

DEPOSITOR: Mary L. Dodge

TITLE OF PAPER OR PROJECT: American Folklore

SUMMARY: Folklore materials collected from Bowdoinham, Maine.

TYPED OR HANDWRITTEN: Typed

CONTENTS LISTING:

- I. Evaluation (p 2-3)
 - Author's evaluation of the success and problems encountered with the project.
- II. Early Remedies (pp 4-5)
 - The author's mother related various types of medicinal plants and what they helped cure.
- III. Two True Stories (pp 6-7)
 - One story is about a man who drank vanilla because he could not buy liquor. The second story is about a man whose wife caught on fire and later died. There is also a third story; the author's reminiscences about an old woman who always wore black, whom the children thought was a witch.
- IV. A Picture of My Town (pp 8-10)
 - A history of what Bowdoinham's social life was like during Prohibition. Newspaper article recounts what went on at a typical local dance.
- V. Bowdoinham (in 1949) (pp 11-12)
 - A poem about the stench from the fertilizer plant in town.
- VI. Poem "A Ten Cent Can of Paint" (pp 13-14)
 - Poem about the paint not drying on a toilet seat.
- VII. My Own Superstitions (p 15)
 - The author lists a few of her superstitions.
- VIII. Superstitions (p 16)
 - The other tells of other superstitions that she's heard.
- IX. True Stories, Pat and Mike Stories , Anecdotes (pp 17-20)
 - "Eastman's Chestnut" (pp 17-18)
 - "In Again – Out Again" (p 18)
 - "Scotch Joke" (p 18)
 - "A Negro Passenger" (p 19)
 - "Two Hillbillies" (p 19)
 - "The Scotchman" (p 19)

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- "A True Railroad Story" (p 20)

X. Hunting Stories (pp 21-25)

- Several stories told to the author by Prudence Soucy, wife of former guide Lewis Soucy.

END

PROPER NAMES

tr. cards.

Collection D-8

Indexed by P. CORNELL date: 1-3-64

name	informant	character	other
Dodge, RUTH Bow Doin HAM	6		
HACKETT, LONA MRS. Bow Doin HAM			
Soucy, PRUDENCE		22	
Tom Halc HARD		6	
BRAUN, GEORGE		22	
GORDON, ED.			

Cp 80 se : AMERICAN FOLKLORE

BY

Mary L. Dodge

Bowdoinham, Maine

O.K.
B

D-8

Dodge, Mary

Page Contents

- 2 Evaluation
- 4 Early Remedies
- 6 Two True Stories
- 8 Boudoin ham (in 1949; p. 11)
- 13 Poem "10⁴ Can Of Paint"
- 15 Superstitions
- 17 True Stories Pat & Mike Stories, Anecdotes
- 21 Hunting Stories

~~1~~ A. The Area

1. East Boothbay, Maine
2. Greenwich, Connecticut
3. Bowdoinham, Maine

B. The Informants

1. Ruth Dodge, Bowdoinham, Maine
2. Mrs. Lona Hackett, Bowdoinham, Maine
3. Mrs. Prudence Soucy, Bowdoinham, Maine

C. The Folklore

1. Early remedies --Mrs. Dodge
2. Superstitions --Mary Dodge
3. Stories and jokes ----Lona Hackett
4. Hunting stories --Prudence Soucy

Q D. Evaluation

I feel that this town is rich in hunting stories. Nearly all of the land outside of town is posted. I have heard of three different parties putting deer skins in their fields to fool the hunters. One man often does it because he gets so angry when they hunt near his house. When deer hunting starts, the wife usually tags the first deer and the husband the next one, if he is lucky enough to shoot two.

After I had finished getting my hunting stories, one interviewer said that she could tell me a true story that happened the night before. Many geese were in the field near by her house, and boys were shooting at them. She said, "And it wasn't even dark, either!"

