After Last Call, Swing Stories (Some True)

By STAN LEE

The last of Stan Lee's Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers is a riveting one. Their adventures have been described as anything from 'starkly cynical' to 'grimly cheery,' depending on the time, place and audience, some of whom have found them to be the ultimate expression of the counterculture's spirit.

The story begins with a group of young, rebellious, and mischievous brothers who, fed up with the usual fare of the times, decide to take matters into their own hands. They set out on a quest to create a new, more vibrant world, free from the constraints of the past. Along the way, they encounter various challenges, including alcoholism, fifteen and fourteen-year-olds who read comic books, and a lot of police officers.

Lee's stories are known for their vivid imagery and powerful themes, and this one is no exception. The brothers' journey is a testament to the power of the human spirit, and their determination to change the world.

At the end of the day, the brothers are left with a simple message: 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.'
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**Notes:**
- City A has the highest population and median income.
- City D has the lowest population and median income.

**Graph:**
- The graph shows a trend where population and median income are positively correlated.
Populist Oral History Project Envisions a Nation of Interviewers

By MICHAEL BRICK

The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 2003

The voice on the recording quavers and warbles and shows the speaker’s age, which is 88. The speaker is asked who he is.

“I’m Sandy Birnbaum,” the voice replies. “I’m a retired biomedical scientist, have been retired for some time.”

Mr. Birnbaum says that he is living a very comfortable life. But soon he will reveal things that the word “comfortable” hides — everyday agonies, experienced and unspoken pretty much universally.

The questioner, David Isay, draws Mr. Birnbaum out. Mr. Isay, a grandson of Mr. Birnbaum’s wife’s sister, is a practiced interviewer, best known for making oral history and documentary projects broadcast on National Public Radio.

On this recording, Mr. Isay is making an oral history of his own family, but he is also using the interview as a trial run for a much broader project: to democratize the craft of oral history and simultaneously capture a chronicle of ordinary life in our times comparable to the body of work produced by the Works Progress Administration two generations ago.

This will turn on his ability to persuade ordinary people, starting with New Yorkers, to speak of raw workday joy and anguish in the presence of a microphone, a recording device, a friend and a stranger. It also turns on his ability to teach interviewers the techniques that can elicit candid stories and unvarnished emotions.

“This is our beachhead against ‘The Bachelor’” Mr. Isay said, referring to the reality television show. “It’s about reminding America what kind of stories are interesting and meaningful and important.”

Starting in October, inside Grand Central Terminal, Mr. Isay plans to build something of a quiet public confessional in the center of the motion and tumult — and ordinariness — of daily commuting.

People rushing from train to street will move past a six-by-eight-foot box of gray sheet metal wrapped in a translucent skin with a microphone attached. Stepping to inspect the booth, they may push a button activating a speaker and playing aloud an edited sample oral history interview.

“If you see it from a distance, you’ll see this glowing box with these car speakers,” said Eric A. Litten, an architect with Mesh Architectures in New York who helped design the box. “Once you go inside, it’s going to be a wood environment, totally different, what you would call warm.”

Mr. Isay hopes that people will stop long enough to make an appointment to go inside, bringing a family member or friend to sit in simple wooden chairs beside a table with two microphones. In the room, a trained mediator will quickly teach them a few interviewing techniques — chiefly answering questions not interrogating — then monitor recording equipment as one person interviews the other. The whole process will take three-quarters of an hour.

A copy of the recording will be made on compact disk for the participants, and another copy will go to an archive.

Another booth is planned for downtown at the Eldridge Street Synagogue, and Mr. Isay hopes to place similar booths in libraries and other public places around the country to send a survey of movable booths to county fairs and the like.

So far, the only financing is a $50,000 grant to Mr. Isay’s nonprofit group, Sound Portraits, from the Rockefeller Foundation. But money may not be the biggest problem. Experts in the field of oral history, including some strong supporters of Mr. Isay, say that his project must overcome nonfinancial challenges to realize the scope of its ambition.

“It’s oral history writ large,” said Mary Marshall Clark, director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University and a professor of history.

She said that the project’s fate rests with Mr. Isay’s ability to train the mediators, who will have to train the participants. “The temptation in the short form will be to get people to serve up their lives very quickly. What was your happiest moment?”

“The truth is, there’s always another side,” she said. “The lost dreams.”

Both the product of oral history and the process of collecting it differ from journalism. Oral history describes the past, even the very recent past, while journalism describes the present.

The purpose of oral history, said Studs Terkel, the 90-year-old historian and radio interviewer who began his career with the W.P.A., is to tell the story of the world through the voices of the salt of the earth.

“Sir Francis Drake conquered the Spanish Armada,” Mr. Terkel said in an interview. “I thought he did it by himself. Some who shed those other tears are what history should be about. Who built the pyramids? Mrs. Pharaoh’s fingernails were as manicured as Elizabeth Taylor’s. Thousands of people built them. What are their stories?”

Mr. Terkel said that the participants themselves are the first beneficiaries of oral history. By way of example, he said that he once interviewed a woman in a housing project who had never heard her voice on tape. When he played back the tape, the woman said, “I never knew I felt that way.”

It is this part of Mr. Isay’s fund-raising pitch — the assertion that oral history works as therapy to the participants — that draws more skepticism from experts in the field.

“We don’t know really what impact this sort of recitation of life history has on war veterans conducted by family members,” Professor Bodnar also questioned whether participants would be forthcoming and complete. It is not of omission, he said, that could taint the results.

“Can you imagine how many people would go out there and tell a family member with a facilitator nearby about an instance of child abuse?” he said. “You’re going to get the public face of these individuals more than you’re going to get authentic stories.”

To avoid that result, Mr. Isay plans to use the recording of his great-uncle, Mr. Birnbaum, as an example and as a training tool. As that oral document rolls along toward the 75-minute mark, where it ends, the quiver and warble in the voice grows, and pauses elapse. The voice begins to describe another side of a comfortable life, a side that has emerged since the death of the speaker’s wife, Birdie Birnbaum.

“Grief is a funny thing, you know,” Mr. Birnbaum says. “Right now, when I do break down, I hate to say this, but it’s a good feeling. Cause, you know, it’s like, you’re — God, I never thought of this before — it’s like you’re trying to defend yourself, and all of a sudden you don’t have to anymore.

“You’re going to cry — you know what I mean — and nothing’s, uh, you don’t have to pretend that you’re being a brave soul, gutting it through. You’re just letting go, and it’s a good feeling. It’s hard to say, you break out crying or you choke up and you can’t say a word and it’s a good feeling. Yeah. You know, you no longer have to defend yourself, or act something you don’t really feel, that you’re happy with everything, ‘cause you’re not, ‘cause you never will be.

“Until I get rid of that extra bed in my room. I still come in a while reach over. I don’t know what to do with it.

“Oh well. That brings us up to date. That’s where I am now.”

On the tape, Mr. Isay asks Mr. Birnbaum whether he thought that talking about this grief might be damaging.

