

Cp. 80

F O L K L O R E

Nora N. Roach

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Smyrna Mills, Maine

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H I S T O R Y
Smyrna Mills, Maine

341 01

SMYRNA MILLS, MAINE

The town of Smyrna was originally township No. 6. It is bounded on the east by the town of Ludlow, on the South by Oakfield and on the west by Merrill, North by Moro plantation.

The surface of the town in the southern portion is considerably broken, and in some high places high wooded ridges or bluffs rise to a commanding height and can be seen from all the surrounding towns.

The first settler upon the town of Smyrna was Mr. Nehemiah Leavitt of Royalton, Vt. who came to the town about the year 1830. Mr. Leavitt had, previous to that time, received from the State Legislature a grant of the township on condition that he should place 100 settlers upon the town within five years, build a saw mill and grist mill and four schoolhouses. Not having the required number of settlers at the end of five years, he obtained from the State an extension of five years more in which to comply with the conditions of his grant, and near the expiration of this second term he sold his claim upon the town to Messrs. Dunn & Jefferds.

Royalton Vt.

Smyrna Mill
Smyrna
Ludlow
Oakfield
Merrill
Moro Pt.

Smyrna Mills, Maine

2

The northern half of the town Smyrna is not settled and is still in its wilderness state. A railroad was put through the town, being a branch of the Bangor & Aroostook and called the "Ashland Branch".

Smyrna has a population of 409 which is steadily decreasing. The inhabitants are English-speaking, many of them migrating from Canada. The religion is definitely Protestant.

Smyrna is an agricultural community, with a large portion of the families living on small farms and the major crop is potatoes with dairying being second. There are a few large farms but on the average the farms are small in acreage compared with upper Aroostook.

At the present, the social and economic standard is low. The income of the locality depends on the price of potatoes and this has been disastrously low in the past few years.

*Smyrna M.
Smyrna*

341 03

FOREWORD

Most of the stories were told to me by my husband, Herbert A. Roach of Smyrna Mills, Maine. He has lived all his life in Smyrna and is fifty-five years old. He heard many of the stories as a boy when he used to visit the lumber camps. His father had a large farm and hired a lot of men who boarded at the house, and he loved to listen to them spin their yarns in the winter evenings in the men's room. Herb loves stories loves to tell them and is a very good story teller. He keeps a straight face and uses some voice inflection, mimicry and a few gestures. He can tell a dull story and it sounds funny. He never has to be prodded for a story if he knows one. Most of the stories were told to me alone, but there were times when either our daughter or son was present and they enjoyed listening. My notes were taken in shorthand as that is my field of education.

*Smyrna Maine
Smyrna*

341 04

G H O S T S T O R I E S

341 05

CAMPBELL'S LIGHT

There was a light known as Campbell's light that would appear on the North Road near the Clark Settlement Road in Smyrna Mills. I have seen this light many times as a boy and was terrified. The light would appear about nine o'clock at night.

The story is that this Campbell had a camp in that neck of the woods and he went away to the Civil War. He said he would be back but was killed in the war. This light would float through the air and move about just as if someone were carrying a lantern. Everyone would say that it was Campbell returning to his camp as he said he would.

Told by: H. A. Roach

Smyrna Mills

Age: 55

The locality of this story is part of my husband's farm.

Smyrna Mills

341 06

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

There is an old farmhouse on the Aroostook road that is haunted. It seems there was a young man boarding there and working the the woods. He was engaged to a pretty young lady. Before they could be married, he was murdered and buried somewhere around that farmhouse. All the lumbermen from that time on, who stayed at the house would tell the story about the ghost they saw.

They would go to bed at night. A cold draft and a strong wind blowing in the window would awaken them. They would see the form of the lovely girl in flowing white robes moving from room to toom. They would get up and light the lamp, but see nothing. They said it was the ghost of the young girl, looking for her bridegroom.

Told by H.A. Roach
Smyrna mills

Age: 55

Smyrna Mills

SACRED GROUND

On the North Road at Hastings Brook in Smyrna many years ago was a field that from some reason was supposed to be sacred. Said Gert, "I cannot remember why it was sacred." Anyway, there were three men mowing hay in this sacred field. They were not supposed to be there cutting the grass. They were cutting away when all of a sudden a great big snake jumped out of the grass, flung himself at these men. He got the men in a group, wound himself around them and tied them up in a knot so they couldn't get away. No one could get to them and they couldn't get loose, so they starved to death.

