of disarray issuing from the fact of her rheumatism, which prevents her moving aout about easily.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Ave.

DATE Oct. 18, '38

SUBJECT [Folk-Stuff- Stories Told by Mrs. [?] Bennett?]

1. Ancestry

Irish.

2. Place and date of birth

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Ireland. Abut About 73 years [?] of age

3. Family

Widow of an American

4. Places lived in, with dates

Ireland during early childhood. England until about 25 years of [age?]. Since then in America

5. Education, with dates

She was educated in a Catholic school in England, reaching what would be the equivalent of highschool. She studied Latin and has read Dickens and Shakespeare.

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

She has been a carpet sewer since living in America. She worked for most of the big department stores such as Wanamaker's where sales were often conditioned on changes being made in the carpets to fit odd [rooms, fire places?] , etc.

7. Special skills and interests

Being crippled she enjoys reading and listening to the radio.

8. Community and religious activities

Catholic.

9. Description of informant

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Although a woman of 73 years , she still has beauty, represented in eyes that still retain a deep blue sparkle, even featu features, excellent forehead. She has few wrinles and her white hair is silky. Age has been successful mainly in compressing her cheeks and stealing something of the form of the mouth and chin. Pictures on the wall show her strikingly beautiful in youth.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Ave,

DATE Oct. 18, '38

SUBJECT [Folk-Stuff- Stories Told by Mrs. J. Bennett?] NOTE - If any of this material is [? line ?] and others mentioned should be changed 1 1 [Form C?]

I had asked Mrs Bennett previously to tell me some stories so when I entered she said:

“I have a little story all fixed up.” She handed me a piece of paper with a story written in pencil. The original I attach to the end of this document. What she had written on the paper was as follows:

“My mother and I called on an acquaintance one evening The husband of the lady was violinist. He wanted to entertain us with some classic music. He started with Cavalleria

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Rusticana. In the middle of it his wife jumped up, pulled up her skirts and did a step dance and said: "Oh give us 'Johnnie get your gun, get your gun."

I read the story and laughed and then the interview proceeded as follows: 2 2 [????]

My mother and I wee were so mortified [he?] was so mortified [but?] we didn't dare laugh. But on the way home we screamed with laughter. Didn't dare laugh. She did two or three [?] steps I wished I could [do?] it but I can't (Mrs Bennett , 73 and crippled with rheumatism gets up and tries [??] to imitate [?] dance We never went there again. You know [Cavalaersa?] Cavalleria Rusticana ? He started with such pathos , you know. So serious about it [?] Ha ! Ha ! [ha?] ! [?] (Laughs loud and [?]) ***** [Myfsister?] My sister and I My mother was expecting a baby and my siste sister and I were sent , what shall we say , nurse , nurse [she?] was a very cross old woman [they?] always are [the?] midwife [they?] don't have any midwives any more [what?] happened to them ? [they?] used / to do quite some business around here [?] at one time [yessir?] ! [?] [midwives?] and the doctors never got paid [they?] were called for and they were / promised the money But they never got paid [they?] just came , they saw they conqueed conquered ([steps?] to interfere [??] on [??], the deaf janitor) (I was in there las last night and he gave her a long conversation in his own language , you know , and at the end she looked up and she said " Hmmm "" [just?] like that. I laug laughed [?] in the night [he?] just said , " [oh?] , go to hell "" [?] Back to her story) [we?] took it on a run of course , when we were sent for that cranky old midwife She being older than I , what shall I say , she saw the importance of making haste [i?] I was tired of running and I asked her what we were runnin running for. [and?] she said , ' Oh mother's going to have a baby and Mrs Tutor is bringing it ,' [sure?] put her name in she was over seventy then and she's probably dead and buried by now [she?] hasn't anything to worry abut about if she's gone to the right place [if?] not she will have plenty to wo ry worry about 3 3 So I was tired of running I said, ' If that's the case I'm not going to run any more [we?] don't want any more babies. Ha! Ha! Y u You know I never [?] told my mother that. We never dicussed having babies Isn't that funny ? Having a hard / time or anything of the kind. [?] ***** # I was working in a house another [?] woman