“Oh, no,” Mr. Birnbaum says. “I’ll be just back to where I was when I walked in here in about 10, 15 minutes.”
MARCUS DALY
ENTERS HEAVEN

By Archie Green

Miners mucking in the Speculator Mine around 1922.
Photo courtesy Al Hooper

The text continues with citations and sources, but the content is not legible to reproduce here. The document appears to be a scholarly work, possibly a journal article or a book chapter, given the citation style and formatting.
Well, there used to be an old fellow around the western mining camps by the name of Paddy Burke. Paddy was a strappin' Irishman, and he had a handlebar mustache. It looked something like the horns of a belligerent bull. Paddy was a great story teller. In fact, he got so that he wouldn't work. He would tell stories around the barns, and so forth. And, he was well-known in the Coeur d'Alene country, and, also, in the Nevada mining country. Those were all gold and silver camps, and the boys were pretty generous with shellin' out money for Paddy's entertainment.

But he wandered into Butte, and he fell upon hard circumstances. The boys didn't shower down very good, and he had to go to work. So he hustled himself a job muckin' in a mine called the Never Sweat. It was one of Marcus Daly's properties, and Marcus was, as you well know, the king of Butte at the time, or thought he was.

Paddy was workin' in the Never Sweat on the night shift. And old Marcus wandered into the place one time. It was a habit of Daly's to visit his properties every once in awhile in the middle of the night. He'd put on diggin' clothes and an old hat he'd covered with candle grease, just like any miner, and he would prance around. And it was understood that if Marcus caught you with your back straightened up, you were fired.

Well, this time Marcus stepped onto the cage, told the hoistman to drop him off at the 1300 foot level. The cage drops down, Marcus steps out, the cage ascends again, and Marcus is left alone in the darkness with his candle, and he listens. He doesn't hear the sound of a drill or a shovel on the whole level, no sounds of activity whatever. So he starts prancin'. Well, it's time for lunch anyway, so, he finally locates the gang. They're all in a big stop, and they've got their candles stuck into the stones around and about.

Enthroned on a muck pile in the middle of the assemblage is Paddy Burke. He's telling them a story, which is a damn sight easier than workin'. And, when this stranger joins the group, there's a chill sweeps over the boys. Uhh, Paddy—being, he had his audience well in hand—he felt this sudden chill. He didn't know just what caused it, but he suspected. So he finished that story, and the gang got up. He said, "Well," Paddy says, "Well, boys," he says, "wait a minute." He says, "I'll tell you another one." So the gang—they were fired anyway, which they figured—remained.

Paddy says: "I had a dream the other night. I dreamed that I died and went to heaven. And for miles upon countless thousands of miles, I climbed the stairs until I stood before the great pearly gates. I drew back my fist and I hit the door a rap, and an old gentleman with long white whiskers sticks his head out, and he says, 'And who may you be?' I says, 'I'm Paddy Burke.' 'Oh you are, are you?' He says, 'Where are you from?' I says, 'I'm from Butte, Montana.' 'Hub,' he says, 'I've had nobody from there for a long time, I'll tell ya that.' He says, 'I'll look you up in the book. Burke, is it?' 'Yes,' I says, 'Paddy Burke, if you please.' So after a few minutes he sticks his head out again, and he says, 'You can come in, Paddy, but you'll have to behave yourself.' I says, 'I'll do that.'

So he opens the gate a crack, and I stepped in. And old Saint Peter—for it was no less—he pressed a button, and here comes an angel. And he says, 'Angel,' he says, 'take my friend Paddy down to the storeroom and fit him out.' He says, 'Give him a good pair of wings, and given 'im a golden crown, size 7½. And give 'im a harp and be sure it's in tune.' So with that we went away to the storeroom to get him equipment.

After I was rigged out in the heavenly style, I was turned over to another angel, who took me out to show me the sights of heaven. And, 'twas the most magnificent place that the mind of man can conceive of. The sidewalks were of solid gold. The doorknobs was of great jewels. And the hosts of heaven were flitting about with their wings outspread, and sitting on clouds and strummin' their harps, and singing, oh, the most glorious tunes that you ever heard.

The angel said, "Well, we'll hurry or we'll be late for the great banquet." So we went to the hall where the hosts of heaven were assembled. When we entered the hall, it took me breath away. It stretched away on every side for miles, and miles, and miles, as far as the eye could carry in every direction. And here were the tables fairly groanin' with the most rare and delicate viands. We sat down to a meal of nightingales' tongues, and all manner of quaint and foreign delicacies. We drank the most rare and delicate wines, and the goblets that we drank from were hallowed out of great emeralds, and rubies, and diamonds. And they had waitresses flittin' about servin' everybody. They were on roller skates that were jewelled like a railroad's watch.

And of a sudden, all of a sudden, there was a bell of a commotion in heaven. The word was passed around that Marcus Daly had died. And no sooner had the word been passed around until there was a great fanfare of trumpets at the door, and a voice was heard saying, 'Marcus Daly is here!' And from the other end of the hall, where the great golden throne was, came another voice, 'Marcus Daly, welcome to heaven. Advance to the foot of the throne.' So the hosts of heaven parted like the Red Sea when the Israelites passed over. And Marcus Daly, all alone, walked down the aisle to the foot of the great golden throne. Almighty God arose, and He says, 'Marcus, I bid you welcome.' And turnin' to his right hand, He says, 'Come, Jesus, get up and give Marcus your seat.'

Transcribed from LP: Harry K. McClintock "Haywire Mac," Folkways FD 5272; Collected in 1932 by Sam Eskin at San Pedro, California.
Harry McClintock's folktale, "Marcus Daly Enters Heaven," literally carries listeners/readers into a Butte copper mine—a deep stope, a miners' circle, a storyteller enthroned on a muck pile. Mac's Folkways selections, as well as his songs and stories on other discs, tough hardrockers and copper kings, cowboys and canal navies, gandydancers and engineers, hoboos and boomers. His unusual repertoire and traditional style together catch our imagination; listening impels questions about his treasures and our responses.

I use the term "folktale" in its classic sense—two words combined to denote an enclaved set of people and a story shaped by these people's experiences. Mac's tale holds all the requisite elements of literary narrative: time/place setting, characters, plot, theme. Further, he has structured it to resemble a kernel within a shell. Formally, Mac introduces Paddy Burke, who prefers entertaining his fellows in barrooms to work underground. When his luck plays out in gold and silver fields, he finds employment at Marcus Daly's Neverswet, Butte's mine with seven fingers piercing the sky. There, the canny owner inverts the Arabian knight's caliph, Harun al-Rashid's, practice of disguising himself and prowling by night to reward deserving subjects. When Daly, in old digging clothes with tallow grease on hat, catches the gang loafing, all know they are to be fired. At once, Paddy takes up the choice portion, a self-contained wonder tale about Heaven. Figuratively, Mac has discarded the outer shell to reveal and provide a sustaining morsel.