Told to me by Gertrude Sholler of Merrill, age about fifty-eight and she heard my husband's grandmother, Bridget Fitzgerald tell this story many years ago.

This is a story that Gert told to me one Sunday afternoon with my husband present, Maynard Sholler and myself. She could remember "Gram" telling stories of this type but couldn't seem to recall them.

Hastings Brook
Smyrna
Merrill

GRAVESTONES

341 08

There are two gravestones on the Aroostook road in the vicinity of the old McMannus farm. The stones mark the graves of two people who died of diphtheria. There were two other people in the same family who died of diphtheria but were never buried because there was no one left to bury them. Near the graves is a fir tree. There is a blue light that seems to hover around the stones and the fir tree and it is said that that light is the spirits of the two people who were buried there protecting the spirits of the two persons who were never buried.

Told to me by Gertrude Sholler of Merrill, about fifty-eight years of age and it was told to her by her sister-in-law Jennie Robinson of Ashland.

Present when she told it was my husband, H.A. Roach, Maynard Sholler, Gert and myself. I don't think that she believed the story, but it was told to her in belief and awe.

Merrill
Ashland

CURSE OF THE NORTH ROAD

341 09

This was told to me by my husband and it was told to him by one of his neighbors, Glenn Tibbetts, of Smyrna. I almost think he really believes it today.

There was an old fellow named Reed who owned a large farm on a hill on the North Road in Smyrna. He was forced to sell the farm and when he sold, he split the land into smaller plots. When he had finished, he put a curse on the land by saying that there would be no happiness and no prosperity on the hill. They verify the curse by telling about all the misfortunes that befell the residents of that section. One woman, in apparently good health, sat down on a log and bled to death. During the flu epidemic, they died so fast and it snowed so hard and was so cold that the coffins were just piled up in the cemetery. The death rate was higher in that area. Not a farmer on one of those plots of land prospered. Even at the present times the farms and land are bleak looking and not prosperous. Most of the owners have moved off the farms. A young man of the present generation bought one of the farms a few years back, and since has suffered two very bad heart attacks and has lost money on the farm every year.

My husband's farm is just below this hill and they all tell him that is why he is more prosperous than the others.

Told by H.A. Roach
Smyrna Mills

Age: 55

- Smyrna
Smyrna Mills

GHOSTS IN THE GILLMAN HOUSE

341 10

The house was known as the Gillman house and was supposed to be haunted, but everyone who lived there had different experiences. One family who lived there had some barrels piled up down cellar and one night they heard the barrels all roll down. They went down cellar to investigate and found the barrels all piled up just as straight as could be. A lumberman who boarded there said he would be awakened every night by the sweep of a woman's long hair across his face. A Mr. and Mrs. Dean lived in the house and owned a lumber mill. The mill whistle would blow every day at noon. Then the mill burned. In one room of the house Mrs. Dean would hear the mill whistle blow at noon even though it had been destroyed by fire. Only one room would she hear this whistle blow, and she got so that she made it a point never to be in that room at noon time. The house has since burned and a new house was built on the foundation, but the ghosts burned with the old house.

This story was told to me by Ruby Haskell of Smyrna Mills about fifty-eight years old. She has lived around Smyrna all her life, is a school teacher and has always heard the stories about the haunted Gillman house. She told this story to me over the telephone.

Smyrna Mills
Smyrna

D E V I L S T O R I E S

FLOATING LIGHT

341 1

There was a light that would appear on the North Road near the Roach farm about nine o'clock at night and just would seem to float through the air. Everyone was terrified to travel in that locality at that time of night. They claimed if anyone was walking along the road and the light appeared, it would follow them. All that could be seen at night was the light, but in the morning the prints of the devil could be seen in the fields. They figured that the devil was after them and were terrified.

Told by H. A. Roach

Age: 55

Address: Smyrna Mills

This is a version of the Campbell's light as told to my husband when he was a boy by Fred. Sholler of Merrill, now deceased.

*Smyrna Mills
Merrill*

"Gram" Cannot Sleep

341 13

This story was told to me by my husband about his grandmother.

She always looked upon a deck of cards as devil cards. She said that she couldn't sleep a wink at night if she knew there were cards on the floor in the house. The devil wouldn't let her. One night his youngest brother went out to the men's room and strew cards all over the floor. The next morning he asked, "Well, Gram, how did you sleep last night?" She said, "Fine, just fine." The young fellow turned mischievously then and said, "How come, the devil was here and strew cards all over the floor."

