

[Taverns]

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Library of Congress

Project worker Abe Aaron

Project editor

Remarks

W3611

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

NO. Words

2900

Jun 14 1939

Forms to be filled out for Each Interview

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Abe Aaron

ADDRESS 5471 Ellis Ave. Chicago

DATE May 11, 1939

Library of Congress

SUBJECT Taverns

1. Date and time of interview May 5th (the morning) May 10th (the day)
2. Place of interview May 5th-sign shops- 47th & Cottage Grove May 10th-a saloon-south Halsted St. (a window job) and the Marcus home
3. Name and address of informant Philip Marcus, 4523 S. Cottage Grove Ave. Chicago,
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.

The Marcus home is well-appointed, newly decorated, pleasant. With four large rooms, excluding kitchen and bath. Three flights up. On the "White" side of Cottage Grove. In the building are Italian (1), Mexican (1), Russian (1), families. The remaining families are American stock (so-called) and Irish.

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CHICAGO

FORM B

Personal History of Informant

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Abe Aaron

Library of Congress

ADDRESS 5471 Ellis Ave. Chicago

DATE May 11, 1939

SUBJECT Taverns

NAME OF INFORMANT Philip Marcus

1. Ancestry (see copy of 5/4/39)
2. Place and date of birth “ “ “
3. Family “ “ “
4. Places lived in, with dates “ “ “
5. Education, with dates “ “ “
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates “ “ “
7. Special skills and interests “ “ “
8. Community and religious activities “ “ “
9. Description of informant “ “ “
10. Other Points gained in interview “ “ “

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FORM C

Library of Congress

Text of Interview (Unedited)

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Abe Aaron

ADDRESS 5471 Ellis Ave. Chicago

DATE May 11, 1939

SUBJECT Taverns

NAME OF INFORMANT Philip Marcus (to be added to the material submitted May 4, 1939, gathered from the same individual.)

1. The Saloon Keeper Who go Vicarious Revenge On his Employees

I could tell you more stories about the taverns than anything else, I guess. They're a crummy bunch of places and a crummy lot of people, them tavern keepers I mean. Take all in all, though, the taverns that cater to the Irish are the dirtiest of the lot and the ones that cater to the Salvs are the cleanest. Not casting reflections on the Irish, understand, and not throwing bouquets at the Slavs. I get around, that's all, and that's the way I've found it. In my line, a guy sees more than the average, and if he keeps his eyes and ears open he sees and hears a lot the average man don't ever get a chance to see.

All that aint nothing to do with this story.

But about this guy I was going to tell you about. I was workin' on a saloon window one any day and listenin' to the help jibber jabberin'. One bartender he's sayin' to another, "The

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way to treat this guy”—they're talkin' about the boss—“is to sass right back at 'im when he starts shootin' off.” The other guy says, “Yeh, that's right.”

Well, I work two days on that job. While these two guys are talkin' and I'm painters, another bartender is servin' the boss who's sittin' at a table with a customer. They're drinkin' different brands, but each guy's stickin' to his own brand, and pretty soon, it's along toward noon, the place gets pretty

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After a while I say to the tavern keeper, “Say, how do you explain this? These dames got class. Jesus! An' they got clothes. An' you can see they don't work. How the hell's a guy gonna work? How do y ou do it? How do you keep y our mind on your business?”

The tavern keeper an' barkeep, they both laugh. An' the bar-keep cracks:

“That's the kind o' stuff you read about in the papers.”

“What d' mean?” I says.

The Tavern Keeper says, “Hell, Phil, these are the kind o' high class whores business men will call long distance, spendin' ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five dollars just to tell 'em when they'll be in town, just to phone 'em.

3. Wh at She Used to Give Aw ay

This one happened in a saloon on Clark street, near north. You know these victrola's, the automatic nickel one's I mean. Well a guy's puttin' one in. I'm pushin away at the brush, an' you know me, the open ear kid, always listenin'. I'm workin' and listenin' and the wife of the owner an' the victrola man, they're talkin'. The dame, she says:

“What records ya got there?”

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The guy, he reads off the list o' records '[e?]'s put in, an' this dame she pipes up with:

“Did you put in the one called No w she sells What She Used to Give Away?”

Did ya ever hear anything like it? These jerks!

4. The re's Always Some Way to Beat The Ra_p

I was workin' in a saloon out south. A big moving van pulls up, an' the driver an' helper lugs a big case into the joint. It's a beautiful case, 4 Mahogany finish, like a piece of furniture. It was a brand new slot machine, with a sliding front like's on my kit there. Yessir, it had a sliding drawer that pulled down an' locked when the heat was on. That's the feature of it, that's the latest. And tailing the van was the slugger, the syndicate man, in a Lincoln Zephyr, who came in and tended to the formalities, how the split was going to be, an' if there was any trouble to contact him, an' all that. I tell you, Abe, there's always some way to to beat the rap. It's the goddamnedest thing!