As listeners, we hear Mac, initially in a normal voice, following Paddy's adventures from the Coeur d'Alene to the Neverswet. After Daly discovers the shirkers, a chill sweeps the stope. Pausing, Mac shifts his vocal style perceptibly to Paddy's Irish brogue. We have already heard Mac tell about Paddy; now, Paddy tells "another one," a story about Marcus Daly. Teachers of literature alert us to shifts in performing modes which signal plays within plays, or stories within stories, like Chinese puzzle boxes.

Over the years, folklorists have concerned themselves with the scope of international folktales, and the multiple variation within particular families. When and where did anyone first hear about an earthly ruler who preempted the Lord's seat? Are there analogues in print to Mac's text? Was Paddy Burke a living figure, or did Mac create the strapping miner? If collector Sam Eskin had any clues either to this tale's origin or its localization, he did not make them available in the Folkways brochure (issued with McClintock's LP in 1972)! A parenthetical detail helps establish a time line for Paddy's tale. How did a ten-day stint, an itinerant hardrock miner, first learn of a feast of nightingales' tongues?
ANECDOTES OF THE WEST

Along Exeter Creek, which flows into Milk River about four miles west of Malta, are several families of French ancestry named La Fond. They have always been stockmen, raising fine cattle and fairly good horses. Their land runs down to Exeter Siding, on the Great Northern Railroad, where Kid Curry once held up a train.

Adjoining their land on the east was the domain of an old Scotchman, named Andrew Davidson, who made money in the sheep business down in the Judith Basin and later had come north to continue raising sheep.

The domain of these two factions was in some dispute. They had some ill feeling on account of the range and waterholes but most of all because of a line fence and gate between them. I do not recall what the dispute over the gate was about. It was an ordinary pole gate on top of a ridge where the road came up out of the Milk River bottoms and headed northwest.

At one time old Davidson and old Adolph La Fond had hot words. The Frenchman challenged Davidson to a duel. The old Scot accepted the challenge and selected the weapons. They were to meet at sunup the next morning, upon a flat north of Davidson's ranchhouse, and settle the affair with six-shooters. La Fond was there promptly for the appointment but his opponent was delayed. The small, hot-tempered old Frenchman waited but no Davidson. He waited until noon but the large, white bearded Scot never showed up.

Upon another occasion the two had words over the same gate. This time there were several onlookers to see the fun. The two ancients came to blows but this did not last long. Davidson was a huge, burly old fellow and he grappled with old Adolph. They went down in a struggling heap.
Sheer weight and strength in his favor, Davidson downed La FOND. However, the triumph was short-lived for the wily old Frenchman seized a thumb in his teeth and clamped down.

Davidson tried to loosen the hold but to no avail. He decided to let his opponent up but the other failed to take advantage of the opportunity. La FOND clung grimly to the offending thumb. The pain growing stronger every moment, Davidson made frantic efforts to get up but could not. At last he turned to the onlooking spectators.

"B'yes," he called, beseechingly, "come help me let go."
1851. Conventional European images and paintings took their place, and the native creations have become extremely scarce. E. Boyd tells the story in Saints and Saint Makers, a volume which is reviewed in this issue.

_Tall-Tale Purveyor._—Boyle House, Texas booster on the grand scale, receives special mention in _Life_ magazine, March 17, 1947, pp. 6 ff. The bragadocio of the West still maintains a high average in Texas, and old tall-tale elements play no little part in this exaggeration. House applies many of the old stories to the Texas background. A few of the stories are given in the article:

1. _Tough Hog_. A Texas razorback hog ate a stick of dynamite, blew up, broke all the windows in the house, wrecked the barn, killed two mules, and was a mighty sick hog.

2. _Big Water-Drinker_. A cowboy didn't mind scooping up water from the creek which cattle had muddied, because he intended to drink all the water anyhow. See the article on "Jonathanisms" in this issue.

3. _Tough Frog_. Old Rip, a horned frog, was removed in good health from the cornerstone of a building. He had been there thirty-one years.

Gib Morgan, tall-tale teller of the oil fields has had one biographer. See Mody C. Boatright, _Gib Morgan, Minstrel of the Oil Fields_, "Texas Folk-Lore Society Publications," XX (1945), reviewed in _California Folklore Quarterly_, V, 320–323. Additions and variants to Boatright's collection are:

4. _Postholes_. Gib drilled a well three thousand feet into a hill in West Texas. A terrific wind blew all the sand away, leaving the hole standing three thousand feet in the air. Gib cut the hole into four-foot lengths for postholes.

5. _Tall Roof_. Gib built a roof over his big derrick (see Boatright, p. 66) so that the rush of oil would not knock a hole in the sky. The details about the size of the derrick are the same as given by Boatright.

6. _Quick Growth_. Corn has to be caught in the air by chickens. Otherwise, they would have to eat it from the stalk.

7. _Big Fruit_. Grapefruit are so big that it takes only nine of them to make a dozen.

8. _Healthy Place_. One Texas town had to hire an Easterner to shoot himself so that it might start a cemetery.

9. _Dry Climate_. The climate is so dry that people fasten stamps to their letters with safety pins.

10. _Hot Climate_. When a coyote chased a rabbit it was seen that both were walking. Some of House's tales appear in his books, such as _I Give You Texas_; _Tall Talks from Texas_; and _Texas, Proud and Loud_. Folklore collectors take note.
At the Hall, In the Stope: Who Treasures Tales of Work?

ARCHIE GREEN

American folklorists have long been ambivalent about occupational culture. Although we work every day in archive and seminar room, on campus or at public agency, we are reluctant to identify ourselves as workers with affinity to brothers and sisters on assembly line or at computer terminal. Calling upon norms in ethnographic reporting, we distance ourselves from those from whom we draw strength. Despite this favored stance of scientist-in-white-gown, we remain drawn to bunkhouse and honkytonk. In effect, we are torn between poles: the possessive pleasure in netting a song or story and in enjoying the company of its bearers; the perceived need to demystify, decode, or deconstruct these findings and to “psych out” bearers of song and story.

John Lomax liked cowboys, viewing them as Anglo-Saxon valiant; George Korson liked anthracite miners, viewing them as Celtic bards. The attachment of these two collectors to “their” workers helped immensely in filling America’s songbag. Today, some students look back at old-fashioned folklorists as “romantic” collectors, helpless in the face of dazzling theory. Normative tags such as “sentimental” or “enthusiastic” cloud appreciation of pioneer work, or distort disciplinary history. Hence, all folklorists strengthen themselves by reflecting on their consciousness, by articulating codes for calling, by facing con-

This essay was presented as the Archer Taylor Memorial Lecture at the 1987 meeting of the California Folklore Society at the University of California, Los Angeles, April 24, 1987.

ceptual contradiction, and by relating academic craft to skills on high steel, in the steno pool, and at a shopping mall.