I found it very difficult to get hunting stories from men. They know plenty of them, but a man's approach is necessary. I was unable to get a moose story, which a friend had heard. She said it was long and very funny. The gist of it was that a man shot a moose out of season. He hid some in the woods and wrapped some in a newspaper and hid it in the furnace. While he was cooking some of it for his supper, the game warden called. He was caught! I tried very hard to get this, but had no luck.

101 03

I certainly found that note taking was difficult, and unless you know the person well, it would be almost impossible.

My advice in getting material would be to contact the person, explain what you want, and give him time to think out his stories. This would be particularly appropriate for an older person. I asked my mother to jot down remedies as she thought of them. Then, when I was ready, she gave her stories very easily.

I can see where a drink would loosen the tongue, but I didn't have the drinks or the time to look further. I can say, however, that I became more interested as I continued and I haven't a doubt but what this territory is very rich in this kind of material.

East Boothbay, Maine, is a typical New England fishing and shipbuilding town with a small population, until the influx of the summer visitors. Here at a place called Meadow Cove there is an old house over 100 years old, where my mother and I were both born. The former took long walks into the woods with her grandmother and gathered many of nature's remedies. The following actual experiences, which date back approximately 65 years ago, were told to me by my mother, who is now 72 years old.

Euth Dodge

"Near a neighbor's house and in the woods there was a plant called mullein, which had long leaves. These were taken home, dried, and made into tea. If your lungs were weak, this concoction would help them".

"Juniper berries were brought home, dried and steeped. This drink would aid in the function of the kidneys".

"If a bee should sting you, a common remedy was to use a dampened plantain leaf, which grew wild in front of the house".

"Mustard leaves, which were planted and then grew wild, and hops, which were planted, were both used as poultices. If you had a headache, it was a rush of blood to the head. The poultice on the sole of the feet would draw the blood from the head down into the body. To reduce a swelling and remove inflammation, the dried stalks and leaves were applied as a poultice".

"Wild cherry bark was steeped and used as a common cough syrup. If that did not relieve the patient, there were various other herbs".

East Boothbay
Meadow Cove

167
"People planted catnip. If a child had worms,
or similar ailments, the leaves were steeped and
drank as a tea". 101 05

"Onions were planted and often used both as
a poultice and in a homemade cough syrup. Cook the
onion with molasses and butter, take an occasional
spoonful, and the cough would disappear. If the lungs
were congested, fry the onions in plenty of lard,
apply the poultice while hot, and keep renewing it
until the patient has relief."

(In case of pneumonia, when the patient has been
given up by the doctor, the onions have saved lives.)

6
RUTH DODGE

TWO TRUE STORIES (told by my mother)

101 06

Before the days of liquor stores, people drank vanilla. When my mother was real young, she worked in a small grocery store at East Boothbay. Here she met and talked with many characters of the small town. One of these people liked anything with alcoholic content. She tells the following story about a man named Tom Hatchard.

"First he would come into the store and ask for a fairly large bottle of Jamaica ginger, which was not allowed to be sold for that purpose. His next choice was vanilla, then peppermint, and finally lemon.

One day, while on his way to town meeting, he came into the store. He looked longingly at the vanilla, which he was afraid he would not be able to purchase. Then he held up his finger to his teeth, which were in very poor condition, and said, 'Terrible toothache, Ruth! I want some peppermint!' I sold him the peppermint, which he took with him. On his way home from this annual meeting, he returned to the store and asked for another bottle of the same remedy. I asked, 'What did you do with the bottle you bought?' He said that he went over to a neighbor's house for dinner, forgot, and left the bottle there. So he bought another bottle, which he quickly 'downed' outside the store".

[K1700]

[X800]

17

There was another character in the same town
named Gene. He was working out around the barn, when
his wife came running toward him with all her clothing
afire from the effects of using kerosene to start the
kitchen fire. He rolled her on the ground to try to
put out the flames, but she died later as a result of
the burns. When her husband often repeated the ex-
perience, he said that by the time he reached her,
she was 'burnin' nasty', and he always stuck to that
same expression.

