

[Point to Point Workers]

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS

DATE April 25, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore of Communications - Point to Point Workers

1. Date and time of interview

2. Place of interview

Men's Relief Room, 15 Whitehall Street

3. Name and address of informant

Frank Gaynor

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.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS

DATE April 25, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore of Communications - Point to Point Workers

I used to think I'd pull out of this job — I never was crazy about it—but it's eighteen years, and now it might as well be for [life?]. There's not so much choice any more. Used to be you could take it or leave it. Guys like myself were boomers. If you didn't like a place, you'd up and take a crack at the boss, pick up your key and walk out. Hit the next town, show your key, and they'd take you on just like that. Only a few guys knew their Morse, and owned a key. Not like now with one or two companies holding the wires, and training their own men. But I'm not kicking. I'm lucky, in a way—You gotta realize it, what with the times—unemployment—If a man crowding fifty holds a job anyplace, he's a lucky son-of-a-gun.

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I joined up with Postal after the war—I already had an in, cause I had served as signal man part time, and part time as a wire spy in France—that's tripping the short commune lines for military information—then I was on signals too.

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That time they were still using the old Bug receivers. “Vitroplex” is the trade name—it's outdated now— We called em “bugs” cause there was a picture of a cockroach or beetle on the trade mark. It was a matter of sending and receiving on single sets—nothing to it—but here in the company, it's more like a factory. You concentrate on one operation—either in sending or receiving, and you have to turn out so many messages per hour, transcribe so many words per minute—55 is my limit, and that's high considering you're reading code on a ribbon of fast moving type.

I've heard it said that it's supposed to be the hardest job on the eyes next to diamond cutting. Eight hours a day you are reading code off this moving strip of tape. Working at night it's worse, cause electric light strains your eyes. Now they've started printing on a purple-blue on an off-white strip—supposed to be easier on the eye than black on white.

Heard tell of a guy once got stagger-blindness from reading the tape. What they call stagger blindness is when everything moves backwards—your eyes keep moving along from right to left even off the tape, from having watched the tape move backwards. Lots of the guys wear glasses round here. Some wear green eyeshades, and some wear blinkers—yeah, they'll fix two pieces of cardboard on each side of their head—helps your eyes.

Well, I actually knew a woman been on the phones thirty years—this was when they had ear receivers, instead of eye receivers—that is you intercepted the code through the phones, 3 not off the tape—and this woman got what they call Telegraph Deafness. She got so she couldn't hear anything but telegraph sounds. She stayed on the job five years after this happened. It never hurt her work—she could transmit perfectly—in fact she was much faster than the other operators cause no other sounds registered with her

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except telegraph signals. Goes to show how highly specialized a job like this gets to be!. Remember, those wires are busy every minute of the day and night—never a let-up—perpetual motion. There's bound to be a high average of neuraesthesia among workers here. In order to concentrate on the single operation of sending or receiving you've got to train your mind into one rigid groove. What happens? The habit finally becomes so strong that even off the job your mind goes on transmitting unconsciously, in your sleep even. Myself, for instance—I got what they call the litters in my key finger. Notice my hand when its resting on ny knee or on the arm of a chair— Unconsciously I'll move that finger up and down—dot dot dash, dot dot dash—reflex action. It goes away and then comes [back?] again. I'm used to it, so it doesn't bother me. But sometimes my wife will wake me up at night, you know, and she'll tell me for heaven's sake to quit pecking around! I do it in my sleep—wherever my hand's layin, up and down goes that finger, pounding the key for Postal Tel. 4 Excerpts from the ACA NEWS, official publication of the American Communications Association, CIO:

From the column Personal and Impersonal by Wiretapper

SLOW DOWN

“Ali Baba Kramer and His 46 2/3 Thieves” On the 24th of October at 8 a.m. We put the company in a jam. We refused to be speeded or hurried a bit And the company officials were having a fit. They ran into the office and back out again The way they were worried was really a sin. Tape hung from the machines like grapes from a vine And for once in the office we could really recline. This hasn't ended, but shortly it must, For if it doesn't, the company we'll bust.

(By a Sanfran [Traffic?] Operator)

[md;]

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Buffalo, Local 51-A—“Pappy” out Clvd. way reports he attends Western Reserve University (sounds like an Indian reservation) and is majoring in chemistry. He continues —“sure is funny monkeying around with test tubes and stinking up the joint”—fer dat mine poy he goes to school?

The slow-down was in effect in this office, too, folks...(yawn)...and 'twas hard work for some of us...(yawn)...the 5 baskets were full up and (yawn) [?] tried hard for 36 per hour but (yawn) we could'na reach such “[speed?]”..hu-hum...'twas restful and quite enjoyable to us “small fry”...but lordy! those “brass hats” were steaming...[yowsch?]...40 minutes is half hour and ten 'an' shouldn't we have it?...Well, we have it, huh?...So long.

[md;]

One of the girls in [simplex?] said the other day: “I feel so lousy that I think I'll spend my overtime money on a down payment on a tombstone!”

And did you hear this one: “It's terribly warm in here,” complains one op to a supervisor. No answer. 'Say, it's awfully warm in here. I feel so hot, I think I'll faint.” “Oh,” says the supervisor, “you're loafing, eh. Because if you were working hard you wouldn't know the difference.”....You sure would if you worked in a union shop, sister.....