In suggesting that folklorists, too, are toilers, we can place Archer Taylor in John Henry’s bold company: a powerful worker elevated to a legendary pantheon. Exemplifying the best in empirical scholarship, Taylor eschewed direct value statements in writing and teaching. I never heard him offer a political message, although I assumed that his Quaker childhood had inured liberal notions of brotherhood and sisterhood. I knew that some of the proverbs and riddles he treasured were alive on maritime or construction sites where I worked, but it was not part of his strategy to connect lore to work experience. Sharing many of Taylor’s aims, it was his colleague Wayland Hand who made explicit for me the ties of ancient beliefs to hard-rock mining songs gathered in the West. And George Korson, a continent removed, challenged me to raise critical questions about occupational practices.

Korson’s books told me that mine-patch ballads were not as old as classic ballads studied by Bertrand Bronson. Yet a palpable line does stretch from “Patrick Spens” to the “Avondale Mine Disaster.” Both are tragic narratives with a strong work component—sailors lost at sea, miners lost in the earth. Do these losses also surface in proverbs or riddles glossed by Taylor? I do not know. Nevertheless, I am confident that Korson, Bronson, Hand, and Taylor would have relished the two tales offered here.

Matters of continuity in musical and literary forms engage scholars. However, in this presentation, I am not concerned primarily with folk tale parallels or progressions, genesis or genre. Nor do I focus upon our professional ambivalence in taking up the challenge within occupational studies. Rather, I raise a question of responsibility: Who treasures work narratives? Two workers’ stories precede my answers. These adventures hold intrinsic interest; with each I delve, also, into personal growth and accountability.

We begin with a tale heard about 1942 in a dilapidated union hall in San Francisco. Completing undergraduate days in Berkeley, I served a year in a Civilian Conservation Corps camp on the Klamath River. With a bit of woodslore absorbed, I turned to the waterfront to learn the shipwright’s trade. My teachers came mainly from Scotland’s Clyde River—Clydesiders canny both in trade secrets and world politics. Fiercely independent, they welded a puritanical Calvinism to a variety of radical creeds, ranging from anarcho-syndicalism to guild socialism. Other mechanics, who took youngsters in hand, hailed from

WHO TREASURES TALES OF WORK?

Belfast and Brest, as well as from Norway’s fjords and Holland’s marshes. Together, this castaway crew in Local 1149 could have both built and manned a tramp steamer in any Eugene O’Neill drama.

One Irish old-timer, Spokane Tom Cain, had worked as a pile-driver and dockbuilder before age drove him to odd jobs in the Bay Area’s boatyards. When we met, he was grizzled and garrulous, fond of recounting exploits in setting up a soup kitchen during the big strike of 1934. Tom relished sharing arcane knowledge with apprentices. Although one of his most receptive listeners, I must confess that, in our union setting, I did not anticipate a folklorist’s future. Cassette recorders had not been invented; it never entered my mind to take diary notes, or keep a log on the endless stream of talk swirling about me. Plainly, I had gone to the waterfront to become a worker, not an academician.

One of Spokane Tom’s stories has lodged in memory for more than four decades. (Although as I write it out for the first time in 1987, I cannot certify that it is fully true to Tom’s account of 1942.) Curiously, this tale’s hero is also named Tom. The title, “Tom’s Old Nag,” is mine, for if 1149’s Tom knew formal titles, he did not offer them to his listeners. His adventures slipped into anecdotal speech, blurring clear openings and neglecting semantic markers. All his tales appeared seamless, fitting easily into daily events and job happenings. Once, in greeting a new member (a gold miner who had come down from a timber-cribbing stint in the Mother Lode) Tom began with a natural question:

Did you ever meet old prospector Tom in Amador County? He had a spread above Volcano, maybe a hundred acres, nothing but scrub pine and black rock. He kept an old burro, a few horses, and a goat. Tried to garden a little bit, but his luck had run out. He was too old to prospect; mostly, he lived on fat. When that was gone, he figured he’d have to sell his land. But he knew it wouldn’t bring much.

Tom got to figuring about what to do, and hit on a good scheme. He had a few gold nuggets hid away for a rainy day. Tom took this gold and just mashed it on an oak board. Then he got his nag and pressed that loose gold into the nag’s back teeth—pressed it with his fingers and palm. Tom picked a bunch of green grass from the best spot in the meadow. Fed this grass to the horse. You know, it kinda hid the gold, stained it nice and green.

Then, prospector Tom saddled up his riding horse and led the nag into Volcano, just in time for the monthly stock auction. The auctioneer told Tom the nag wasn’t worth much, but he’d try. Only one dude—
kind of a fancy guy—bid on the nag; he got him for $20. Tom was sad to part with his old friend, but he pocketed the money and rode back up the hill.

As soon as the dude got home, he examined the horse’s mouth, and was really excited to find loose gold in the teeth. On the next day, the dude rode up to Tom’s spread, and thanked the old man for selling him such a fine horse. After talking a bit, this dude asked Tom, “Would you like to sell your land?” Tom was real surprised and said, “No, I’ll just stay here ‘til my time comes.” The dude allowed that the land was awful poor, but maybe Tom might take $2000.00 in cash for the whole spread. Tom said, “No deal!”

The next day, the dude came back and offered $2500. The old man was reluctant, but said, “I’ve been studying the matter, maybe I could let the place go for $3000.” The dude protested that he’d have to ride all the way back to Volcano for the extra money. Tom just snorted, “That’s your choice.” Naturally, the dude brought the $3000, pronto, and the two men signed the deed. This guy asked, “How soon can I take possession?” The old man said, “Just give me ‘til the morning to pack up and clear out.”

Folks in Volcano thought that Tom would come into town, buy a little house and settle down. Instead, he headed up the canyon towards the state line. Tom was long gone in Nevada before the dude ever knew what happened.

That morning, the dude brought wagonloads of tools—picks, shovels, sandbags, wedges, drills—and a Chinese crew up to Tom’s place. Soon as he could get the gear out, he got those Chinamen to sweating. They dug up the pasture, the scrub pine hillsides, and even the rocky slopes. They dug for weeks, but never found a trace of gold, not a single speck, nothing.

What happened to the dude? He just became the fool of Amador. What happened to Tom? Last anyone heard, he married a squaw in Winnemucca, and lived like a chief.

It will be obvious to anyone now hearing or reading “Tom’s Old Nag” that it is old in years, and widespread in the West. This tale’s central motif stems from the custom of “salting” barren ground or a poor mine with rich ore. The hero, of course, is a classical trickster. Auditors gain a sense of chronology (to the decades after 1849) by reference to Chinese laborers. Spokane Tom ties old prospector Tom back to Western mountain men and fur trappers who took native women as brides. In the audience, we feel the teller’s warmth as he identifies with a down-on-his-luck senior who outwits a rich man. As well, we sense Spokane Tom’s possible fantasies about a good end to his own life of toil.