Gram was as Irish as her name, Bridget Fitzgerald and believed in all the superstitions of the Irish.

STRANGER IN CAMP

341 1

There was a lumber camp deep in the woods. One night in a howling blizzard a stranger entered the camp. The woodsmen fed him and bedded him down. He stayed at the camp and in the evening entertained the men with his feats of magic. He would do unbelievable tricks. He would make things disappear and draw objects from the space. He would work in the crew during the day and would fall trees that had become lodged. Something that no one else could do.

One morning the men arose to find the stranger gone. A light snow had fallen during the night and as they looked out they saw tracks of a cloven hoof. The devil had been amongst them.

Told to me by my husband, Herbert A. Roach. about fifty-five years of age, Smyrna Mills, Maine. He heard the story, when he was a boy, in a lumber camp which he used to love to visit.

Smyrna Mills

FRIEL SCARES DEVIL

341 15

One of the Oliver boys of Amity was walking along the river bank towards Woodstock. He came upon another man sitting on the bank crying. He asked what the trouble was. Then he noticed that the man had a cleft hoof. The devil was crying and he said, "I want to go to Woodstock, but in that next town live the Friels, and I don't dare to go by."

(A family of Friels live in Smyrna and this story is told about them because they are known fighters)

Told by H.A. Roach

Age: 55

Address: Smyrna Mills

Amity
Woodstock
Smyrna
Smyrna Mills

341 16

ANECDOTES AND JOKES

MIDNIGHT FITZPATRICK

341 17

He got the name Midnight by going out in the afternoon and getting drunk and picking up his groceries and going home at midnight and they would hear the bells on his horses as he went by.

He drank so much that his relatives got the priest to talk to him. The priest told him if he got drunk again he would turn into a rat. So, he did pretty well for a time, but fell off the wagon and got awful drunk again and passed out. Some of his friends wanted to get him home and he had lost his coat. So they dressed him up in a fur coat and loaded him on the wagon and headed the horses home. When the horses came to the door yard Midnight woke up and reached and felt his fur coat and called to his wife. He said, "Come out here and call in the cat. I've been turned into a rat and I want to get into the house."

This was told to me by (H.A. Roach), Smyrna Mills, age 55.

He heard (Clyde Haggerty) of Littleton, Maine about 58 years old tell this story to a bunch of men working in a potato house. He told the story and then laughed.

(Midnight Fitzpatrick lives on the "Ridge" in Littleton.

Smyrna Mills
-Littleton

PETE'S FAUX PAS

"Pete ran a filling station in Smyrna. One day a woman drove her car up to the station for gas and oil. Says Pete, "I was checking the oil and ^{she} got out of the car and asked me, "Have you got a rest room?" I'm a little "deef" so I didn't quite catch what she said, so I answered, "No lady, but if you back your rear end up to the hose, I will blow it out for you." She gave me the dirtiest look I ever got in my life and said, "I didn't say whisk broom, I said rest room." Pete laughed and laughed and said "My G--, did I ever feel foolish.

This is a story told by Hallie Hersey of Smyrna about 45 years old, nicknamed "Pete" about himself and everyone in town now tells this story when "Pete's" name is mentioned. Pete is quite a joker and loves a story even when the joke is on himself.

- Smyrna

HOW MT. CHASE IN PATTEN GOT ITS NAME

There were some Canadians came over from Canada and were stealing lumber. They brought their oxen over and were grazing in the meadow. The State Department sent Mr. Chase up to Patten to get rid of the Canadians. He decided he would do it by burning the fields so that there would be no feeding for the oxen. The fire got away from Mr. Chase and he was forced to go to the mountain and stay there for four days before being rescued. Therefore, the name Mt. Chase.

Told by Mrs. McPhee of Patten on the way home from March 17 class. It was told to Mrs. Greenlaw and me at the same time. There were no gestures or humor, just told while driving the car.

- Patten
Mt Chase

THAT'S ONCE

There's this old farmer named Dobbins. One day he hitched the buggy to his horse to start for town. He had his wife with him. They were already to start and the horse bucked. Dobbins said "That's once." The horse bucked again. Dobbins said, "That's twice." The horse bucked again, Dobbins said, "That's three times" and he got out and shot the horse through the head. Dobbins' wife started a tirade of language at him. He turned to her, pointing a finger at her, and said, "That's once."

