

[Uncle Zeb's Inside Frog]

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. 124th St. New York City

DATE November 21, 1938

SUBJECT MEDICINE SHOW TALES: "UNCLE ZED's INSIDE FROG

1. Date and time of interview Nov. 18, 1938
2. Place of interview INTERVIEWED IN MY QUARTERS, 86 W. 12th St.
3. Name and address of informant William D. Naylor See "Medicine Show" 9/19/ 10/5, 11/9) for information on William 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.

FOLKLORE

Library of Congress

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 W. 12th St, New York City

DATE November 21, 1938

SUBJECT MEDICINE SHOW TALES: "UNCLE ZEB'S INSIDE FROG II - UNCLE ZEB'S INSIDE FROG " One of the tricks that Doc Porter used to work on the old Medicine Show to stimulate sales of his " Kickapoo Indian remedies " when I was with him, was the psychology of suggestion. Doc had it down fine. " He would always wind up his lecture by a detailed description of the "symptoms" symptoms of all the diseases the Kickapoo Indian medicines were supposed to cure. And the way he'd describe those diseases, how anybody would feel when they were getting them, or had them or were about to have them was enough to make anybody shiver. His method was something like the old-fashioned " hell and brimstone preacher " bearing down on " future punishment " till the most of his audience could feel themselves already sizzling. " By the time Doc got through describing "symptoms" symptoms practically everybody in the neighborhood would be imagining they felt some of the "symptoms" symptoms at least and would be convinced that they " had it, " whatever it was. Why, I used to sit and listen to Doc's " horror stories " of diseases till I'd get to felling feeling the "symptoms" symptoms myself! " Doc was a foxy old bird and I guess he wasn't far off his base when he'd say, most ["most?"] diseases diseases people get are just imagination, anyhow! " 2 " At any rate, Doc's system of describing symptoms symptoms helped stimulate sales of his " Indian Remedies " wonderfully. " I've seen the same idea worked in old-time newspaper advertisements of " patent medicines. " And there are lots of people who may be fooling perfectly well when they start to read

Library of Congress

“symptoms” symptoms described in patent medicine advertisements but by the time they're through reading the darn thing they have the “symptoms” symptoms bad enough that they rush right out and buy the “cure” .” Even otherwise educated people and who are supposed to be intelligent are like that; let them hear enough about “symptoms” symptoms and they will get those “symptoms” symptoms , or let them have a queer felling feeling and they'll imagine they've got some sort of a “queer” disease.” We ran across one queer, get-whatever-they-imageine disease cases down in the back-woods hill country of Virginia when I was with Doc Porter's Kickapoo Show.” The people in that section were pretty poor and on most of the farms they used water from shallow open wells, natural springs, or creeks. Naturally the springs and creeks and even the open wells were often infested with frogs, water skimmers, beetles and things like that.” Well, one night at one of our shows a young fellow asked Doc if his Indian Medicines would cure an “inside frog.”” It sort of stumped Doc Porter for a minute and he said: “Cure a inside-what?”

“Cure a ‘inside frog,’ I said, ” the young backwoods native repeated kind of worried.” My Uncle Zeb Hurst, out on Deerlick Creek, has got a inside frog. He took a drink of water down at our spring in the dark one night a couple of weeks ago and he swallowed a frog by mistake, at least he says he did. An' And he also says it's still in him 3 and still alive and he can feel it kickin' and twitchin' around in his stomach. He's gettin' ” mighty peaked ” and thin from worryin' about it. He's afraid it will grow and get so big it will kill him.” ” The idea of a man having an “inside frog” was so novel it intrigued Doc Porter and he told the young fellow he'd go out and see his “Uncle Zeb” personally, then he'd be able to tell for certain just which Indian Medicine would be the right one to give him to get the frog out of him.” The young fellow took Doc and me out to see “Uncle Zeb” and we found the old fellow in pretty bad shape, just barely able to hobble around, and he'd heep keep holding his hands over his stomach and swearing that every once in a while he could feel the cussed frog he'd swallowed kicking and jerking inside of him!” Doc put his hand on the old fellow's stomach and kind of pressed down on it for a minute...” There, he kicked!” the old man said, ” Didn't you feel him?” ” Doc looked solemn and said: ” Yeah, I sure as hell

Library of Congress

felt something jerkin' inside of you, but are you sure it's a frog you swallowed?" Doc said. " " Course I am shore, " the old man replied. " I went down to the spring to tote a pail of water up to the cabin and thought I'd take me a fresh drink while I was down there. It was sort of dark and I didn't notice much, an and well before I knowed it I'd sucked the danged frog in my mouth and felt him slip down my throat. " " Doc said he'd go down to the spring and look around a bit, it might be something else Uncle Zeb had swallowed; anyhow, he'd want to see what sort of frogs there were in the spring so he could tell better which variety of Indian Medicine would be best to use to make the frog come out... 4 " When Doc came back from the spring he was grinnin' with that wise grin he used to have when he'd get a big idea and felt confident of what he was about to do; and he told Uncle Zeb he'd found out the kind of frog he'd probably swallowed and that he had to work on to get him out of Uncle Zeb's stomach. He said it wouldn't be any trick at all to make the frog come out and for Uncle Zeb to not worry, but he had to work a certain way to get the frog out. " He had Uncle Zeb lie down on the ground under a tree out in the yard, close his eyes, and open his moth, then Doc squatted down by him, put his silk hat over Uncle Zeb's face and told the rest of us to stand back, he had to have plenty of room. Then he said: 'Now, Uncle Zeb, keep your eyes shut tight and I'll stick this medicine under the hat, slush a little of it in your moth and when the frog smells it he'll come out of your stomach in a hurry. He'll come up so damn quick you won't hardly feel him until he hits your mouth, then I'll grab him and pull him on ou—Now hold still, I'm goin' to do it.' " Doc run his hand under the hat...Uncle ZEB sort grunted and gagged; Doc jerked his hand out-and damned if he didn't pull out a little green-back bull frog about an inch and a half or two inches long!

"Now you can open your eyes, " Doc told Uncle Zeb, 'here's your cussed frog— I knowed my Kickapoo Medicine would bring him up! " Uncle Zeb opened his eyes and heaved a sigh of relief: 'I Gawd, you shore got him, Doc, didn't you— I feel relieved already! An' I'll never take another drink of water out of that damn spring, in the dark, you can depend on that!... " I don't know whether he ever did or not; but if he did and swallowed another frog...it probably wasn't serious. He bought three bottles of Doc's Kickapoo Rhemuatism

Library of Congress

Rubbing Oil—which smelled 5 like hell—so he'd have it on hand just in case he did accidentally get another 'inside frog.' ” Yeah...Doc Porter was versatile alright, and nothing ever seemed to stump him. ”