Further details useful in enriching this narrative can be left to the curious.1 Here, I turn back to my initial encounter with Tom. During student days, I had learned to identify recorded cowboy ballads as folksongs. Discovering John Lomax’s first book in our junior high school library, I began to correlate printed texts with radio songs performed by Haywire Mac (Harry J. McClintock). Literally, Mac touched me at the level of affective power; Lomax taught me that Mac’s favorites were folksongs with special resonance.

In my teens, I could identify a cowboy folksong long before grasping a folk tale’s spell. I may have heard traditional stories on the radio, but they did not penetrate. In the CCC camp, 1940, I listened to young men from California families—Italian, Portuguese, Mexican—swap “lies” with “Okie” enrollees, new to our state. Nothing had prepared me to place these spirited offerings under the rubric “folk.” Ironically, while serving as a “three-C enrollee” on the Klamath River, other Berkeley graduates were nearby studying Karok and Yurok languages, filling notebooks with vital narratives.

Back “home” (on the waterfront) not only did I lack the terms to situate Spokane Tom’s story, but I had no special need to cherish his trickster narrative. And I was overwhelmed by gaining a craft; ship’s nomenclature, alone, involved learning a thousand esoteric names. Apprentices struggled to use old tools, adze and maul, along with strange new “funny papers” (blueprints). Struggling in this flood of tools, techniques, and trade secrets, neophytes were also immersed in union practices involving deep ideological choices. Harry Bridges led San Francisco’s longshoremen. To his right, conservative metal-tradesmen led the divided shipyard locals. My Clydeside teachers viewed craft leaders as either misguided or corrupt “pie cards,” and Harry Bridges as a Moscow dupe. The path of rectitude open to a young shipwright was a narrow one.

At this juncture, a critic might well ask: “What does maritime nomenclature or ideological choice have to do with “Tom’s Old Nag?” My answer involves the matter of receptivity to folk narrative: Who listens to the folk? How can one treasure material one is unready to receive? What shapes the sense of responsibility of hearer to teller? Essentially, I did not cherish Tom’s Mother Lode tale, for it seemed foreign to my concerns. It never entered my mind that our Spokane

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Tom should have been named Shanachie Tom, the master of a thousand and one tales.

Although oblivious to Tom’s full repertoire, I did savor those of his reminiscences which fed into my waterfront growth. His account of our local’s soup kitchen during the 1934 strike stands out in memory: scavenging for meat and vegetables; keeping a jungle pot going on the poth bellied stove in the back of the hall; feeding strikers after picket duty on raw foggy days; sending skilled joiners, familiar with precious teak and ebony, to gather scraps of ammunition for the stove.

During his years as an itinerant worker, Tom had “boiled up” (washed) in many a hobo jungle. Hence, at the time of the big strike, he re-created jungle camaraderie within an urban union hall. His storytelling gift helped bond the hall loungers, who waited for work, into an association which prized solidarity. Tom may or may not have packed a red card of the Industrial Workers of the World; from my perspective, then and now, he shared the Wobbly culture.²

In retrospect, I should have turned to folk tale collecting upon first hearing Tom. In an ideal world, a student coming from Berkeley (in the years of Archer Taylor, Bertrand Bronson, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Paul Radin, Carl Sauer, or Arthur Brodeur) would have sought out Spokane Tom as a platonic storyteller—one who had kissed the Blarney Stone long before he found his way to a dingy Embarcadero hall. I cannot reset my personal time machine; I can encourage present-day students to seek their own Tom Cains.

On returning from Navy duty to waterfront work at the end of World War II, I learned that Local 1149 had abandoned its old hall in favor of then-splendid new quarters. Old timers, uncomfortable in the sterile hall, drifted away. On June 4, 1946, Brother Tom Cain died in San Francisco’s County Hospital. A sister local’s bulletin carried a brief, unsigned obituary: Tom “was intimately familiar with the history of #77 and #34 [piledivers’ unions] and delighted in recounting incidents and strange characters that came and went.”³

We folklorists are facile in using the term “anonymously.” I have never met an anonymous carrier of lore, but I have lived long enough to see Brother Cain slip into anonymity. He personifies legions of workers who revel in craft history and job mystery. Perhaps his monument stands in the piles he drove, the docks he built, the boats he patched. All workers build monuments as they go, but few enter labor-history texts or folklore anthologies. I feel it important to memorialize Spokane Tom as we remember Archer Taylor. I dream that Archer, in one of his ferry-boat trips from Berkeley to San Francisco, passed our Steuart Street hall and silently saluted the bard who “recounted incidents and strange characters that came and went.”

We turn abruptly to a second story, “Marcus Daly Enters Heaven”—one that Tom Cain might have known and could have told. I previously alluded to Haywire Mac as a radio cowboy singer, but Mac held many claims to fame: railroad boomer, Wobbly, recording star, popular stage entertainer, pulp fiction writer, composer of songs destined for life in tradition, friend of scholars.⁴ During the 1920s, Mac sang for Berkeley professors gathered in their Faculty Glade. Wallace Stegner, at Stanford, drew upon Mac’s memories in a novel about Joe Hill. Collector Sam Eskin visited Mac in San Pedro (1952) and gathered a trove of songs and stories for deposit in the Library of Congress, as well as for release on a Folkways album.

In 1959, I put my tool box away and turned from manual labor to the academy. Coming late to the discipline of folklore, I relished fresh vocabularies and new conceptual tools. The step from launching way to lecture room held its own dangers and rewards. One gain involved participation in sound-recording projects—collecting, editing, commenting. In 1968, I received a dub of the Eskin tapes from Moses Asch as he planned McClintock’s Folkways album. In this manner, Mac’s tale reached me.

Upon first hearing, the story seemed strangely familiar, yet I could not place it. Puzzled, I stored it away in a memory box until it broke out to push me into belated folk tale analysis. During 1984, a Butte journal carried my initial findings.⁵ Here, I transcribe the tale from Eskin’s tape of 1952 as released on Folkways FD 5272:

Well, there used to be an old fellow around the western mining camps by the name of Paddy Burke. Paddy was a strapping Irishman, and he had a handlebar mustache. It looked something like the horns of a belligerent bull. Paddy was a great story teller. In fact, he got so that he wouldn’t work. He would tell stories around the barrooms, and so forth. And, he was well-known in the Coeur d’Alene country, and, also, in the Nevada mining country. But, he got those were all

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³ Pile Butt Special, a mimeographed one-page bulletin, Pile Drivers Local 34, San Francisco, June 6, 1946.
⁴ Henry Young, Haywire Mac and the Big Rock Candy Mountain (Temple, TX, 1981).
gold and silver camps, and the boys were pretty generous with shellin’ out money for Paddy’s entertainment.

But he wandered into Butte, and he fell upon hard circumstances. The boys didn’t shower down very good, and he had to go to work. So he hustled himself a job muckin’ in a mine called the Neversweat. It was one of Marcus Daly’s properties, and Marcus was, as you well know, the king of Butte at the time, or thought he was.