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was sent to help me and there was live wire [the?] elctrician electrician was working and he left a live wire exposed. [it?] was on a lamp [and?] he was sing doing something on the lamp. [she?] , being deaf , didn't hear the man say it was alive. [she?] went to touch [it?] and I stopped her[?] [she?] would have [?] been shocked [?] , if I had n't stopped her from touching it. [going?] home she [?] wouldn't go [down?] down the stairs [she?] got in the eleva tr elevator and wanted me to come to. I wouldn't go in and I shut the door for her and down she went. Ha! Ha! (Laughs loud) she, [?] went up and down half a dozen times. Ha! Ha! She couldn't get it stopped she looked like wax work another [?] You never saw Madame Trousseau's in [london?] ? [?] [There's's?] There's a funny thing My brother was in Madame Trousseau's and he [?] had a uniform of the English infantry , red coat [tall?] , looked fine , six / [?] regular scarlet coat [and?] he was standing there [?] admiring the waxworks. He had never seen [?] them before. And woman started to admire him [finally?] he started to move and the woman got quite a start. She thought the statue had come to life) She So he was [?] clutching the lever Everybody was shouting to her. The [?] caretaker was "far down" from the North of Ireland. The lord [?] knows where tey they are now [that?] was in J. p P . [morgan's?] house 4 4 ([?] They gave lots of work. They occupied lots of people so So the (far-down) . They were always having something done over [?] and they treated ev rybody everybody so nice. One time we ther there and [?] she thought [?] the work wasn't going as well as she thought it shuld should be [she?] said she wouldn't have [?] anything to do with any [??] of the work people [she?] was finished with the boss [and?] she [?] threw [?] everybody out in the first place So we thought we were through. But we asked another man and he said if our work was satisfactory just to go back in the morning. Morgan's daughter said I thought I told you I was through. I took a chance I said [but?] we came from another office[, ?] [and?] she said all right then stay at work. [and?] so we kept the job and later she gave us \$5 and laughed about the incident.) # "Take your [haan?] off the [haandle?]" you can't put the accent in. [?] [?????] She-kept up to the roof and down the cellar. Couldn't stop that elevator She went up and down several times. She looked more like a statue than anything else. Then I went like this to her (gestures) but you can't put that down [and?] she judged from that to take her hand

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off the handle. So finally she took her hand off the handle and stopped the car. Oh she was a devil [a?] devil of a woman I wished afterwards afterwards she had ouch touched the live wire and got a shock. Ha! Ha! Ha! 5 5

[oh?] ! [she?] was horrid in every way [a?] mean woman I couldn't describe her really. I think all deaf people are mean. Suspicious because they can't hear. [?] *****

Mrs [??] [?] comes in Mrs. [?] had lived in this house for twenty years but had recently moved a block or two away She was now moving again this time to 86th street She came in to say [goodby?] came in to say goodbye. She is moving up to 86th street. You're going away now. I won't see you again. I could cry (Mrs B Bennett can hardly keep the tears back.) Oh don't [doa?] that Mrs [?] B. Don't Bennett Don'ta cry." Mrs [B?] " Oh you have no sentiment / You're too tired to have sentiment. You don't feel. You are going away and you don't even want to cry. " Mrs. [?] "[Weell?] whata you think ! I'm going to 86 street. Not going to Italy or Europe , just to 86th street " . Mrs Bennett: "You have no sentiment [you?] don't feel. " Mrs. [?] "You musta have a little philosophy I'll be coming down here. " Mrs. Bennett. "Yes but not so often ". [?] At door , Mrs [M:?] using our expression, Well , good night. Mrs Bennett B: Bennett (Almost weeping , choking) "Good bye !" Mrs [B?] follows her into hall to say something alone.) [?] ***** 6 6 #When I was a child [?] I was in bed and asleep woke up and saw a [?] looking through the window at me. I immediately [?] my head under the bed clothes and went off to sleep. Ha! Ha! That settled that [another?] kid would bawl. That was on t e the ground floor. We were in bed three of us slept in a bed great big b d bed [none?] of these little bits of things ***** they have here # [we?] were all in bed one night [my?] father had an extension made over the extension was a sort of a loft where father kept leather He made boots for [??officers?] [had?] to have a lot of leather [?] [he?] used to keep leather in loft [one?] night we were / all in bed and we went to sleep. [we?] heard some cre ping creeping over head [sh?] ! [sh?] ! [listen?] ! [listen?] ! ceeping creeping came over further and further and the first thing the fellow did he [fell?] fell through the ceiling his leg came through the ceiling. Ha ! [ha?] ! [ha?] ! [we?] jumped out of bed [we?] nearly knocked each other down trying to get out quick ([laughs?])