Told to me by George Larlee of Oakfield about 36 years old while driving home from school one night. George told it and thought it real funny. He told it with a little gesture of his finger every time he said once, twice, etc. I didn't think much about the story until about two weeks later when I read it in my book, American Folklore. I have an idea that in the "tirade of language" George meant blasphemy but was too much of a gentleman to say the original words to me.

Oakfield

341 21

TALL TALES

Thomas McKee

22

The "one and only identical Thomas McKee" was coming in from Houlton one night with his horse and wagon. He had been warned not to start out because there were highway robbers on the road. Nothing could stop Thomas and he started out. The night was pitch dark, so dark he couldn't see his hand before him. Right in the middle of the deep woods, two highway men jumped him. One grabbed his horse and the other shoved a big pistol under his nose and said, "Your money or your life." Said Tom, "What in d'od blasted nation you doing?" One robber hollered to the other, "Jesus Christ, man, run for your life it's Tom McKee."

This was told to me by H.A. Roach, Smyrna about fifty-five and he heard his father Aziah Roach tell it.

Houlton
Smyrna

341 22

CHARGE

TOM MCKEE GOES HUNTING

Thomas McKee in the Union Army in the Civil War.

Tom was out hunting and he had his muzzle loading rifle with him and he spied a flock of partridge on the fence sitting in a row. He walked around to the end of the fence, then he fired. He left the ramrod in his loaded rifle and he fired stringing all the partridge on the ramrod--like a string of fish. Tom shouldered the ramrod and 15 partridge and went home.

of the Confederate Army.

The ... about ...

... father ...

Nora Roach

CHARGE

Thomas McKee was in the Union Army in the Civil War. One day his company lead by a General, came to the top of a hill. It was pitifully small in number. Below them lay a valley. Spotted in the valley was this large company of Confederate soldiers. The General realized they would be overpowered, so he stopped at the top of the hill and with his sword raised straight up in the air, he shouted, "Halt!" Then he turned and hollered, "Is Thomas McKee in the Ranks?" Answered Tom, "Right behind you, sir." The general lowered his sword and gave the order, "Charge". That was the end of the Confederate company.

This is a follow-up story of the same battle:

The battle raged back and forth until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and the Union Army began to overpower the confederate troops. The Confederate troops were retreating, then the General turned to Thomas McKee and said, "Fall to the rear, McKee. You've killed enough men for one day."

This is a story of the "One and only Identical Thomas McKee" of Smyrna Mills. (Not to be confused with his nephew, Tom McKee) This story was told to me by my husband H.A. Roach, Age 55 of Smyrna Mills, and he heard his father tell this story. Father's name Azial Roach, now deceased.

- Smyrna Mills

*****341 25

F O L K H E R O

DAVE WINS RACE

There was a race on at Woodstock, N. B. and Dave Perkins said he knew he could outrun anyone entered in the race. He got up one morning and ran all the way from Smyrna to Woodstock which is a distance of 30 miles. He entered the race and as he said he could do, he outran all those entered and won the race. After the race, he ran all the way back to Smyrna which is another 30 miles, and he did all this in one day.

Told by H.A. Roach
Smyrna Mills, Me.
Age: 55

Woodstock NB
Smyrna
Smyrna Mills

DAVE PERKINS

341 2

There was a man who lived in Smyrna Mills, by the name of Dave Perkins, and he was always pretending he was a horse. One day he and another man by the name of Fred were coming out of the woods. Fred decided to pretend he was all worn out. "Dave" was always hauling a sled. So they stopped. Dave said, "Butcha know, boy, get on the sled and I will haul you." After awhile he stopped and cut a white wood (switch). Giving it to the man he said, "Butcha, know, boy, if I lag a little bit, just tap me on the heels with this to stir me on." He did, and Dave snorted and galloped all the way out of the woods.

He had a tote road where he would get his winter's wood and would take horse manure in and spread it on the road to walk in because he thought of himself as a horse.

Dave went in to the B. & A. Railroad station.

Dave: "Butcha know, boy, I cut up an awful trick on the B. & A. today."

Station Agent: "You did, what did you do?"