Paddy was workin’ in the Neversweat on the night shift. And old Marcus wandered into the place one time. It was a habit of Daly’s to visit his properties every once in a while in the middle of the night. He’d put on diggin’ clothes and an old hat all covered with candle grease, just like any miner, and he would prowl around. And it was understood that if Marcus caught you with your back straightened up, you was fired.

Well, this time Marcus stepped onto the cage, told the hoistman to drop him off at the 1300 foot level. The cage drops down, Marcus steps out, the cage ascends again, and Marcus is left alone in the darkness with his candle, and he listens. He doesn’t hear the sound of a drill or a shovel on the whole level, no sounds of activity whatever. So he starts prowlin’. Well, it’s time for lunch anyway, so, he finally locates the gang. They’re all in a big stope, and they’ve got their candles stuck into the stones around and about.

Enthroned on a muck pile in the middle of the assemblage is Paddy Burke. He’s telling them a story, which is a darn sight easier than workin’. And, when this stranger joins the group, there’s a chill swells over the boys: Uhh. Paddy—being, he had his audience well in hand—he felt that sudden chill. He didn’t know just what caused it, but he suspected. So he finished that story, and the gang got up. He said, “Well,” Paddy says, “Well, boys,” he says, “wait a minute.” He says, “I’ll tell you another one.” So the gang—they were fired anyway, which they figured—[remained].

Paddy says: “I had a dream the other night. I dreamed that I died and went to heaven. And for miles upon countless thousands of miles, I climbed the stairs until I stood before the great pearly gates. I drew back my list and I hit the door a rap, and an old gentleman with long white whiskers sticks his head out, and he says, ‘And who may you be?’ I says, ‘I’m Paddy Burke.’ ‘Oh you are, are you?’ He says, ‘Where are you from?’ I says, ‘I’m from Butte, Montana.’ ‘Huh,’ he says, ‘I’ve had nobody there for a long time, I’ll tell ya that.’ He says, ‘I’ll look you up in the book. Burke, is it?’ ‘Yes,’ I says, ‘Paddy Burke, if you please.’ So after a few minutes he sticks his head out again, and he says, ‘You come in, Paddy, but you’ll have to behave yourself.’ I says, ‘I’ll do that.’

“So he opens the gate a crack, and I stepped in. And old Saint Peter—for it was no less—he pressed a button, and here comes an angel. And he says, ‘Angel,’ he says, ‘take my friend Paddy down to the storeroom and fit him out.’ He says, ‘Give him a good pair of wings, and give him a golden crown, size 7½. And give him a harp and be sure it’s in tune.’ So with that we went away to the storeroom to get me equipment.

“After I was rigged out in the heavenly style, I was turned over to another angel who took me out to show me the sights of heaven. And, ‘twas the most magnificent place that the mind of man can conceive of. The sidewalks were of solid gold. The doorknobs was of great jewels. And the hosts of heaven were flitting about with their wings outspread, and sitting on clouds and strummin’ their harps, and singing, oh, the most glorious tunes that you ever heard.

“The angel said, ‘Well, we’ll hurry or we’ll be late for the banquet.’ So we went to the hall where the hosts of heaven were assembled. When we entered the hall, it took me breath away. It stretched away on every side for miles, and miles, and miles, as far as the eye could carry in every direction. And here were the tables fairly groamin’ with the most rare and delicate viands. We sat down to a meal of nightingales’ tongues, and all manner of quaint and foreign delicacies. We drank the most rare and delicate wines, and the goblets that we drank from were hollowed out of great emeralds, and rubies, and diamonds. And they had waitresses flittin’ about servin’ everybody. They were on roller skates that were jewelled like a railroader’s watch.

“And of a sudden, all of a sudden, there was a hell of a commotion in heaven. The word was passed around that Marcus Daly had died. And no sooner had the word been passed around until there was a great fanfare of trumpets at the door, and a voice was heard saying, ‘Marcus Daly is here!’ And from the other end of the hall, where the great golden throne was, came another voice, ‘Marcus Daly, welcome to heaven. Advance to the foot of the throne.’ So the hosts of heaven parted like the Red Sea when the Israelites passed over. And Marcus Daly, all alone, walked down the aisle to the foot of the great golden throne. Almighty God arose, and He says, ‘Marcus, I bid you welcome.’ And turnin’ to his right hand, He says, ‘Come, Jesus, get up and give Marcus your seat.’”

Harry McClintock died in 1957. To the best of my knowledge, no one ever asked him to comment on “Marcus Daly Enters Heaven.” Mac’s Folkways album appeared in 1972, and collector Eskin died two years later. Thus, we must turn to the recorded text to extract such secrets as it will yield. Fortunately, we can listen to Mac’s telling and feel his artistry. Together, rhetorical style and narrative action pull hearers into a Butte copper mine, a deep stope—the step-like chamber where miners extract ore from earth. However, this particular stope also serves as a storyteller’s circle. Mac’s hard-rock miners, at leisure, enthroned a gifted spinner on a muck pile (“muck,” an all-purpose word, covered rock or ore to be lifted to the surface, and waste to be discarded).

Figuratively, I am at this very pile’s edge. I strain to absorb details. Reflexively, I make the tale mine by testing it against knowledge of
mining craft and miners’ aspirations. Mac’s voice becomes an audiocassette which I can play-back or re-run endlessly. Listening leads to commentary and I reflect upon Mac’s opening: the introduction of Paddy Burke, who prefers barroom sessions to hard work. With luck played out elsewhere, he finds employment at Marcus Daly’s Neversweat Mine. Like Harun al-Rashid, the mine owner disguises himself for night prowling. But unlike an Arabian Night calliph, Daly does not reward deserving subjects; rather, he punishes lazy workers. Daly hears Burke yarning and fires the whole gang. Here, the storyteller Mac discards an outer shell to reveal an inner kernel.

Literally, Mac uses a normal voice in recounting Paddy’s wanderings. When Daly catches the shirkers, a chill sweeps the stope. Responding, Mac shifts his voice to accent Paddy’s brogue. Originally, Mac had told a story about Paddy; now Paddy places Daly within a story. Skillfully, the linked accounts integrate dual journeys—Burke travels from Nevada to the Coeur d’Alene to Butte; Daly, from Butte to Heaven. These follow each other in sequence, but they are not exactly parallel. Although the boss bests his workers by dismissal, one worker imaginatively employs verbal art to best the big boss, himself. Paddy’s wandering as a “ten-day-stiff” is realistic, while Daly’s path to judgment is dream.

Mac’s tale holds many qualities, among them its ideological and eschatological commentary. Ultimately, it is the proletarian who holds the capitalist to a moral code—a startling inversion within American society. This tale’s Butte listeners would have known that Daly came to the Rockies as a poor Irish immigrant, amassing a fortune on the world’s richest hill. Some Butteans hailed him as a hero; others, as a despot. Montana residents have told many Daly stories centered on the mine’s cockscrew ways and aggressive bent.