5. They' re Hard-Boile_d

So ya wantta know what the saloon keepers are like, in general? Well, now, I'd say it's like everything else, there 're all kinds, only the range's sort of narrow, good an' bad inside of certain limits. I told ya before they're next door to hoodlums. But one thing, most of 'em are hard boiled. Anyway, on the surface. Like the guy in this place. Yesterday after you left he was out here talkin' to me. I'd noticed he wouldn't let no one buy him no drinks an' I remarked on it. Well, Jesus, the guy had a regular code. He said:

“Buy me a drink? No, by Jesus! Let them buy their drinks an' get their money an' kick them out, that's the way I do business. I don't stand for that buying me a drink stuff. I won't let the bartenders do it either. They buy you a drink an' then you gotta set 'em up for them, an' they hang around then an' clutter up the place so pain' customers don't have room. As long as they have money an' set 'em up among themselves that's all right. But I let 'em

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buy me a drink, then I'm one of 'em too, get it, an' if I kick them out, I lose their business altogether. Ya c'n always kick a man in the ass if you're a business man, but ya can't do it if you're a member of his club. An' I kick 'em out, by Jesus yes, just as soon's I see they don't mean to spend no more dough. Ya gotta be hard boiled in this business or it's your ass, that's all."

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They're hard boiled.

6 . I'll Drink It Up. It's mostly when there's no customers around that the stories come out. Now in this saloon near 79th. The bartenders were talking about the way they connive on change; you know, when somebody gives 'em a big bill and maybe walks away, forgetting to pick up his change. Well, one of the guys is telling about it. He says he always puts the dough on the back bar, so if the customer should happen to come for it, he couldn't say he was stealing it. After a few hours, of course, they guy pockets it. The customer comes in, an' he says, "You see my change? an' the barkeep says, "Yeh, here it is, "an' that proves he's honest. If the customer doesn't come back, it's gravy. One time, though, a couple of bucks are on the back bar, and the boss comes in an' sees it. "What's this? he says. The barkeeper tells him. The boss wants to know what time it was left, an' the barkeeper, like a fool, tells him. So the boss puts it in his pocket. But that's not the best one. The best one's about the dame that called up from the elevated station. Did I tell you that one?

A big heavy woman comes in an' guzzles some beers. She lays a dollar on the bar an' she's shootin' a line an' when she walks out she forgets to pick up her change. It was thirty cents out of a buck, so there was seventy cents layin' there. Well, the barkeep lays it on the back bar, like I said. After a while, there's a call for the boss, who aint in; so the barkeep takes it. It's from the dame who forgot her change. She's callin' from the EI station on 63rd. "Yeh, I got it," the barkeep says, "seventy cents." The dame says, "That's right." And then she pulls this gag. Listen, It'll knock you off your pins. She says:

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“Well, just hold it for me. I'll be in one of these days and trade it off.”

So the barkeeps tellin' me about it and swearin, an' he says:

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“There's the goddamn seventy cents, gatherin' dust, no good to me or her or anyone else. If that goddamn—don't come in pretty goddamn soon an' drink it up, I ll drink it up.”

I says, “ll drink it up, don't worry, if you want to get rid of it.”

The barkeep says, “Aint that a bitch?”

7. Anti Semitism

A lot of fellows, ice men and guys like that, have to spend a certain amount of time and money in the saloons, just to hold their trade. Well, I'm working in a place, and in comes a guy, a German or a Swede or something like that. We were talking about it afterward, and we sort of agreed he must o' been a Swede. The saloon being one of his stops, he tries to be sociable. He's an ice man, sort of big an' hulking an' dumb as hell. He tries to make talk an' blunders at it somethin' awful. But that aint the point. The point is, when he goes out, the tavern keeper turns to me an' says:

“He acts like a—— Jew.”

I don't look Jewish, an' no one ever takes me for a Jew, so I hear lots of things like that. You'll find a lot of that kind o'stuff around these taverns.

8. Anti Semitism

I was workin' in another place. This wasn't no window job this time, but on a wall outside. The guy comes out every once in a while to watch us work an' see how things're goin'.

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We get to jibber jabberin' around—you know me, always askin' questions an' tryin' to find things out, an' pretty soon we're talkin' about Hitler 7 an' so on. This bastard, he busts out with:

“I don't want no Goddamn sheenies in here!” - talkin' about his trade.

“Yeh, sure,” I say, “Yeh.”

Maybe I didn't talk right, forgot myself for a minute or somethin', because he looks at me sort of queer an' says, “You aint Jewish, are you?”

“No, no,” I say, “no.”

The lad I'm workin' with, he says, “aint we all God's people,” tryin' to smooth things over.