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[ha?] ! [ha?] ! [nobody?] wanted to be last for fear he would catch us. [well?] we ran up to my father [?] mother and mother [of?] course shouting not crying [somebody?] getting in or something [well?] of course my father , just right away , thought of the leather [so?] him and my mother went out to see what it was all bout. Of course the fellow was gone when he heard us shout There was nobody there. A hide of leather was gone 7 7

[there?] must have been somebody there throwing the leather down [so?] we stayed up in [mother's?] mother's room til everything was over. Mother said , ' [oh?] it was nobody there. It was some cats. How did the cats fall through the ceiling ? [oh?] , the ceiling was weak !" We believed it all and went right back to sleep. ***** # [my?] father made shoes He could make lady's shoes, gentleman's running pump , a lady's patent slipper [?] [turned?] inside out [he?] was a swell shoe maker. I heard my father say , telling some stories , he said when he was serving his time he had to serve seven years. [there?] was seven of them of the m slept in one room [and?] when one fellow wanted to go out with his girl the other six had to stay home. [they?] had only one good suit between them Ha ! ha ! ha ! I've heard my father [?] tell that many times. My mother used to be awfully ashaed ashamed and so did we but afterwards it seemed so ridiculous. [and?] when one went with his girl the othe s others had to stay home [oh?] , dear , dear , dear [what?] funny things ! [that's?] all life ! [them?] fellows don't care as long as they are having a good [?] time ————— ***** [?] to scare:

[its?] a wonder our hearts didn't jump out of place [how?] were they kept intact.

[they?] were / [?] entices you know [they?] weren't full [?] fledged [they?] didn't have much money [you?] don't get much when youre you're an apprentice. I guess they feed them that's all. ——— [C.O.D.?] 8 8

I can just see us getting out of bed with one accord [ha?] ! ha ! ha ! [the?] last one's a sissy [ha?] ! ha ! ha ! . The last one would be somebody. Ha! [probably?] [?] one of the men that worked for my father [years?] after my mother told us but father wouldn't tell us [the?] men

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who worked for father knew [?] the leather was there [many?] and many a soldier us kids [used?] used to shield They stay out to see their girl [they?] stay over time [if?] [?] they're caught out in the town without a pass they take them to the guard house you [you?] know. [many?] and many a [?] soldier I've seen hiding when When the provost asked we'd say they've gone [they?] would stand in some niche you know and stand there so they wouldn't be [?] seen [?] ***** # I went to a bachelor(s bachelor's apartment and two men , very nice [oh?] I got quite chummy w th with them , afterwards [they?] were very nice. I went to sew and my scissors went down beside me I'll give you an idea of the scissors I have some simil similar [?] [of?] c urse course it isn't the same as all those year You wouldn't imagine how much callous you can get cutting (She shows scissors with a [?] Piece piece of binding to protect the hands. [??] We hang it on our waist so we don't throw it on the floor afterwards. You can always tell a person doesn't know how to work [how?] they rig themselves [how?] they cut the thread. [??] A big bull dog came in and sat in fron front of me [?] watching me. [?] I was in ther there by myself [??] so terrified [??] 9 9