101 07

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

[G 220] Another story concerns the writer. There was
an eccentric older woman who always wore black and
carried an umbrella every day, regardless of the
[G 240] weather. All the children had great fear of this
person, who so well resembled the much feared witch.

About forty years ago my family moved to Bowdoinham, Maine, a small town ten miles from the larger town of Brunswick. The population was about 1000. The main industries consisted of a fertilizer mill and the sheep business, both smelly industries. However, on Saturday night everything was set aside for the big weekly dance, as they called it. People came by train or any other means, including walking, from neighboring towns.

The following article, which was first told and later written down by an unknown author gives you a good picture of what the people in my town DID at those weekly dances.

Town Hall Jig

[2400] They still dance the old and strenuous way in this burg. Lady of the Lake, Portland Fancy, Boston Fancy, Quadrilles and other antique orthopedic exercises every Saturday night.

A crowd of 44 persons is accounted a good turn-out. Fellow and his steady are nicked 75 cents at the gate. Dances are run by the orchestra boys, constellation of three perspiring dispensers of frenzied music. They pay \$5.00 a night rent for the hall. Population around 1,000.

Bowdoinham
Brunswick

[2400]

It's a slice of authentic rusticans, the real McCoy in barn dances, and a delight for a city-bred traveler. The Boston Fancy has it all over the corns and bunions of the Mayfair paralysis. 101-09

A dance is a dance in Bowdoinham. No dignity. The lads unbrock down to their shirtsleeves, which are rolled up and their collars tucked away for the evening in a hip pocket. The floor vibrates and the frailer ladies visibly wilt under the whirling pep of the lads fresh from the farm.

Dances last 10 to 20 minutes each. Occasionally a Charleston--persisting favorite--is played, but square dances predominate. When not musicing the orchestra boys are farmers themselves.

Prohibition is a success in Bowdoinham. The last bottle of Jamaica ginger was sold several months ago. Stubborn scofflaws are reduced to beef, iron, and wine tonic, disagreeable medicine of alcoholic content. Mostly the boys eat ice cream, raw. Intermission for that purpose.

No films at these cross-roads and the nearest town with a theatre 10 miles away. During the winter Bowdoinham has magic lantern entertainments. Sets of slides telling humorous stories are shown repeatedly.

(2400)

While the younger element get to neighboring towns occasionally, the older folks do not see three pictures a year. Music they get relayed via radio, 101-10 their principal contact medium with the entertainment world.

But a swell time Saturday night. The square dances are at once a lot of fun and better than a Turkish bath. As gay and as innocent as the larks that twitter. "All Hands Round" and those venerable jigs are based on the old-fashioned precept that many feet make merry times and the dance floor is for dancing, not for necking.

New England was doing these steps when the New York, New Haven and Hartford was a cowpath.

BOWDOINHAM IN 1949

(2400) I have mentioned that years ago there was an interest 101-11 in sheep in Bowdoinham. When the two Kendall brothers, prominent people in the town, died, this interest gradually lessened until nothing was left of the sheep except what could be used in the form of fertilizer. In order to make another industry, a place was set up in the center of town to prepare and bag this mixture for sale. At first this kind of business annoyed the townspeople, but the local boys had to have work, so nothing was done. However, people coming into town wondered how people could endure the fumes.

Every June it is the custom for a railroad crew to move into Bowdoinham, where they have their headquarters for about a month. In the year 1949 one section hand found this odor so intolerable that he wrote a poem and signed it Yoo No Hoo. That is all we know about the author. The poem was passed around, read by all, and everyone had a good laugh.

When I was collecting, a railroad man told me that he would let me copy the poem. In the meantime a woman, who recently celebrated her fiftieth wedding anniversary and always keeps a scrapbook, let me borrow her copy. She had copied it from one that my brother had put up in his grain mill.

The following poem denotes an outsider's impression of Bowdoinham in the year 1949.

Bowdoinham

Bowdoinham

101-12

We've just completed one full week in Bowdoinham, in Maine.
And when we leave I hope to God we don't come back again.
For of the different places I have been this side of Hell,
I can't recall another place with such a God damned smell.

