

[Shoe Worker Tells a Tale]

Duplicate

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 8

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Irving Nicholson

ADDRESS 4507 15th Avenue, Brooklyn

DATE December 23, 1938

SUBJECT SHOE WORKER TELLS A TALE

1. Date and time of interview December 21 and December 22 at 12 and 10 o'clock respectively
2. Place of interview [1653?] East 4th Street, Brooklyn - home of the informant
3. Name and address of informant Philip Dash, 1653 East 4th Street, Brooklyn
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Knew informant through long acquaintance. Originally through my father
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. (See following sheet - Form C)

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Irving Nicholson

ADDRESS 4507 15th Avenue, Brooklyn

DATE December 23, 1938

SUBJECT SHOE WORKER TELLS A TALE

The Douglas Shoe factory — so in this factory was working a father and two sons. So Douglas's son, he had a young son, about 23 years of age, he met a girl in church and he notices it she's a very beautiful girl.

Two of her brothers were working with the father of this girl in the shoe factory. One of her brothers who was going to high school noticed that his sister was going with a rich guy who he knew was the son of Douglas where his father and brothers was working.

And he start to tell in the house, "My sister is keeping company with the son."

So they have a discussion in the family. The old man was glad. "I'll get a rich son-in-law." The sons thought that he'll be ashamed of them and all would have to quit their jobs.

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Very often they had discussions like that. It come out, once, that when the rich son had to come to the house, he met her outside. So the younger son always used to warn her that her boy friend was too rich for her.

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In the end was he married her. It happened that six months after, the independent union got a hold on Douglas's and two sons and the father that worked there was striking and the strike was lost and the superintendent wouldn't take them back.

Then the trouble began. She used to beg the husband to take back the father and sons. But the firm wouldn't do it. Gradually it went a few months and the daughter decided to leave him. So she did. She came back to her father and mother and from that time went to work in the fitting room of a shoe factory. And she became a great leader of the shoe union.

Later when Douglas had another strike this girl was the leader of the union. Her former husband tried to have her arrested but she always laughed at him. That's a shoe worker's revenge.

In 1910 Beck's Shoe Company had employed about 300 people. We start to organize.

The boss said he didn't mind, only he didn't want outside people. He wanted we should all give him \$50 each and become shareholders. At the end of the year we would get bonuses.

We worked like that for a year. We decide we wouldn't go no more to the union. The salary was about \$12 a week. And we worked a year. By the end each one of us got \$40. But a couple of smart boys called us to a private meeting that the boss should not know. And

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he proved to us that for that year the salaries in the factories was raised about 15% even without any unions.

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So, he start to figure that each of us lost about \$300 and gained \$40. We decide to ask our \$50 shares back from the boss. He gave it back but he locked us out and forced us to strike. And we striked 20 weeks without any results. The strike was broken.

When Kurz and Lapidus was still in operation, I was contractor and foreman. Lapidus was going to Paris. He made a dinner for all the workers because he made a success in business. He had two men who were in the business with Lapidus from the first day. They were regular fixtures there. One was Domapee and the second was Pilippo Deliso. That was his two loving workers who Lapidus figured brought luck to him.

So we had a dinner, eat and drink, plenty of wine, chicken and spaghetti. So Domapee, he want only that Lapidus should be lucky in Paris. So he put soul-thread (what you [sow?] the soul) on Lapidus's shoe. He was superstitious and he thought that would bring him luck.

And Pilippo took out an eye from a little mouse, and he talk into Lapidus's wife (Pilippo still comes to my house) that, when her husband will go on the boat, she should throw the eye of the mouse over his head. Pilippo said that would keep her husband from running after good-looking women in Paris.

When Lapidus come back, they find it out that he had been sick from having too many women in Paris. And the little mouse's eye didn't help. Such an industry.

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In Garside & Son, when the Brooklyn shoe factories was in a general strike, we were very peaceful there. We were all satisfied. But the Brooklyn shoe workers used to come to us and beg us that we should go out in sympathy with them, because Garside was the president of the boss association. And we must help them.

It took us three or four weeks to consider. We were satisfied. But they were an the top of us that we should do it.

So the whole shop held a meeting and the Jewish workers swore by the Torah in a little empty synagogue where we hold our own meeting, and the others they also swore by their own holy books. We all swore to go the next day and tell him to settle the strike because he's the president. In case he'd refuse, we should call a strike.

The boss was a very fine feller, and he said to us, that how can I settle a strike when all the factories are occupied by other people. He agreed to take a committee in the machine to every factory where they are striking, and he'll prove they are occupied.

He told us the workers were spoiling the strike. They were leaving one factory and going to work in another factory where they were striking.

The committee found that the boss, Garside, was right in what he said. We went back to the people. We told them that. So he advised us to take back our sworn pledges. We followed his advice and went back to work but he promised us that he'd try to make the bosses take back most of the strikers now, and the rest in one month.

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He would try to get rid of the scabs. We announced to the Brooklyn workers what Garside promised. And, you can believe me. The boss kept his promise. Ten thousand workers returned to work in two months' time with an increase in wages.

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We always called John Garside the peaceful manufacturer because he stopped a very big strike. This is a true thing. The boss was a gentleman. I worked for him for thirteen years. Once we made a party for the boss and carried him on the hands from excitement.