

[Folklore of Stage Folk]

Duplicate

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 11

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Terry Roth

ADDRESS 47 W. 69th St., N.Y.C.

DATE January 30, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore Of Stage Folk

1. Date and time of interview Monday evening, January 30, 10 to 11 P.M.
2. Place of interview Gus and Andy's Restaurant 146 W. 47th Street New York City
3. Name and address of informant [Nagle?] Miller Renard
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

Florence Everett

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
Restaurant. Full description to be given in later reports.

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

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Terry Roth

ADDRESS 47 W. 69th St., N.Y.C.

DATE January 30, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore Of Stage Folk MILLER

Did you ever hear of Duffy and Sweeney? They were a wonderful comedy act and this Duffy was a real loveable guy. With a tremendous talent. But he was always drunk. They more playing the show in the middle west one night and just couldn't get a laugh out of that house and Duffy was very aggravated and intolerant of the stupidity of the audience. He tried every gag and trick to wake them up but nothing doin'. So after the act was over he walked out on the stage and in a very serious manner he started: "Ladies and Gentlemen: My partner and I have been playing here four days now and we haven't seemed to be able to do something you would appreciate. Now we have something we have never done in this town. My partner, Mr. Sweeney, will pass among you with a baseball bat and beat the bejeezes out of you." Duffy and Sweeney never played that town again.

Another real guy, and loveable like Duffy was Jack English who had been banned from Keith's circuit, and one day he came into town with his youngest son and marches into the waiting room of Keith's office. When the girl tells him that Mr. Albe can't see him, he's

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too busy, Jack says he'll wait there all day. But Albe always had a weakness for him so he called the girl in and said he'd see English 2 but just for a minute. When English came in he made a long speech about knowing how busy a man Albe was and promised he wouldn't take up more than two minutes of his time by the clock. Then he turned to his son who was the youngest out of seven or eight and said. "Look, Sonny, this is Mr. Albe." And then he turned to Albe. "Mr. Albe, do you want my child to go on hating you as the man who made us starve to death." And Albe took him back.

Then there was Johnny Stanley. He comes into a restaurant one night drunk as usual. It was a place where we all hung out.

"Give me a hunk of apple pie" he said to the waiter.

"We haven't any apple pie."

That got Stanley. "What kind of a joint is this? Can't you fake it?"

He was always in trouble about his salary being attached and he never could get his salary because the sheriff would be there first. So he met Francis X. Bushman who was as smart as they come and always in trouble with sheriffs too, and Bushman puts him wise to his own way of getting his salary. Bushman would go up to the manager's house early in the morning on pay day. When the manager opened the door, Bushman would hand him a receipt for his salary all made out. "Sign this please," and with the other hand he'd hand him a package, "Have some breakfast. I brought it for you," and that always broke them down and he'd beat the sheriff to his pay that way. Someone was telling me about an agent that books up girls these days in real cheap joints for two and three bucks a night, real buckets of blood. So he books a girl for a week in one of these places and on the second night she gets hurt doing an acrobatic and she's entitled to compensation so this agent wants commission for the compensation and he holds out on her two buck's salary. Can you figure a guy like that? 3 RENARD

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I had an act with a fellow, Joseph Egan, he's dead now. I met him singing in a saloon in Coney Island and I asked him to to in vaudeville. He was a waiter. We used to rehearse on the beach and when the weather got too cold, we moved over to the park on the East side at night and the cop on the beat used to stand around and watch and keep the kids moving. We didn't have a dime between us and the act required scenery so I borrowed 50 bucks from the policeman to buy scenery. Then we got a booking for \$10. But we had to have a trunk made for the scenery and the trunk cost 12 so we had to borrow the two bucks from another cop. Well, we worked on the road for a couple weeks for small change and finally got back to New York. In those days we lived in a Turkish Bath when we were in town and when we got up the next morning we didn't have even money for breakfast. You know how it is at the baths. When you come in, you check your valuables in a large envelope and when you leave you get it. As we went out, we saw a hundred dollar bill in this basket where people threw away the envelopes, and what do you think we did with the hundred dollars. We bought a hundred dollar trunk. And all we carried in it was a bellhop suit which was my costume, and a cane for Egan, a little makeup and the drop, but we sure made an impression in every hotel with that trunk, even if it left us without a quarter.

After a while I had an act with Burns of Burns and Allen. My name at that time was Fields. We went to Brooklyn for the matinee and the manager takes one look at us and closes us. So about five months later I decide to do a single so I book myself into the same house under a different name. In the morning, the manager is watching the rehearsal from the back and he comes down the aisle. "Weren't you here six months ago?" "No, not me." "Wasn't your name Fields?"

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"No, Renard." He looks blank for a minute but goes back, and I start signing my number and all of a sudden he rushes down the aisle. "Get out, Fields." That was that.

Before that I did a three act when I lived on Second Aveune with two boys. The first booking was up on 107th Street so we used to walk up to do our show, the three of

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us. Sometime all we had was a dime between us so we would buy about 3¢ worth of cigarettes, and a milk bottle full of vichy water and a raw [egg?] for the tenor's voice.

And you couldn't exactly call my first stage appearance a success. I was fifteen and I got into an amateur night on the Bowery. They gave me the hock before I could open up my mouth, but that didn't discourage me.