How folks in this community can stand it and not die,
Gives them a lease on Heaven in the distant by and by.
Perhaps I am a sissy and therefore I can't take it,
But even then I do not crave to eat and drink sheep shit.

It may be soothing to the ones who live here year by year,
And yet to me there's one thing that is not so very clear.
How any animal could carry such damned rot inside
Calls for some strong debating o'er the country far and wide.

I've handled plain manure out on several farms,
And seen some good results obtained but never harm
And when I bid this town farewell I'll be so glad that I,
Will never care to look another sheep tird in the eye.

By Yoo No Hoo.

June 26, 1949

(This plant has recently been moved outside of town.
On April 25, 1960 a special town meeting has been called
by the selectmen to consider and vote on the Bowdoinham
Zoning Plan.)

Bowdoinham

The following poem, also author unknown, has been passed around many times. Either it was written by a French-Canadian living possibly in Brunswick, a nearby town, or someone imitated a dialect. I copied the poem several years ago, but do not recall who gave it to me or how long I have had it. Perhaps people living in the small town would appreciate this condition more than those living in the city.

A TEN CENT CAN OF PAINT

Mr. Woolworth, I got complaint,
About one can of ten cent paint.
My wife she buy at your damn store
And now by cripes, we doggone sore.

You see last week the spring she come--
And everything's on the bum,
Da walls, the floors, da windows too,
She's dirt like hell, I'm telling you.

My wife she's short and kinda fat,
Now you know just where she sat.
She's got big ring around,--complete
Where she done sat on toilet seat.
I say to her, it serves you right
You try to be so doggone tight.

That doggone paint she no damn good,
She no got dry on no damn wood.
My daughter too get ring around,
Where on toilet seat she too sat down.

For one whole week by cripes we wait,
And now we all get Constipate.

By cripes we don't know what to do
We got to eat and some go through,
My wife she cry and cry and cry,
But still that paint she no get dry.

My wife got sis he name Marie;
She lives in hime all time with me.
Lasta night I look where she sat down--
By cripes she too got ring around.
I try to wife with turpentine
She howl like wolf, she loose her mind.
I scratch like hell for half a day,

Brunswick

[x 100]

She skin she come but the paint she stay.

101-14

I live long time but never see
A man who get so mad as me.
When I think about the can of paint
I get so mad I almost faint.

Now Mr. Woolworth, I aska you
What in duce we gonna do,
For how can home be nice and sweet
If paint no dry on toilet seat?

X200J

431J

15

MY OWN SUPERSTITITIONS

101-15

I have always been very superstitious about many things that I have heard about. Here are a few:

When you see a common pin on the floor, pick it up and you will have good luck.

If you see one crow, you will have sorrow. Two crows mean joy. Three crows mean a letter, four crows mean boy, and so on. (As I get older, I look only for the first two).

Do not walk under a ladder. If you do, you will have very bad luck.

If you cut your nails on Sunday, you will have bad luck all the week.

A black cat crossing your path denotes very bad luck. (Many times I have turned around and gone the other way, when I have met one of these creatures).

If you stub your toe, the next person you meet will be your sweetheart.

Cobwebs on the grass in the morning point to a good day. (This acts as my barometer in the summer.)

If the kettle boils dry, it will rain.

Don't start anything new on a Friday, or it will be unsuccessful. (In school I never begin a new unit or reading book on the last day of the school week).

SUPERSTITIONS

Other superstitions concern a school in Greenwich, Connecticut, which I attended for three years. 101-16

I was told that, on the first day of every month, if you said the word 'rabbit' three times before you said any other word, you would have good luck all the month. All of us put up signs in our room the night before to remind us. (I still find myself today saying these three words the first day of every month.)

Another custom in the same school was to walk down the stairs backwards the first day of the month and that would also bring good luck. However, this habit always brought demerits, when you were late for breakfast.

Greenwich, Conn.