Dave: "I bought a train ticket to Houlton and then I walked *all* the way." (He pulled out the ticker from his pocket and showed it to the agent)

These stories were told to me by my husband, Herbert Roach, age 55, of Smyrna Mills, Maine. They are about a character by the name of Dave Perkins who was a native of Smyrna, but now deceased.

- Smyrna Mills
Houlton
Smyrna

Dave Perkins

341 28

There was a woods fire about five miles down the road where Dave was working with a bunch of men. He had an axe and wheelbarrow down near the fire. Dave said, "Butcha know boys I got to go and git my belongings." The men took a fast pair of horses and a wagon and started down the road with the horses galloping. After awhile Dave said, "Butcha know boys, let me off. I'm in a hurry." He got off and outran the horses to where the fire was.

Told to me by Maynard Sholler of Merrill, age about seventy-two. Maynard says he was one of the men on the wagon.

The following story about Dave was also told to me by Maynard.

Dave was going down the road and had his wheelbarrow all packed and a pack on his back and his camp all closed up. Someone stopped him and asked him where he was going. He said. "Butcha know boys, I'm going to South Oakfield to a warmer climate for the winter." (South Oakfield would be about 10 miles below Smyrna)

Merrill
South Oakfield
Smyrna

DAVE PERKINS--LOST!

341 29

Dave took his knapsack on his back and headed for the woods. He had some food in his knapsack. He was lost, and traveled for two or three days. Finally a search party found him and the first thing he asked for was something to eat, saying that he hadn't had anything to eat for four days. Someone asked him why he hadn't eaten the lunch in his knapsack and he said he had never thought of it.

Told to me by H.A. Roach, Smyrna Mills, Age 55

Smyrna Mills

H U N T I N G

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

341 31

"Jake" is my next door neighbor and is a well-known hunter and poacher. This is a story he told me while sitting in my kitchen after he had brought me a partridge all dressed and ready for cooking. As he told it, he looked very sheepish. Later this same story was printed in the Houlton Pioneer Times.

"Yesterday, I decided to take a short hunting trip for partridge. I didn't want to go very far, so I took the path to the woods back of the house here. I walked and walked and saw no game. My leg started hurting so I turned home-ward. All of a sudden I saw what I thought was a partridge and fired. I went over to pick up my game and found that I had shot my pet cat. Cripes, I had two cats. If I'd shot the other one, I wouldn't have cared, but I shot my best one."

Jake is about 65 years old. He is a woodsman and

has broken every gaming law in the State. He is a native
of Smyrna, but this winter has been living in Connecticut.

*Smyrna
Conn.*

341 32

S O N G S

ANNE BOLEYN

341 3

Anne Boleyn had no panties to wear
 So she bought her a sheepskin
 To make her a pair
 With the rough side out
 And the wooly side in
 They'll keep me warm now
 Said Annie Boleyn

Now they roughed her, they chafed her
 They made the girl grunt
 As they worked up and down
 In the seams of her (yump)

She tried to endure it
 A long time in vain
 But she had to take 'em off
 And go bare a~~ss~~ again.

Sung by H. A. Roach
 Age: 55
 Smyrna Mills, Maine

Herb learned this song a long time ago when
 he was young, from a man who lived in Patten.
 His name was (Ferd Huston) and would be about
 100 years old were he living.

Smyrna Mills
 Patten

AUNT RHODY

341 34

Go tell Aunt Rhody
Go tell Aunt Rhody
Go tell Aunt Rhody
The old gray goose is dead

She died last Saturday
She died last Saturday
She died last Saturday
In the old wood shed.

At Rockland, Maine this is the way we
used to sing it when I was a child.

There was a young girl from Nantucket
Had a bustle as big as a bucket
She filled it with oats
And a bad nanny goat
Came right up behind her and took it.

Rockland
Nantucket Mas

341 35

EVALUATION

Pharmacia
SELF-COTTON-CONTENT

EVALUATION

341 35

I enjoyed listening to the stories and will probably be on the lookout for more of them now that I am conscious that stories like these exist. Heretofore, I had never thought much about them.

I do not think at the present time that my area is rich in folklore material. I think that it has been in the past, but the art of telling the stories needs to be revived. So many people had heard stories, but couldn't seem to fully remember them.

I think more of this should be done and could be a lot of fun.

I did not find the stories given to me by my husband hard to come by. Outsiders, yes. They were either reluctant or said they didn't know any when asked for a story.

I think most of the material is of regional quality and did not find any universal stories.