But the guy must've had his suspicions all the time after that, anyway, because he kept comin' out an' talkin' to me, tryin' to justify himself. He'd say:

“Look, Phil, you wouldn't think that a guy who governs millions of people for years an' them lettin' him get away with it, you wouldn't think he could be all wrong, would you?”

I aint nobody's dummy exactly, an' I know what he's leading up to, an' I say, “No, no, I guess not.”

“Now,” he says, “you take this guy Hitler.”

“Yeh,” I say.

“Well,” he says, “if he kicks out the Jews, an' all the Germans let him do it, then damn Jews must've done some pretty goddamn bad things in their time, aint that so? You can't say the guy don't have s omethin' on the ball.”

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That's the sort o' thing ya gotta contend with.

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9. Now Don't Work Too Hard, Boys

I was workin' at one place where the twenty-six girl was as nice a place as you'd want to see. I worked three days on that job; it was windows an' a wall outside, both. We were always kiddin' back an' forth.

Well, one day, the second morning it was, she gets off the bus. It's in the summer. Jesus, you could see everything she had. An' I'm tellin' you, she had plenty.

She goes swaggerin' by us, Red an' me. We're lookin'[:?] an' not makin' no bones about it either.

That dame knew what the score was, all right. She stops when she gets up to us an' just looks at us an' laughs. Then off she goes, swingin' that rump of hers—Oh Jesus!" An' when she gets to the door, she looks around an' yells, sort of soft an' just loud enough for us to hear:

"Now don't work too hard, boys."

It was good enough to eat.

We swaggered around like that for weeks, sayin':

"Now don't work too hard, boys."

Oh, Jesus!

10 . Two Tough Broads

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Did I ever tell you about the two tough broads?

It aint much of a story.

It's like this.

I was workin in a saloon on S. State, an' the bartender tells it to me. It's about a snippy little waitress. I didn't see her; she wasn't workin' there no more when I was letterin' the joint.

Two broads come in an' order some sandwiches an' beer. The waitress is kind o'slow gettin' them their orders an' they start givin' her the works, remarkin' on the way she looks, the clothes she wears, an' pretty much everything else in general, including the fact that she puts it out. Whether she did or not I don't know. I don't know anything about her but this that I'm tellin' you.

Well, the waitress goes over an' tells them where to get off. Kind o'low. The barkeep didn't hear what she said.

The broads sit around, maybe one and a half-two hours, just drinkin' beer an' eyein' the waitress.

After a while the waitress has to go to the can. An' damn if the broads don't follow her in. Pretty soon there's screamin' an' bumpin an' hell to pay in general. By the time the barkeep 'd got help an' got them out o'there, them two tough broads had just about killed that kid, I guess.

The bartender was sort o'sorry about it. She was a good kid, he said, a good kid, but not tough enough. Ya gotta be tough yourself to talk back to a tough broad, he said. But you want them pretty, in the saloons, too, and they don't always go together. The barkeep said he was sorry as hell. He shook his head over it for a hell of a while.

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11. Anti semitism

This one happened out south. And the hell of it is, it's in a Jewish neighborhood, feature that.

The guy was sayin' how much he hated "kikes." "Take, for example," he said, "the two couples that was in here the other night."

Me, I always say, "Yeh," - you know me, get-the story Phil.

So it's like this.

These two couples—they're all dressed up to kill, fur coats an' evening gowns on the dames, and the lads in tuxes, or evening suits, or whatever the hell, an' they're drinkin' and eatin' an' having fun.

The waitress—I don't know how she come to do it, but she did—she spilled two cocktails. Well, the guy says, the tavern keeper I mean, a little of the stuff got on the clothes.

So one of the guys calls the tavern keeper over. They want him to look at what's happened and to pay the cleaning bill.

But the tavern keeper says that'll come to too much, it aint worth it. Besides, most of the stuff was on the table cloth not the "kikes' "clothes, an' how much syrup was there in two cocktails, anyway? "Leave it to them to make a good thing out of something like that," he says.

So they get sore all around and the tavern keeper calls for the bill. It comes to something like two-sixty, if I remember right, an' he says, "All right, now this is on the house; that's as much as I'll pay and I won't pay no more."

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Then one of the guys, or maybe it was one of the dames, I don't remember now, says, "Well, we won't come in here no more."

The tavernkeeper laughs. He says to me, "A hell of a lot I care. That's the way I treat these goddamn kikes."

12 . The Guy That Knocked Himself Out

This one happened on State near Congress. I had a good view, because I was on a ladder looking down, and I laughed so hard I almost fell off. Look, it's a pippin', an' if it doesn't get you, why, you ought to be doing some other kind of work.

It was outside of a saloon as usual, of course.

There was two guys. One was small, a shrimp maybe five foot four or something like that, and the other was a big guy. I mean big.