A MORNING CALL

101-17

One morning I called on Mrs. Lona Hackett, writer of news for the Brunswick paper, town gossip, and native of Bowdoinham. When I told her what I wanted, she was very glad to see me and immediately started for the parlor, which had been closed for the winter, and dragged out picture after picture taken during her 50th wedding anniversary observed this past summer. After I had seen all the pictures, I had to look at all the gifts. By this time I was well discouraged as far as story-getting was concerned, until she thought of her scrapbooks. Here she found the poem the railroad crew man composed and a few others of interest. During the interview her husband, a retired railroad employee, added a true story about the Irish boss and the Frenchman he hired.

The following are the jokes from her scrapbooks, which are very old.

Eastman's Chestnut

A nice old lady stopped an officer in the court house. "Where is the court of reprobates?" she asked. "If you mean the probate court," said the officer, "it's right in there."

"Thank you," answered the lady graciously. "My husband died detested and left an infidel to his will."

It was a moment before the officer could translate this. Then he said, "You must mean intestate. In other words, that means he didn't have a will. A co-¹⁰¹⁻¹³dicil ^{is} an addition to a will. It looks as if your sorrow has got you all mixed up."

"Well I do feel bad, but this is the place isn't it where you apply to be the executioner?"

IN AGAIN--OUT AGAIN

Pat was dawdling along on his way to work, looking half-asleep. Mike overtook him and slapped him heartily on the back.

"What's wrong wid ye this fine morning?" he cried. "It's half-asleep that ye're looking."

Pat turned a bleary eye on his friend. "And it's tired I am after feeling," he said. "Wasn't I up half the night?"

"What was the trouble?" Mike asked anxiously.

"It was the cat," replied Pat. "Wasn't I sitting there till gone two waiting for her to come in so I could put her out for the night?"

SCOTCH JOKE

Mrs. McTavish looked out the window as the family was going in to dinner and wailed, "Och, Jon, here comes company, and I bet they haven't eaten yet."

"Quick!" ordered the Scotsman. "Everybody out on the porch with toothpicks."

A NEGRO PASSENGER

[X600] A Negro passenger in the steerage, who was very seasick, was bantered by his friend as being a land-lubber. "Dhat's ⁶ correct," said the MAL-de-MER victim weakly. "Dey ain't no ahgyment dere. Ah's a land-lubber as' Ah's jes' findin' out how much Ah lubs it." 101-19

TWO HILLBILLIES

J1805} First hillbilly--Yes, sir, my gran'pappy lived to be 90 an' he never used glasses.

Second hillbilly--Mine, too. He allers drunk from a bottle.

THE SCOTCHMAN

A Scotchman whose name was MacIntosh, and who was proud of the fact that he was directly descended from the chief of the clan, was having a dispute over the fare he owed a tax~~e~~ driver.

[X600] The man with the meter talked loud and harshly, and it angered the Highlander.

"Do you know who I am?" he demanded, proudly drawing himself up to his full height. "I'm a Mac-Intosh."

The tax~~e~~ driver snorted.

"I don't care if you're an umbrella," he said, "I have my rights."

A TRUE RAILROAD STORY

101-20

J 1803] There was a man by the name of McCarthy, who was a section boss. When he hired a Frenchman, he told him to "spike up the ^{ties} ~~ties~~". The Frenchman didn't do it, as he didn't understand what he was to do. So McCarthy didn't want him around any more. He said to the Frenchman, "Count the ^{ties} ~~ties~~ from here (Bangor) to Portland". And he did. What the boss meant that time was for him to go to Portland and collect his pay, as he was fired.

HUNTING STORIES

101-21

Bowdoinham has the reputation of being a hunting town, because of the nearness of Merry-meeting Bay for ducks and geese and the great deer population. People hunt whenever they feel like it and, when men get together, hunting, or target practice, is the main topic of conversation. People eat deer meat the year round here. Many people act as guides and that is practically their only occupation or interest.

One afternoon I called on a former guide, who until seven years ago, drank continuously. He said he knew plenty of stories, but thought they weren't the kind that I would like to hear. Besides that he was a little suspicious of the paper I was writing, and consequently I did not get any stories.