I was in thre there alone and the big bull dog came in watching me. [was?] I scared ? I was afraid to pull out my hand to sew. I was afraid to lift out the scissors. If I lifted up the scissors he'd go for you , I think. [so?] I called out after , a while , ' [will?] somebody come and takthis take/this dog away. I was so frightened , my own voice was frightened. [?] Oh , [he?], says , ' he wouldn't hurt you he's an awful nice dog [he?] wouldn't hurt you “I was afraid to pull my [?] hand out [afraid?] to cut the thread with the scissors. “ If you don't take him away I'll never do any work .” I said [??] ***** # This one I don't know whether I should tell you or not That was a big private house on Lexington avenue [the?] son o of the house was a son of a gun. Ha! Ha! I was sitting on the floor sewing the carpet Oh , I could go to the court , but I don't like that. They would only say I was an [adventuress?]. I had no witnesses. I couldn't prve prove anything. I was [?] very plump in those days , today I'm [?] broad , but then I was plump. he He sat down beside me , on his hunkers and told me I had a wonderful complexion I paid no attention to his flattery. Then I saw [?] something 10 10

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I just got up and ran. I would have thrown those shears through a window to attract somebody's attention but the window had shutters and I couldn't do that. So I ran until I couldn't run any more I was tired out. Of course other people have better stories , but ([sarcastically?] , [?] a refined [?] ” [they?] wouldn't remember them. Oh no! no! no! ” I'd like to see him do that to me. He'd know better. “ [????????] [????????????????????] (She laughs) So he ran after me until couldn't run and any more I turned on him and held my shears , ” If [?] you come a step nearer I'll push these right through you “ [well?] what happened ?” I asked Mrs Bennett answered: “Well it was all ver over by then. Nothing more .” ———— ***** 11 11 # Mrs Slavic, the superntendent, very deaf [?] knocks at the door.

Mrs B. Bennett “Is she back ? Don't answer the door ! She's a nuisance ! I don't want her to see you in here. She's so nosy nose . (Mrs Slavic pushes in.) Oh , was that door unlocked !

Mrs Slavic (Speaks in loud uncontrolled voice of deaf person.) Look at this ! (She has copy of the magazine Life , opened.) Is this awful ? Its pictures of a baby [how?] you get baby. (Mrs B. interposes , right in front of Mrs Slavic.) Isn't she stupid ? She can't hear anything we say. Or perhaps she can. If she can hear she's ge ting getting an earful.

Mrs Slavic: he the things they print now. My boy showed this to me [oh?] its awful , awful. Mrs B. Bennett. All right [go?] on home now (Mrs Slavic of course doesn't hear.) (Finally Mrs Slavic completes he e here criticism of [?] Life , sees that we are busy , and goes out.) ***** 12 12 [?] Mrs Slavic is deaf [so?] I went in there She was making bread. She offered me some of this hot bread. I couldn't eat anything in there. Ugh! (gesture of repugnance). So I said no I don't want anything. She said it wasn't won't hurt me. I said , ” No ! No ! I don't want any. I know what's good for my system “ .. “Oh , she says , ” I didn't know your [?] sister was in the city. [your?] sister isn't here ? Ha! Ha! ***** [?] Reverting to first story about “Johnny get your gun”

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We were / laughing so they must have thought we were drunk we were taking both sides and the middle. We couldn't [?] walk straight. [about Johnny get your gun johnny get your gun.