It's classic. You might put this one in the movies. You couldn't make up a better one than this. By the way, I can substantiate everything I'm telling you. I don't —what's the word?

Fictionize, that's right; I don't fictionize anything. It's all true, every word of it.

Well, these two guys were fighting. I mean, it was as if they was going to fight. One guy, the little fellow, he was walking circles around the big guy, posturing, gesturing, like a prize fighter, like a professional. The big guy just looked sort of puzzled and sick.

The guy with all the class, the one that was doing all the posturing and gesturing, dancing around like Pavlowa, all of a sudden he stumbled. Guess how. Well, I'll tell you. He caught the toe of one foot behind the heel of the other and he stumbled and fell. When he fell he hit his head on the curbstone and rolled off of the sidewalk into the gutter. He'd knocked

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himself out. I was up there on that ladder and I almost split my guts laughing. But that isn't the end. The next part's funnier.

The big one, the musclehead that was all the time skull draggin' around looking puzzled and sick, he suddenly comes out of it. He's lost his straw hat, it's laying on the sidewalk, and he stoops and picks it up. Then he looks at the little guy that's layin' unconscious in the street, and than he looks at the crowd.

By the way, I forgot to tell you, there was a hell of a crowd standing around gawking. He looks around, and it's as if he was saying, "Any of you guys want to get tough with me?" He didn't say a word, but that was what his face said, and the crowd just m elte d away. There wasn't a blow struck.

13 . The Beat Ya Got In Tha House .

I was workin' in a saloon a couple of weeks ago, an' a guy walks in an' says, "Gimme the best ya got in tha house."

The barkeep gives it to him, an' he puts it down an' starts to walk away.

The barkeep yells, "Hey? - how about the dough?"

This guy, he just turns around and laughs and says, "I'll see you payday."

There wasn't anyone in the saloon but the barkeep an me an' the lad helpin' me to letter up the place, an' this guy.

The barkeep comes out from behind the bar.

This guy, he just turns an' looks at the barkeep an' laughs an' walks out.

The lad with me, he says to the barkeep, "Don't you know the guy?"

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The barkeep, he scratches his head an' says, "Never saw him before in my life. I'll be a son of a bitch!"

I never saw anything like that before. Did you?

14 . Two Irishmen

This one happened in a saloon on 51st street.

Two Irishmen had been bullcrappin' each other for hours. These Irish. They'll be standin' around drinkin', and' someone'll know a Mahoney, say, an' someone else'll know a Mahoney, an' so he'll hear the first guy speak of Mahoney an' want to know, "Is that the Mahoney that lives down on Racine and 50th," or wherever the hell, and that's the way they break the ice, and pretty soon they're all thick as jelly and talkin' hell for [leath?], each one tryin' to out-bullcrap the other. The Irish saloons are the filthiest of 'em all. And the toughest. Did You see the I nformer? Well, remember the saloon? They got it there, all right. I've seen it over and over again. It's the same way right here in Chicago.

These two. They had plenty under their belt. It was all beer, though, because I was watching them. Well, after a while, they stop talking so much, and then one of them starts to argue, an' the bartender says something to him, an' he goes outside. I see him standing there for maybe half an hour.

Pretty soon I've got to go outside, too, to judge the layout, and while I'm standin' there, this guy comes up to me. He says:

"That's the bull, that's the bull. I spent a dollar and a half and he only spent a half dollar, he's got to come across with a few. He can't get away with that bull with me. That's the bull, that's the bull, I spent...." Over and over again. I went back inside and he followed me in.

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Pretty soon there was talking again, plenty of it—the same two Irishmen.

Well, they three the guy who'd been talking to me out on his ear. I mean on his ear, Abe. They picked him up and three him through the air and he landed with a plop on his side and his head bumped on the sidewalk so I thought he'd crack his skull, at least. I never saw anything like t hat before.

Was he hurt? Now. He got up cursing and walked away. Now there's something for you, maybe you can use that one, I don't know.

1 5. My America

I was workin' in a saloon just west of Western on 71st. It's Lithuanian or Polish, something like that, I don't know. The owner's wife let me in every morning. Because she'd be busy cleaning the joint while I worked, and the old man, he had to be up late at night so he didn't get up till maybe eleven-twelve o'clock. She's come out with pail and mop, but before she started to work she'd park her fanny behind the bar.

There's a little radio there. She'd turn it on and listen, with her head almost on top of it. By God, I thought her ears were glued to that loudspeaker. But always the same programs, two of them, always the same ones. They were “Dan's Other Wife” and “Road To Life.” Or maybe it's “Road of Life.” Aint that a bitch, though? And as soon as those two programs were over, always the same two, she'd turn off the radio and begin to work like hell, moppin' up that floor.

There's America: what are you going to do with it?