ORAL POLITICAL TRADITIONS
of
MARTIN COUNTY

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Interesting
but some
explanation and
interpretation
of some of the
items mentioned
should have
been given.
Can you put these
into some kind
of sociological
framework?
For the past few weeks I have been discovering, securing and recording in writing the oral political traditions of Martin County, Kentucky. The folklore I have collected has been particularly associated with politics, politicians, campaigns, elections, voting, voters, office holders, political parties, and "the government." Among these things are oral communications such as jokes, tales or stories, sayings beliefs, songs or poems, proverbs, words, terms or riddles. These folklores have been handed down or passed on from father to son or generation to generation.

I arranged several interviews with persons who were fifty years or older and had been actively involved in politics of Martin County. Some of the informants had held office but at this time none are active office holders. All of the informants could be described as having been residents of Martin County at least 40 years, representing all portions of the county, education ranging from less than grade school to college degrees, being affiliated with both Republican and Democrat parties, and most being occupied in Martin County most of their lives.

Following are the many beliefs and folklore of Martin County related to me by life-long residents of Martin County.

**Jokes**

One time one of Martin County's strongest Democrats took ill. The family doctor was brought at once to the sick farmer's bedside. After examining the doctor told the farmer that he had only a day or two to live, for his illness was very serious. Upon hearing this, the old man requested that his sons get him dressed and take him down to the courthouse, for he wanted to change his registration from Democrat to Republican. The family was astonished and asked him why he would do such a silly thing with only hours to live. He then said "Well, if one has to go, it's better to be one of them instead of one of us."
Little Boy: Sir, what kind of politician isn't dirty?

Big-time Politician: A losing politician.

One time a candidate for an office in Martin County went among the people of the county campaigning with the slogan "I was raised and borned in Martin County."

STORIES

I was very much surprised and interested in the stories and tales I obtained from my informants about the politics in Martin County.

In the early 1960's a very tight race and campaign went on for the office of county judge. Two candidates, both whom were honest and worthy of the job went about the county asking people to vote for them. It seemed that one candidate had been speaking at rallies using large and uncommon words and the other had spoke commonly to the people. Even though both candidates would have made good judges, the candidate that had spoke commonly won by a landslide.

Once a young Martin Countian went off to school and earned several degrees. He then returned to his home to seek the office of judge. He told the people what he had learned, about all his degrees and how he could help them. Finally when the race was over the young candidate was beaten by a man with less than grade school education. The young man then left his home reluctantly never to return again.

Sprity and full of energy a candidate went about the county asking people to vote for him for sheriff. Finally after traveling up a long holler to the last house the candidate approached an old lady who was making some soup. All about were flies and dirt which were dropping in the soup. After getting the old lady to agree to vote for him she dippeth in and brought out a big helping of the soup, placing it on the table she made the candidate set down and eat it. The campaigner left the house a very sick man.
A few years back the candidate for Martin County Jailer went about the county campaigning in his truck. On the back of his truck was a sign saying, "PUT JOHN SMITH IN JAIL WHERE HE BELONGS."

COMMON BELIEFS

A woman who had been actively involved in politics helped me very much in relating to me some of the old beliefs about the politics in Martin County.

Traditionally Martin County is a Republican county and many of the old people believe it will remain that way for many years to come. Young people seeking office in Martin County, even though well qualified candidates are not good enough to serve the county as officers.

It is bad luck for a winner in an office race to concede victory before all the votes in the county are counted. This is true even though it is apparent very clearly that he is a winner.

Each year each party send men about the county to different polling places with whiskey and other commodities to buy the votes of the people. Many of the county's voters go only to the polls to collect this because they either don't have enough money to buy the whiskey or their children are in need of the commodities. Every one of these citizens value their vote at about $50.

In Martin County it is a common practice that the winning candidate come to the Courthouse on the night following the election, gather about him all the people and tell them what he is going to do for Martin County during his office.

PHRASES

Old sayings and phrases about the politics in Martin County are in widespread use throughout the county.

'In the next election do away with the Old Board and get a New Board.'
"Those seeking political fortune in Martin County will be sorry."

"In Martin County Republicans are in the click and Democrats are out of the click."

"Two politicians are better than one"

"Better to be sly and win than to be honest and lose"

Politicians say "We bend to serve"

POEMS

I am thoroughly qualified and willing to work,
Please vote for me for County Court Clerk.
My opponents have been employed in the Court House for eight years,
They should not be greedy, it truthfully appears.
The
Dear Mothers and Fathers, and Friends, and all,
Please hear the cry of a young man’s call.
I’ll be faithful and true, I’ll never shirk,
So please vote for me for County Court Clerk.

