The Oral Political Traditions
of Rowan County

Kentucky Government
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Mr. George T. Young

By:

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I

The purpose of this paper is to put down on paper the oral political traditions of Knox County, Kentucky. Oral political traditions consist of stories, jokes, riddles, poems, songs, and any other thing handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

I received permission from five men, who have lived most of their adult lives in Knox County. I gave each man the outline of the paper to let them see what it was that I wanted from them. Then several days later I interviewed the individual. The following material is the oral political traditions that I have been able to obtain from the five informants.

II

My first informant was Mr. Ralph Boyd. Mr. Boyd is fifty-four years old and lives in Manchester. He has been involved in Knox County politics for many years.

The first story Mr. Boyd told me goes like this:

"George, as we will refer to him, was arrested for public drunkenness, and when his trial was over the Judge asked George if he would promise to stop drinking, he said..."
suspend his sentence. But George replied, "Judge, you just a drunk trying a trick, and me on down the road the dinner I go, the dinner I'll get back."

The second story Mr. Boyd relayed to me goes along these lines:

"Two men running for County judge in a tight election were getting to the point where they would do anything to win. One candidate found a man who looked like his opponent. The day before the election they put a suit of clothes on the impostor and got him drunk, placed him in the back seat of a car and drove him around the county, stopped frequently to let the people see their next County Judge. This was not the real candidate but it caused the real candidate to lose the election."

These were the only two real political traditions Mr. Boyd could recall.
My second informant was Mr. Wadford Black. He has been an active member of Marion County politics.

The first story Mr. Black told me goes like this:

"A candidate running for sheriff had a large number of posters of himself holding a broom. He said throughout his campaign that he was going to sweep out the courthouse sparkling clean if he was elected. The people called him the janitor and he ran a low third in the primary."

The second thing Mr. Black told me was a common belief in Marion County:

"There is a belief in Marion County that the losers in an election go up and say, 'Salt rises to get forgiveness for voting wrong.'"

Another story Mr. Black gave me goes like this:

"Two men were making moonshine for the upcoming election. One day one went to get..."
Some water for the still while the other one stayed. While the one was away, the sheriff arrived and arrested the other and took him to jail. The other man came to see the one in jail and said, "I know you was going to get in trouble because of that moonshine still I guess."

This is all the information Mr. Black could remember and could relate to me.

My next informant was Mr. Oscar Patrick. He gave me some common beliefs of Rowan County. The first goes like this.

"People of Rowan County believe that the vote seller, the vote payer, and the ones most deplorable creatures that breathe."

A second common belief Mr. Patrick told me concerns the weather on the day of the election and the result of the election.
"If election day is clear
it means clear sailing for
the Democrats, but if it
is a cloudy day the next
few days will be cloudy
for the Democrats."

A joke Mr. Patrick told me
goes like this.

"A county judge and one
of his friends went out
in the middle of a big
cornfield and got so
drank they couldn't even
stand up. The lightning
bugs started flashing
all around and one called
the other 'Where we at?' and
the other replied 'Look
you see the lights, we're
in the middle of Louisville.'"

These are all the political
traditions Mr. Patrick could
recall at the time of the
interview.
My next informant was Mr. Wales Black. I chose to interview him because he has lived in Rusk County for many years and has taken an active part in the political life of Rusk County.

The first story Mr. Black told me goes like this:

"On election day Uncle Bob, the mountain man, came into the town to vote. On his way through the woods a thunderstorm came up, and he hid in a hollow tree to stay dry. Several hunters came along and seeing something move in the tree, the hunter fired a big shot. Uncle Bob said the only way out of the tree was a small knot hole. When he was asked how he got out, Uncle Bob replied smiling, "I just thought of voting Republican and I felt so small I crawled out the knot hole."

A second story Mr. Black told me goes like this:

"A republican went to the polls to vote but hadn't decided which way he would vote. After thinking a while he
he went into the South End and looked straight at the log cabin and pulled the blow above it. He hit the blow so hard that when it made a line of X's down the ticket it made the fire fly from the chimney and burned all the feathers off the rooster.

Another little story Mr. Black told to me has to do with the passage of the five percent sales tax.

"After the five percent sales tax was passed by the legislature, the blame was placed on Governor Allen. I recall one man remark that's been twenty-four years since they had a Republican governor and now it's going to be twenty-four more."

These three stories were all Mr. Black could recall. Like most of my other informants he could not give a date of origin to a title by which they were commonly known.
My last informant was Mr. Bill Thomas. Mr. Thomas is actively involved in Rowan County's politics. He has lived in Rowan County all of his fifty years. The first story Mr. Thomas told me goes like this:

"A former county judge was holding trial of a woman for some offense. In the course of the trial, the woman became angry at the judge for his continual pounding of his gavel. The woman jumped up and yelled, "If you don't stop pounding that thing I'll knock you in the head with it." She did just that and it took two sheriff's deputies to save the county judge."

Mr. Thomas was at the trial and witnessed the account given above. The next story he told me was another former county judge. It goes like this:

"The judge would come in and open the court house every morning at 8:00. He said..."
State law required the County Judge's office to be open from 8 am to 4 pm, but he also said no law required him to be in his office.

Mr. Thomas gave me a definition of a common political term. "A professional vote seller is clever enough to make it look like he isn't selling his vote. On Election Day, he says he has to work, and to quote work + go vote would lose him some money and he should be reimbursed for his time lost."

This is all Mr. Thomas could give me in the oral political tradition of Kootenai County, I do not recall any written title given to the stages or any date of Oregon.
VII

In conclusion to my research, report of the oral political traditions of Kinom County, I feel that there is much more which has been lost to time. There are many stories which have been passed down to the people I have talked to.

I contacted several people who would not even talk to me. They told me they didn't have the time to talk about politics.

My analysis of the oral political tradition is that the people can't remember the person who told them the story or the time it was told to them. Also, the dates of origin of the stories have been forgotten in all the times it has been passed down to another individual.