About that time along came his wife, who was much easier to do business with and told me the story about a hunter here in town. As it was their supper time, I told her I would be back some other time and that she could be thinking of some yarns.

A few evenings later I returned and she sat back in her chair and, with many motions and laughter, told one story after another. They are true, because when her husband, Lewis Soucy, did his guiding, the parties stayed at their house. So

*Bowdoinham
Merry-meeting Bay*

The following are some that Prudence either heard from her husband, or experienced in her home.

I would like to add that words could not describe this person. She is very fat, good-natured, and laughs all the time. So you can well imagine her buying all the groceries, carrying them home in her arms, and feeding her husband any time of the day or night that he felt hungry, when he was on a drinking spree.

Oftentimes, when Lewis was hunting, Prudence spent the day away with her mother. When she returned at night, there were many surprises awaiting her, one of which I will describe in one of her stories.

Quite a while ago it was a rainy and cloudy day and many people were chasing deer. It was over by Darton's on a rise that went straight up. There were drops of red on the snow and deer tracks. George Brawn was one side of the tracks and chasing deer. The others saw drops and wondered if George had got his deer. When his crew caught up with him, they discovered that the drops were not blood, but the dye out of his clothes. George used his favorite expression and said, "Jeanie Crinie!", The deer, however, was gone and there were fresh tracks.

[J1772]

One morning Lewis told about Ed Jordan, a thin man who always wore a fur cap and ulster, regardless of the weather. He was an old timer, ran a florist shop in Portland, and came to Prohibition Point. Some time in the night, after drinking, Ed got up, went out, got into the boat and hollered to crowd on the side of the bay, "Ducks in!" He hurried over to the further shore and the bottom of the boat fell out. He called again "Come on out! The bay is full of ducks!" There stood Ed standing in the middle of the boat, holding on to the sides of the boat. Later the other four in his party rescued him.

[X 800]
[J 1772]
One night, after a day's hunting, they got into camp, drank, and got everything locked up for the night. They were sleeping--all except one, who said, "Oh, it's too hot in here". He got up and put his fist through the window. Instead of what he thought it was, he had broken a bookcase.

[X 1280]
In camp there was no kerosene, but the men had a candle. They were having a grand time drinking, when Ed said, "What are these lumps in this whiskey?" Come to find out, it was some maggots dropping from deer meat over head.

Portland
Prohibition Point.

[J2200] There were three men in the party. One got up in the night and went out to the outhouse. He opened the door, which opened in, and couldn't get out. He started in shouting, "Somebody's locked me in! Somebody's locked me in!" Lewis goes out and said, "The door pushed in!" There he was almost crying.

When he got back inside the house, he suggested bacon and eggs. Somebody spilled grease on the floor, and the same ^{man} slid the length of the floor and right under the stove!

A man came to hunt and brought his dog with him. The dog had fits and ate only certain things. There was a dog at the house. When they went hunting, they left both dogs at home. Prudence ^{sister} said, "I had a canner full of mincemeat and had cooked a leg of deer and left it in the pantry. When I came home, there were the two dogs curled up on the bed, their stomachs bursting, and the leg of deer meat (Made motions) which had been choked all day, over half gone. Well--there was something going on then--and don't you think there wasn't!"

One other time Prudence left some tomatoes to be canned. When she returned, there was much scouring of walls and ceiling going on, and many white spots from the scouring which had been applied.

25

101 25

Prudence wanted to know if I remembered Bill Miller, a former guide, & told her that I couldn't forget anyone like that. The first thing that I recollected was that he had the nickname "Roarin' Bill", because of his very loud voice. She told me two stories about him.

[J 1772] Bill was getting ready to go hunting and he made some rolled oats. He noticed that no one was eating them. He could not understand it, because he liked it. He thought it was full of raisins, but it was rat manure.

[X 800] Bill said the fellows gave him a drink, when guiding, and he said it was Four Roses. He said, if there had been one more, "it would have tickled him to death".