Without engaging in polemical tirade, Haywire Mac reveals “which side he’s on” by a shocking ending to Daly’s journey. “Come, Jesus, get up and give Marcus your seat” implies blasphemy. We appreciate such daring by knowing that Burke’s listeners were largely Catholic. Paddy, of course, uses an Irish sacred belief system to bring an empire builder down from heaven itself. Here, in a seemingly simple tale, Daly’s fall from grace occurs 1300 feet below ground, in a Danteian stope, an earthly Hell.

ventures back to the decades before miners used carbon or battery lamps. (2) In heaven, Paddy feasts upon nightingales' tongues. This delicacy surely did not spring to life in Butte during Daly's reign, 1880–1900. To invoke the sweet-singing nightingale's name is to call up the voice of a courtly minstrel, not a strapping hardrocker.

Curious about the genesis of Mac's story, I had speculated that he might have heard of a Celtic chief who ascended to heaven only to be rebuked by the gods. Fortunately, folklorists—in visits at meetings—generously share missing elements for traditional tales. At UCLA (April 24, 1987), Donald Ward heard my thoughts on an Irish background for Mac's tale's dramatic ending. Happily, Ward had previously elaborated upon this jest's occurrence in Norse mythology.7

The "Lokasenna" (Loki's Flying or Wrangling), an old Icelandic Eddic poem, tells of Loki, intent on violence, entering the hall of the gods. As he arrives, Odin orders his son, "Get up, Vidar, tell the father of the wolf/to take a seat." We glimpse something of the original's recitative strength in a modern translation:

Othin said:
"Arise, then, Vithar, let the Wolf's father
be bunched at our banquet;
lest that Loki fling lewd words at us
in Aegir's ale hall."8

This thousand-year-old command reappeared in Germany ca. 1930 in the form of humorous response to the death of famous persons. As an illustration, when Kiel city father and wealthy shipbuilder Sartori reaches heaven, God turns to his son Jesus, "Get up, so Sartori can sit down." We see at once a parallel between the treatment meted to magnates arriving from Kiel and Butte. God, by his action, reminds both men that worldly power is useless in the afterworld. Placing side-by-side a motif in the accounts of Loki, Sartori, and Daly, we wonder at transitions in time and place. Scholar Kurt Ranke, in commenting upon the Sartori anecdote, was reluctant to assume a direct link from Norse myth to present-day jokes about earthly lords. However, Donald Ward does see continuity and a genetic relationship within the give-up-your-seat jests, for they share an underlying sense of irony.


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Professor Ward's fine analysis shifts emphasis from the matter of origin for Mac's narrative to its core meaning. Loki, scolding the gods, seeks to destroy them. Odin knows Loki's evil purpose, yet cannot refrain from requiring son Vidar to surrender his seat. Human logic, today, demands that Odin reject Loki, but the Viking's supreme being had no choice but to bow to intractable fate. Essentially, son Vidar gives up his place within a tragic scene. In Mac's story, humor overtakes fate; God need not accept Daly, for only nominally does Jesus leave his seat. We who listen know that Mac's tale closes with ironic play. Jesus is not displaced; instead, God cloaks Daly in ridicule. In pre-Christian Iceland, Loki punished Norse gods. In copper-camp Butte, miners wanted God to punish mine bosses. Somewhere, in the many steps from the "Lokasenna" (ca 800–1050 A.D.) to Paddy Burke's dream about Daly (ca 1900–1952), comedy's smile replaced tragedy's scowl.

Additional stories, of varying vintage, can be found to stand on the line from Loki to Sartori to Daly.9 For the present, more is known about the uses of Mac's tale than its origin. Hard-rock miners in the West generated and conveyed a considerable body of song and story, some of which is found in the pages of *Western Folklore*. In the totality of mining tradition, Mac's tale is not strange. Although we are unlikely to know whether it was actually told in a mining camp, I assume this story's traditionality and posit its use by hard-rock miners—telling, hearing, enjoying, reworking, retelling.

Copper miners, like brothers and sisters in countless occupational communities, used songs and stories to pace or lighten work's burden, to soothe the job-generated turmoil, to assert life's purpose beyond routine tasks. Miners did not need diplomas in psychology to employ narrative in sublimating grinding toil, or in externalizing fear. By traditionalizing everyday experience, to some degree, workers could empower themselves. A tale might function to precipitate a job action, to symbolize a job need, to mark a job's worth. Mac used Paddy and Marcus together to entertain Sam Eskin, and, in this sharing, the collector preserved a commentary on the use of power in industrial America.

Our knowledge of the Rocky Mountain frontier work force indicates that a few "muckers" would have identified with Daly betrayed by a lazy crew, while most workers would have favored Paddy, who,
metaphorically, stole a bit of freedom from his boss. I see no point in trying to quantify audience reaction as pro-and-con-Daly. Some workers in Butte accepted capitalism’s doctrines; others helped build America’s most revolutionary unions.

Of the many questions we ask, those of meaning capture my fullest attention. Scholars, at times, neglect to ask of an item of lore: Meaning for whom? If Mac’s tale had been told when miners lightened underground darkness with candles, I believe that the meaning would have been crystal clear to its prime audience. Listeners would have heard Paddy’s dream about Daly as vindicating their position—down in the hole, toiling in dark and danger, exploited by malefactors. One does not have to subscribe to class-struggle dogma to understand either the social or ecological cost of mining. To rip ore from earth is to violate Mother Nature—violence paid in fire and flood, instant death and lingering disease. To have listened to a Paddy Burke or a Spokane Tom in a stope or saloon or hall was momentarily to strike back at all the demon Dalys who despoiled the earth.

How do we assay meaning in Mac’s story for those who now encounter it only through the Folkways sound recording, or, perhaps, the folklorist’s printed transcription? In short, what can this story mean to listeners distant from the stope? We delve for secondary meaning again by probing value positions. To begin: Mac’s LP disc has not been a best-seller, my transcription in 1984 reached but a few readers; our audience today is select.

Within limited circles of folklorists and enthusiasts, we raise semantic matters by scaling the tale against each listener’s sense of socioeconomic tension: Into what realm do Mac’s present auditors divide ruler and subject? New members of the audience, appropriately, can judge the tale against personal projection for the future: continued rule by present sovereigns; the diffusion and sharing of authority in a pluralistic society. Such testing brings the Burke-Daly story out of the stope and into the consciousness of today’s citizenry.

Mac’s story does not hold specific agitational content. As a Wobbly he could and did pen polemical pieces, although tempered with humor. “Marcus Daly Enters Heaven” does not laud a particular platform, nor does it memorialize a labor martyr. Instead, it ridicules a millionaire. Daly emerges as greedy and sneaky, unfit for Olympus, destined for Hades. In the end, all the story’s formal elements gather to reinforce the identity of its worker characters. As a young man, Haywire Mac had joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and

reveled in their creed: We shall set our own compass. We shall be all! These declamations belong to Haywire Mac, Paddy Burke, and Spokane Tom. Their values emerge from and echo with the laughter that closes Mac’s story.