There is another reason you should vote for me;
It’s my first time to ask for an office you see.
So give me a chance to do the work,
And I’ll make for you a good County Court Clerk.

Another sound reason why you should support me
Is because I’m for Martin County and her people, whoever they may be.
I’m not a politician, but a plain farmer man,
And will represent your interests, every time I can.

The preceding poem is typical of a Martin County campaigner’s platform.

Vote for me for Martin County Judge,
I’ll work for you without tare or smudge.
It is plain to see I’m the best qualified man
I’ll do the best that I can.

The people of Martin County have for many years looked forward
to see each election day come about. They can gather about the polls
talk and tell stories. I went about the people to gather the words
add terms used at the election polls on a frosty morning. "Politics
covers Martin County like the Morning Dew." Following are the words
and terms I collected:

Vote Haulers- each year a party hires different people to go about all
the hard to get spots and bring the people in to vote. These people
are called **Vote Haulers**.

*Courthouse Gang*—those people who have held the same office for many years.

**Knick-knack**—item given to voters to persuade the people to vote for a particular candidate.

**Line of Democracy**—each year the people rush to the polling place to crowd in a vote. This causes a large voting line to form in front of the polling place known as the **Line of Democracy**.

**Precinct workers**—these are the people who are responsible for certain precincts, they must see that everyone is registered to vote and does **vote**. They try and persuade the voters toward their candidates.

**Spoils System**—system by which a candidate gives jobs to his supporters and family if he is elected.

**Relay man**—man who works for party taking the results of outlook of the election about the many different precincts.

**Two-timer**—a person who has served an office at least two times and is seeking reelection.

**Evaluators**—the committee at the polls which see that only qualified voters vote and vote only once.

**Reiny Day**—term used by many of the old timers to describe an election that has results unexpected.

**Juggler**—persons who circulate among people at polls trying to convince them to vote for their candidate.

**Grafting**—passing money and commodities out for votes for particular candidates.

**See-sawing**—relay men bring news that one candidate is supposedly winning and then comes again saying the opposite candidate is winning. The people say this method is used to persuade many voters that their candidate is already a loser, so why not vote for the other.
For many years the people have set about their porches in the secluded places of Martin County anticipating the outcomes of the upcoming election. From these anticipations have come many songs written about candidates for offices in Martin County.

A long-time politician told me how a song of a sheriff developed. This song was sung by many Martin Countians for many years for I, myself have heard my grandparents and older neighbors singing it. The song was entitled "Moonshine". It seemed that in Martin County a particular man had been running Moonshine off for many years. The man seeking office had went about campaigning that he would stop this nonsense, because a few years back the man had sold Moonshine to a youngster resulting in an ill-fated accident. The story turned out that the man making the Moonshine died before the sheriff could capture him. It was there that the people wrote the song.

"Moonshine"

Moonshine; Moonshine quinch the devil's thrist,  
M ____ H ______ swore he get him, but the devil got him first.

Everyone knows that the good Lord makes the sunshine,  
But P _____ J _____ makes the moonshine.

The preceding is lines taken from the song "Moonshine"

Following the always surprising campaigns and elections in Martin County are many riddles. Did you know that a man told me this but I couldn't quite understand, maybe you can. He said, "Politics is a parrot that swallowed a clock. Following are some riddles related to me by my informants.

Question: What is pretty on the outside but dirty on the inside?
Answer: A Martin County politician.

Question: What kind of Board is slick?
Answer: The Old Board.

To fully understand the riddle above you must be a Martin Countian.
In Martin County the Board of Education in control has became known as the "Old Board." People opposing this committee are called "New Board."

For many years the candidates seeking office in Martin County have used many articles, artifacts etc. in their campaigns. Some used are posters hung on telephone poles, public places etc. throughout the county. These posters usually have the candidates picture and their campaign platform on it. Pens, small addressed cards, and large signs about candidates are seen throughout the county near the election time.

**Conclusion**

I know it would be impossible to secure all the folklore traditions of Martin County. In my experience, I have enjoyed talking to the Old People about the politics of Martin County, for I feel I have obtained a lot of valuable information which help me in my own life. The one thing I have noticed is that the younger generations of Martin county are not receiving and remembering the Folklore of Politics throughout the county.