[md;]

From Local 32 - L. A.

Max Pritkin, our genial manager at MA branch, and incidentally our sergeant-at-arms at local meetings, is authority for the following:

Max was seated at the desk in a customer's office, making himself at home, as is his wont, when in walked—of all people—a sales representative for the opposition.

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Not recognizing Max, the representative immediately launched forth into a sales discourse on the merits and demerits of each telegraph company. Incidentally, Lineman Stevenson, who was engaged in installing a call box on the premises, was perched on a ladder with some wiring, and witnessed the whole proceeding.

As Stevenson listened, hardly able to hold himself (the weakling), the sale representatives purred into Maxie's ear. In the most dulcet tones, he told Maxie of his company's unparalleled service, and of the vast advantages to be obtained in using his company's service. Max leaned back and listened dreamily. He became spellbound—even enthralled at the salesman's velvety persuasion. He even learned a lesson on salesmanship, page two, chapter two, from *How To Become a Salesman in Ten Easy Lessons*. It was a page that had been glued together in his book—and Maxie had missed it.

But all good things must end. Even for Maxie and Steve. And so the salesman finally finished his sales talk. With eager anticipation he awaited the result of his efforts.

Maxie sighed, then leaned forward, the suspicion of a tear in his eye. But it was the crocodile variety—only the salesman knew nothing about crocodiles, or their tears.

“That was a beautiful sales talk,” Maxie began, somewhat begrudgingly. It was masterful, well time, well executed. I might even say it was Colossal. In fact, I will say it. It was Colossal. [But?]⁷—it so happens that I am the manager of the Postal Telegraph branch, at 8th and Maple Sts. Have a card! Have two cards!

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The salesman turned a deep purple, and then slowly, before the eyes of Max and Steven shrunk to the size of a Kansas pea. It wasn't necessary to even open the door for him as he walked out. He went under the crack.

[md;]

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SPARKS

By C. W. Preble

Book No. 1373 Sparks, a mighty man is he All he does is pound a key And listen to the ships at sea He copies weather and the press And listens for an SOS His rig is all shiny-bright His hook is clear When into port the ship goes steer He's ready for a little fun At the finish of the run. Oh, Sparks, a mighty man is he He helps to make it safe at sea.

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WHICH ARE YOU? Are you an active member, the kind that would be missed, Or are you just contented that your name is on the list? Do you attend the meetings and mingle with the flock, Or do you stay at home and criticize and knock? Do you take an active part to help the work along, Or are you satisfied to be the kind that "just belong"? Do you ever lend a hand to those who never kick Or do you leave the work to just a few and then talk about the clique? This year, there's quite a program scheduled that you will hear about, And we'll appreciate it if you too will come and help us out. So come to the meetings often and help with hand and heart, Don't be just a member but take an active part. Think this over, members, you know right from wrong Are you an active member, or do you just belong? [md;]

NO FAIRY STORY

Once upon a time, not so long ago, a man went hunting in the woods. He was miles away from any shelter, when a storm of terrific proportions broke out.

Looking for some sort of covering, the man spied a hollow log and crawled into it, safely protected from the elements without.

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After some hours the storm died down. Upon attempting to leave, however, the man found to his horror that the log had swollen with the rain and he had become tightly wedged within it.

With death from slow starvation staring him gauntly in the face, the hunter began to review his life. Many were the images he conjured up out of the past. He thought of his happy childhood, his youth, his lovely wife. Bitterly he cursed the cruel fate that had handed him down to such a death.

Suddenly he remembered that he had not paid his ACA dues.

The reaction was immediate and startling — it made him feel so small that he crawled out of the log with ease.

Pay Your Dues Today.

[md;]

I SIT ON THE FENCE

By G. J. McLellan. I enjoy a good fight, it's a wonderful sight, Providing I'm not in the fray. I'm a peaceable soul who prefers his skin whole, So I sit on the fence and survey. I sit on the fence and I gaze from thence At the fighters who fight in the fray. If the company wins, my hide will be safe And I value my hide I must say. If the union is best, I'll cheer with the rest And accept the raise in pay I'll hop off the fence to count my pence, Then I'll hop on again and survey! I'm a generous soul, and it's ever my goal To have plenty of cheers to spair I'm sure they go nice with my kind of advice Which is commonly called "Hot Air" So I sit on the fence with attention tense And watch the battle veering If the company wins, in spite of its sins You'll surely find me cheering But if the Union men are victors, then You will hear my wild "Hurray" As I hop off the fence to show my good sense Ere I hop on again and survey! 10 For what is the use or where's the excuse To put my epidermis in

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danger? I have always known that my skin is my own And not the skin of a stranger So I
sit on the fence, and my din is intense For there I can holler and see And whichever side
wins, you'll know by my grins That the winner was backed by me. When the last shot is
fired and my tonsils are tired And the wounded are carried away I'll hop off the fence with
valor immense Then I'll hop on again and survey

SALARY — 1 GALLON GASOLINE PER WEEK — HOURS 24 PER DAY VACATION —
2 DAYS A YEAR IN THE REPAIR SHOP...NO ERRORS BONUS - CHROME PLATING A
YEAR...GUARANTEED NOT TO ARGUE POSITIVELY NON UNION...

TAKE ONE HOME TO THE KIDDIES