All good tales end. Here, I pull strands together with a comparative glance at our two stories. In my view, the differences between “Tom’s Old Nag” and “Marcus Daly Enters Heaven” outweigh their similarities. Both tales are set in the mining West. Each deals with the relationship of polar figures: wise prospector Tom outwits a Sierra dude; Paddy Burke, in an imaginative narration, demeans nabob Daly. As I hear Tom’s story, I grasp its realistic essence, for I know that miners and owners did salt barren land. As I hear Mac’s story, I know it to be pure fantasy. Daly ruled his workers’ lives; only vicariously could they bring him to judgment. Spokane Tom helped me laugh at an Amador fool, while Haywire Mac helped me ponder American codes. Tom shared a joke; Mac touched a metaphysical vein.

Of course, I am aware that good stories demand multiple interpretations. Other listeners will bring their experience to bear on these tales. My view of these two narratives is shaped by long concern for workers’ values. On leaving Berkeley, I met hard-rock miners, lumberjacks, and salmon fishermen on the Klamath. In turn, they prepared me for San Francisco’s shipwrights, piledrivers, and longshoremen. These masters entrusted me with their skill and lore. I remain in their debt, and repay it, in part, with my work as a folklorist.

It has been my rhetorical habit to liken professional folklorists to present-day workers—assemblers in knowledge factories, stocker boys in conceptual warehouses, checkout girls in cultural marts. Few folklorists working on campus or at a public bureau have joined trade unions; conversely, no unions have seen fit to add their staffs specialists in vernacular expression. This lack of an institutional connection for scholarly workers bears heavily on the matter of responsibility for occupational narratives on tape or in film.

In this century, of the entire corps of folklorists in the United States, only George Korson had close ties to a labor union. He published initial findings of anthracite songs in the United Mine Workers of America Journal (1926), and UMWA officials encouraged his efforts. Korson’s warm experience underscores the inattention all other unions show to the particular skills of folklorists. Labor-union officials are institutionally indifferent to their members’ lore; and members fail to hold their leaders responsible for cultural matters. We are wise
to place this shared negative stance within the setting of large society’s ambivalence about the expressive life of rank-and-file working people.

When populism runs strong, business trusts such as Marcus Daly’s Anaconda empire are seen as juggernauts. When radical causes run thin, private enterprise throws off negative robes, and corporate executives flaunt authority from Wall Street to Washington to Westwood. Recently, a few teachers in the humanities have forged links with management, and have placed occupational lore under the rubric “corporate culture” and “organizational theory.” These trends carry a potential danger—the subversion of workers’ needs to managerial privilege. Wayland Hand, in Butte during the 1940s, wisely identified the problem when copper miners felt he “might betray information to the ‘Company’.” Those to whom he talked feared that their jokes and quips would boomerang against them. Hand’s sensitivity was well-placed four decades ago. His moral sense serves as an excellent guide to new times and territory.

The American pendulum swings endlessly. This metaphor, drawn from the physics of gravity and the skill of clockmakers, tells us that populism—now hiding in the clockworks—will emerge and reassert its democratic voice. I remain confident that young scholars will continue to be responsible to rank-and-file workers who entrust lore to the academy. Folklorists, attracted to occupational communities, become guardians of workers’ expressivity. Folklorists do see their own connections to members of enclaved groups, as well as to leaders in large society.

I have screened the dynamic relationship between scholars and working people against my experience. I have deliberately avoided recent commentary on work culture by public-sector folklorists, such as the current gathering of cowboy poets at Elko, Nevada, or the display by ironworkers (1971) on the National Mall at the Smithsonian Institution’s Festival of American Folklife. I trust that this essay, stimulated by respect for Archer Taylor, will contribute future attention to workers’ narratives in new settings.

Finally, I circle back to my title’s query: Who Treasures Tales of Work? In some years of laborlore exploration, I have tried to learn why workers gather at water cooler or loading platform and swap stories. Beyond concern with setting and circumstance for storytelling, I have related traditional narratives to present work conditions. We know that “Tom’s Old Nag” is but a twig on an aged tree of mine-talking accounts. We guess that “Marcus Daly Enters Heaven” echoes a Norse mythic theme from a millennium ago. Do these tales live? Are they relevant only to formally trained scholars, or are they still meaningful to laborers across the rainbow of age, gender, color, dialect, residence, and craft?

Many workers in the 1980s come to grips daily with dead-end tasks in our economy’s tombs—shuttered factories, stagnant shops. Others face dangers brewed in toxic cauldron and disasters catapulted by invisible rain. Some workers continue to claw their way out of the grave; others are deskilled and dehumanized by the very forces from which they earn a living. Folklore in the form of a vernacular turn of speech, a bonnie tune, a wry jest, or a sly story, all help demystify experience and redress loss.

Tom Cain, in Local 1149’s San Francisco hall, and Paddy Burke, in Butte’s Neversweat Mine, spoke to brothers and sisters throughout the land. Cain used his Celtic gift to entertain his fellows, to fill in lean days, to assist in survival. McClintock used his Celtic gift, and a strong sense of personal autonomy, to speak up against the subordination of one human to another.

Scholars add to their own strength in their reach to other Spokane Toms and Haywire Macs. Shipwrights and railroad boomers hold no monopoly on wisdom, but neither do folklorists hold the grail. Work tales call up plural philosophies; academic explication requires diverse perspectives. Folklorists of varied persuasions are indebted to legions who build, haul, delve, spin, and charm. We help ourselves by acknowledging affinity from hall or stope to campus. In our collecting and commentary, we help workers treasure their lore. This mutual dependence holds promise in a world where work practices of hand and head are daily transformed.

San Francisco, California


remembered, personal high mark not likely ever to be equaled. A rancher in the Sixteen Canyon of southwestern Montana raised goats as a hobby, and battled endlessly with one particular billy who preferred to rove the hills rather than graze in the backyard pasture. Riding toward deer country on the first day of hunting season, the rancher came across his vagabond goat, lassoed him, turned toward home with the furious captive now sulking flat to the snow, now bounding back and forth at the end of the lariat. A pair of neighbors, also out for deer, spied the trough of drag-marks. "I see Jack got his deer already and 's bringin' him in," one observed. A minute later, they came to the hoofprints where the goat had bounced angrily to his feet. "My God!" said the second hunter. "And he's bringin' him in alive!"

(The one joke I am ever able to remember, probably because I read it, in a book of folklore. Daughter is being courted by young man her parents object to. Warning by father: don't see him again. Next morning, peed in elegant yellow script across parents' snowy lawn: Go to hell, you old son-of-a-bitch. Father's rage is titanic. His wife: "That fellow hadn't ought to have done that, but is it worth getting so all-fired mad over?" Father in real eruption now: "Are you blind, woman? Can't you recognize our own daughter's handwriting?"