

[That's How We Are]

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

STATE New York State

NAME OF WORKER Terry Roth

ADDRESS 47 W. 69th St.

DATE February 28th, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore of Stage Hands.

1. Date and time of interview

Feb. 27th, and 28th

2. Place of interview

Adelphi Theatre

3. Name and address of informant

Mr. Powderly and Mr. Cassels No names to be used.

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

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

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

Backstage

FORM C Text of interview (Unedited)

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NEW YORK

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NAME OF WORKER Terry Roth

ADDRESS 47 W. 69th St.

DATE February 28th and 29th

SUBJECT Folklore of Stage Hands.

“THATS HOW WE ARE”

“In the ole days we didn't have any unions in the country. Ya take thirty five years ago, with just a small crew. Maybe two or three. An' we pick up the kids that hung around the theatres. There's your crew for you all the time you're in the town. An' what's in it for them? No pay. Ony a couple passes for the show. Or a few beans maybe beside, if the house was doin' good and the boss was a sport. So kin [a?] expect then to have interest in the work. A course not. An' sometime they just walked out onya cold an' you here with a show to go on. What was in it for them? What about the times ya picked up a crew and they was the firemen of the town. Sure! The minnit that fire bell goes, goes the crew. Then the unions start showin' up an' next thing you know, every body's a union man. The clearers,

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the grips, the flymen, all the electric crew. Nobody works outta line. Even though there was no union before, they was real union people. Nobody came aroun' begain' them to join up. They just walk in like it was nacheral they should be there. Now we got advantages.

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'Nother thing. Ya go out with a show now, they guarantee ya two weeks salary so you kin get back if the show folds up. An' we get lower berths ef we go travellin', instead a payin' our own way in a chair. An' ya can't work outta line now. Before the union, when we pulled into a town, I usta post the 24's (large billboard signs), get the luggage to the theatre, carry the water for the dressin' room, help pull the sets around, strike the show (pull it apart) en [trim?] the lamps (handle the spots). The ony thing what's not changed is the hours. We're on 24 hour call all day, seven days a week. Ony, for a midnight show we get one sixth a week's salary extra. An' if a guy get's hurt, an believe me there's plenty, the company pays him compensation. Somepun falls on ya easy as not. [Me?]? I got plenty things ta do before I croak.

A lotta this crew wuz in the way, an' they all thinks about things like me. We gotta mind our own business. Keep outta Germany. What they wantta do over there, that's their own business. An' leave us out. Muzzelini an' Hitler, let 'em do anything they like. Sure I don't like some of the things they do. But I sa s, keep away from my door, Muzzelini. Those things happen in all countries. Like Mexico. An' we didn't get inta that. As long as they don't bother us an' leave us alone, it's O.K. here.

We usta have a gag pulled in the old days. Ya come into a town an' ya get a yokel that's dying to helpya. So you say, "Go out, So, an' get the key to the curtain. Sometime you tell him where to go for the key an' you fix it up with sore of the guys 3 at another theatre to give him somepun heavy. Like one time there was an ole toilet lyin' around off stage an' they made that kid carry it over to our theatre, three blocks away. Or you say to a guy, "put a tie on", that means make it stationery. The scenery. An he says I got one already on. That usta give the boys a good laugh.

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Ya hear a lot about things happenin' back stage. But that's not always. I remember I was wid an English Company, playin' Bird in a Hand. They had a set there for dinner, an' that set was always ready, set with dishes, in back of the flat. When this glat goes up this night, the table tips an' the dishes go over. This English manager starts pullin' his hair out, but I turned to the clearer and tell him to go out to that restaurant in the alley. We was using Bordages crockery. But he comes back with greasy [appon?] cups. Ya know. The thick ones. The manager says we can't use them props. What are we gonna do? Why cant we, I says. An' we used them an everything is alright. So after the show he comes up to me an says, In England, if that happened, the show would have to close for a fortnight, dat's two weeks. But Americans, they come upta emergencies.

Another thing about American show people. There'a buncha fakers. You take when I wuz down South wid The [Winnin?] of Barbra [Wert?]. We go inta a town an' have 24 sheet posters all over town, with only nine in the cast. We change 'em three ten to see a show — that wuz robbry. Ya know how they got away with it? People in them days didn't have no radios and when a show comes to town, that's somepun. But soon they git wise that this is no big time stuff.

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Ya can see the act in dyin' on there feet, so the people wont pay no big dough no more. It got so bad, I rememba we played ta three people, and one of doze tickets was bought by an acter in the show. Another thing they'd do. Ef a show went over big, say like Captain Rickets, in a coupla monts they come back to the same town with a show named The Boundin' Maine. When the people come in they saw it was still Captain Rickets. They did this three times in one little town until the manager says to the show what came in. "I don't care what ya call yer show. Ef it's Captain Rickets I'll run ya outta this town so you'll remember what show ye got."

I forgot to tell ya this. In the old days, a stage hand had to play a paht in a pinch. Sure. I went on an' it wuz funny. It wuz in Canada an' the leadin' man's mother dies so that if he

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went to the funeral to see his mother, the show closes. I get the juvenile lead an' ast him to play the leading paht. "If you do", I says to him, "I'll play your'n". The manager says O.K. an' we rehearse a coupla times, so I almost know the paht. In this play there's a Prairie Schooner on the stage an' we all sit in it, an' I'm sittin' in there with my paht in ny hand. But it's down low so that the audience out front can't see what I got in my hand. All of a sudden, the comic, who also is in the boat, grabs the scrip from outta my and and trows it off stage. My knees wuz shakin' an' I think I can't do it. But I never missed a cut. An' that juvenile, he misses three.

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Say, Elmer, [showa?] the bank ya made. It's one of them country toilets. Yea. Outhouses. In the top you pull outa drawer an' put your dough in. The money falls back there an, you can't get it out. Ony if you take the roof off. See. It ain't so easy to take the money out like other banks. Now open up that door there. See the two holer? The money is in back of that. We sent one of Elmer's banks to President Roosevelt. It was a duck, an' it had 200 names pasted on it an 200 dimes inside for the Paralysis fund. But it's a funny thing. We never had a letter or nothin'. Elmer sold around 85 outhouses to the negroes in this show. They eat 'em up for 75¢ each.

That reminds me once when I wuz with Elizabeth Risdon in her show, she's tryin' to find a place for her to dress. An' the only place we had on stage wuz a toilet. With no backin's or nothin'. One of these portable ones. We ast her what she wuz gonna do. Ya know what she said? "O,K, boys, me fur the Crapper." She wuz English, too, but a real regular one.