Right now I'm getting together a bunch of refugees and putting on an act with nine genuine refugees. All of them were stars in their own country, mostly from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and one concert singer from Spain. One of the fellows composes; he's written about 100 things but only on the other side. The little Spanish girl left on account of the tumult of war and she's very intelligent, but she doesn't speak much about it. Her family is still over there. They have a lot of confidence in me. Most of them are over here two or three months, although one has been here eight months. Most of them can't speak our language but a performer is a performer in any language he speaks, if he's good. I got them through ads in the German papers and through clubs. And believe me, they're very well educated. They sing in all languages, and I have a commentator with them. We open Friday at the R. K. O. theatres around town. NAGLE 5 NAGLE

“This story I was offered a lot of money for at the Bronx Home News but it would have disturbed too many homes in the Bronx. This is what happened. I was a manager of a theatre up in the Bronx, it had reserved seats, the only one like that in the borough, and I had a doorman and he started to dress a little swell. I met him there in a barroom one night and he's crackin' around tens and twenties, the best in the house for the boys. We were selling out every night, business was very impressive and naturally I start looking for a leak. I thought, “What is going on anyway that this Willie should be in the dough” so I asked him, “Willie, what the hell's going on here. You're not getting \$18.00 and spending tens and twenties a night just like that. In fact a little explanation is comin' to me.” “Well, boss,” he says, “as a matter of fact the time's coming when I need your aid.” So we sit down and here's the story. Around the corner from the theatre there's an alley. He's going

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home one night and a woman is waiting in this alley and she calls him. It was a Sunday night about 12, well after the night performance. "Willie, have you got a program?" "No, but I can get you one," so he went back in the theatre and gets a program. She slipped him a dollar. Now, she had been out cheating on her husband and she needed an alibi, so when he asks her dearie where you been all night, all she has to do is throw him the program, give him the works about the show and he's satisfied. She's so satisfied too with the deal that she tells her friends about this service and pretty soon it gets around the Bronx and finally it wound up this became an industry for Willie. I see that it needs a little system, a fennagle technique, so I went in with Willie and organized it. I went around to the speaks, it was in the 6 speakeasy ear and I tipped the bartenders off to our little side line. They would call us up. "Willie, send me up 25 pairs of tickets and programs," and we built up a regular route all over the Bronx. We took the head usher and let her in on it. When we ordered programs, we ordered 250 extra which used to come in a special package. As the usher there would seat the people she would keep the stubs, quickly clipping them together in pairs and put them in her pocket. As soon as the show was set, Willie would go off the door and go into the room and start sorting them out, a program and two stubs, a program and 1 stub. Then he'd get in his car and deliver all the orders he would have. We used a cigar store across the street to bring in all the calls we would have. Well, that business ran out when the husbands got wind of it and didn't give a damn anyway what the wives were doing or if they came home; so the women stopped spending money. What did they have to put out dough for an alibi they didn't need any more. See?"

I remember when the Siamese twins booked there, I mean these two boys, I think one of them died a few years ago, do you remember? These kids could do anything, drive a car too. Well, they had a gag worked up they used to pull. They'd got out for a drive and get in some traffic jam. Then the cop would come around with a subpoena and hand it to the one that was the driver. "Better be in court at nine tomorrow" he'd say, "O.K." the driver would say, "I'll be there." But his twin would break in. "Oh, I don't think I'll go down to court with you. I don't like getting up in the morning." So the cop wouldn't know what to do so

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he'd go to the judge and get a bench warrant. When they finally appeared in the court the driver would tell the judge that he couldn't appear because his brother didn't want to come with him. They used to purposely get into all kinds of difficulties and what could the judge do about it. It used to start a lot of commotion where ever they went. Judge and lawyers brought up the question: supposing one of them committed murder. The managers would be up in the air because some night one of the twins got sick and couldn't appear, and the other one couldn't be docked for his performance. Why, do you know that after a case like this in Harrisburg it brought on a discussion in the session of the city meetings as to what to do about these twins, because everybody was always wondering about what would happen if one of them committed murder.

Another troupe that was troublesome was the Singer midgets. They used to pile into a cab and then have fights with the driver about the rates. They claimed that three of them sat in a seat for one person, and he said they were eight people and should pay the limit. But the courts always gave the midgets the break.

There was another funny thing happened to me. You know Power's elephants never left the Hippodrome after the show closed, they stayed there 20 years until it closed because it's not like any other act you can move around. Well, by that time the elephants were pretty used to the place. Finally they were booked up at the Royal in the Bronx. The next morning they walked up to the Bronx. We had to find a place for them to stay and after a lot of looking around, I found a place under the El around 143rd Street where the pushcart peddlers stabled their horses and carts. After the night show the elephants were taken to the stable. This is their first new home in 20 years and there's one thing about elephants, it's that the leader of the herd, the rest won't make a move until he says O.K. The others get it somehow, he transmits the message. The same thing happens there. They won't go in that stable until he found out that it was all right. He goes in there and finds all those fruits and vegetables and begins eating. The rest of them get the message that everything is jake and they go right to it, they got right to work on all them fruits and tomatoes and cabbages. In the meantime the horses run away and there was a riot all

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over the Bronx that night. The next day the Borough President gives them a dinner on the lawn of the Chamber of Commerce up on Tremont Avenue, with special dinner menus for the elephants. It was some show to see all those elephants march up those steps to the table where each elephant had a bail of hay. They, the Borough President welcomes the elephants to the Bronx, and the place is just mobbed with people. And that was the worst week's business we ever done in that theatre.