

4000 So 56 St Apt 255G
Lincoln, NE 68506
Aug 18, 1979

Roger L. Welsch
English Department
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588

Dear Prof Welsch:

I was thinking about Ray Randall and the old WPA Writers Project the other day when I received your letter. I had just attended Ray's funeral here in Lincoln a few days before. Ray was a project worker about 1937-1940 and died in Omaha August 4, 1979. The number of remaining project workers is rapidly diminishing. I think there are about five or six of us left above the ground in Lincoln.

Harold Moss died in the early 1950s---his body was found frozen under the snow on an island in the Platte River near Ashland. He was one of the best story gatherers we had on the project. Some people can recall better the things they see, some the things they hear. I remember how impressed I was by Harold Moss's ability to recall what he heard. Shorthand or a recorder wasn't necessary in his case. He could recall conversations and talk verbatim for weeks.

I can still see his thin face all aglow with enthusiasm when he first told me about an old horse trader he had met. It must have been in late 1940 in the basement of old University Hall. I was hopeful he could gather enough material for a pamphlet on the old horse traders we used to have in Nebraska.

I haven't seen any of the writers project material since I left the project at the beginning of 1942. Moss was a speedy writer. He wrote his stories on yellow legal-size pads in longhand during a talk session and then had a typist in the office type a first draft. He made corrections on this as the typist made frequent errors trying to read his handwriting. Then a second draft was typed and I imagine it's this second draft that's in the file. No further editing, or polishing, or revisions on the horse trading stories were done to my knowledge. Are the Forms A and B still attached to the manuscripts?

I believe Moss was quite accurate in taking down the words of the person he was interviewing. You might compare his interviews of horse traders with his interviews of junk dealers and others. I think you'll find individualistic differences. I doubt that the stories reflect anything of Moss himself. I think the talk of people generally in the 1930s was more literary in style than the talk of people today but I don't remember Moss's talk as being that way especially. Moss had good ears and was a good listener.

We asked the workers to take down the talk as it was given and I believe Moss did that to the best of his ability. We had no "collector's manual" to follow in those years. We didn't think of talk or folklore as being anything scientific. I can't recall that any of the interview material, except what we used in the two or three pamphlets called "Pioneer Life in Nebraska" ever reached an editing stage. If it had we probably would have limited our editing to merely cutting out "repeats" or repetitions. As I say, I haven't seen any of the unpublished material since 1942. Do the copies in file show any evidence of editorial alteration?

If you'd like to come out sometime to talk about the writers project material, I am usually available. Mornings are best. My telephone number is 488-4300.

Sincerely,

Rudolph Umland