_____ *****

This lady was named Susan. The landlady , the janitor Her friends didn't like her name Susan so she changed her name to Bessie as a favor to her friends. So when she had her little boy christened the priest asked for her name and she told him Bessie. The priest put it down , Elizabeth. Well when that lady came home she was so indignat indignant . what "What do you think , " she says , " he put me down , Elizabeth. " I said , " [that?] is Elizabeth " [of?] course she didn't know until she came home and somebody read it to her because she can't read , you know. You can imagine the fun I have sometimes with them.
13 13

Next door the girl was always crying. She didn't know what she was crying for. I wuld would tell her , "You're You crying there , just crocodile tears " [then?] later the mother would turn on the daughter and say "Oh you and your crocked dile tears." _____

I came down to this room so lgd I'd be able to get down to the street [?]. And I've been here six months and haven't been down once. ([laughs?]) I've [got?] got now so I don't want to go down. I just sit at the window and look down at the world. Its fun. Sometimes I have trouble getting my groceries One day I dropped half a bucket of ashes down to the street trying to attract some boy's attention. The delicatessen charges a couple of extra pennies for everything and [?] I have to give the kids a couple of pennie pennies

(As I prepared to go.)

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(Very politely.) Now I've done you a favor perhaps you can do me one. Get me a loaf of Banner whole wheat bread and a quarter pound of butter. [?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM D Extra Comment

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Ave.

DATE Oct. 18 '38

SUBJECT [Folk-Stuff- Stories told by Mrs Bennett?]

I decided Mrs Bennett would be a good prospect for stories. She stopped me again in the hall and asked me if I wanted a coal stove. A friend of hers / was moving away and wanted to give away a stove. I took this opportunity to make an appointment to get some stories from her.

Mrs Bennett is very quick and tart in her opinions. This quality is ballanced by a keen sense of humor and a musical laugh that can often be heard through the halls. "There's not enough jollity in this house. All these foreign people. They never laugh", she once said. The lady above her could never hear her playing the radio but occasionally heard her laugh. "Some times I am thinking over these things and laugh outloud in bed in the middle of the night.", she said.

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A word or two to underline her outspokenness. During the telling of the stories she stopped to remark, "Oh you do have a sense of humor. You know when I gave you that rose you were so embarrassed. I thought you were the dullest man I ever met in my life." When I came downstairs for the interview she said "Oh I knew that was you all right. You always slam your door." I pointed out that the old man who lives next to me and who gets up at 5 a.m. to go to work in the slaughterhouse asked me to turn the radio off at 9 p.m. "Don't pay any attention to that old fool. All the good programs come after 9. Don't worry he'll sleep all right if he's tired enough." [?] 705 24

[continue?] Continue from previous page FOLKLORE NEW YORK FORM D Extra Comment STATE New York NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch ADDRESS 869 First Ave. DATE Oct. 16, '38 SUBJECT Stories

Mrs Bennett has lived in the tenement house , at 862 First Ave. , for more than 30 years. Six months ago, because her rheumatism had [?] become worse, she moved from an upper apartment to her present home, one flight above street level, "in order to get out of the house once in awhile and I haven't een been out once since."

I met Mrs Bennett in the following manner. Being imprisoned by her rheumatism she often [stis?] sits at the front window to enjoy observing he the life below. I live in the same house , on the third floor. Going upstiars upstairs one day she stopped me in the hall and handed me a rose, saying very graciously, "I want to give you this in memory of Mother's Day"

I met Mrs Bennett and talked to her again during a rent strike which was exciting but failed to jell. I remember a remark she made to me in the hall. She had [described?] described her cloistered existence in a phrase or two and then added in a vigorous whisper, "I feel like a caged lion. "Her eyes flashed as she wobbled, incongruously, back to her room.

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On another occasion she was having a conversation with Mrs Slavic, the deaf janitor who talks in a [?] loud voice, and a little squat, square, foreign woman , who is forever gathering box boards and storing them in her rooms for firewood. I was passing the three women in the hall when Mrs Bennett asked me who won the German French war of 1870. I was almost as embarrassed as when she handed me the rose, but answered Germany which turned out to be the right guess. *** Note: If any of this material is published, the name of the informant & others mentioned should be changed [?]