

# Interview of Harry Reece about His First Trip to Chicago, Illinois, November 29, 1938

## Forms to be Filled Out for Each Interview

Folklore  
New York

### FORM A

#### Circumstances of Interview

**State** New York

**Name Of Worker** Earl Bowman

**Address** 86 West 12th St. New York City

**Date** Nov. 29, 1938

**Subject** Harry Reece (DACA) ... His Story

#### **1. Date and time of interview**

Nov. 28, 1938; interview at subject

#### **2. Place of interview**

Harry Reece's Book Store, 63 Washington Square, South, New York City

#### **3. Name and address of informant**

Harry Reece, 63 Washington Sq. So.

#### **4. Name and address of person, if any, [who put you in?] touch with informant.**

None; located him myself I have known informant personally for more than ten years.

#### **5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you**

Informant's own place of business; an old book store, in the basement of 63 Washington Sq. So. N.Y.C.

#### **6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.**

A perfectly typical second hand book place with the intimate, friendly, air of thousands of old volumes cluttering shelves and walls and counters.

**FORM B**  
**Personal History of Informant**

**State** New York

**Name Of Worker** Earl Bowman

**Address** 86 West 12th St. New York City

**Date** Nov. 29, 1938

**Subject** Harry Reece (DACA) His Story

**1. Ancestry**

Native born American; born Illinois; on paternal side English descent, of American ancestry back to the Revolutionary War Other racial stocks Dutch, French, and possibly a bit of Indian.

**2. Place and date of birth**

Born in Illinois; declined to give exact date but his age somewhere in the range between fifty and fifty five.

**3. Family**

No family connections save a living mother; past eighty; who resides in Illinois.

**4. Places lived in, with dates**

He has lived in so darned many places that I'm afraid this old typewriter ribbon wouldn't last long enough to tell about them ... all over the world.

**5. Education, with dates**

Academic education not given; but he is highly cultured in every way.

**6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates**

At present his occupation in operating a book store; accomplishments musician and singer also composer.

**7. Special skills and interests**

I'd say his special skill is in music; his interest a lively a lively consideration and understanding of life in general.

**8. Community and religious activities**

No definite religious affiliation that I have been able to learn about.

**9. Description of informant**

"Daca" – Harry Reece is about fifty years of age; dark, eyes and contour of face very pleasant, almost benevolent; height about 5 ft 7 inches weight about 150. Athletic in build; strong; hair abundant; dark greying just a little.

## 10. Other Points gained in interview

He is a darned good looking and generally well dressed person. And he is always affable, good natured and kindly disposed toward his fellow man.

### FORM C

#### Text of Interview (Unedited)

**State** New York

**Name Of Worker** Earl Bowman

**Address** 86 West 12th St. New York

**Date** Nov. 29, 1938

**Subject** Harry Reece (DACA) ... His Story

#### Harry Reece's Story

"I was born in the middle west. Out in the state of Illinois ... and it was quite a while before the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Measured by the things that have happened since then it seems like a long, long time indeed.

We lived on a farm, and even telephones were curiosities to myself and the country boys of my age. Electric lights were something to marvel at ... the old Edison phonograph with its wax cylinder records and earphones was positively ghostly ... and trolley cars, well they too were past understanding!

"Speaking of trolley cars reminds me of a trip to the 'city' once when I was about a dozen years old. My father and a neighbor, Old Uncle Bill Brandon, had to go up to the Big Town, which was Chicago, on some sort of business ... and I suppose I'd been extra diligent at doing chores, weeding potatoes, killing worms on the tomato plants, or something ... and Father rewarded me by taking me along.

"A country boy in a large city for the first time isn't any more curious to the city than the city is to the country boy! They are both something to look at ... and marvel about.

"You can imagine what a time I had seeing things I'd never seen before, in fact had only dreamed about or heard about. Curiosity wasn't the name for it. Speechless incredulity came nearer describing my emotions. (After twenty years down here in New York ... and all the intervening years in the cities of the world, American and European, my reactions are different. Nothing surprises or excites me any more.)

"But when I saw my first trolley car slipping along Cottage Grove Avenue in Chicago ... slipping along without horses or engine or apparent motive power ... well it was just too darned much for me. I didn't know what to think.

“Uncle Bill Brandon was almost as much in doubt about the reality of the darned thing as I was myself — and Uncle Bill Brandon was, locally, that is out on the farm, considered a very, very wise and sophisticated person. And he was wise, too. He had seen a lot of life ... Too much, he sometimes said — especially during the four years of the 1860's when he was fighting in the Union Army.

“Uncle Bill could understand horses, hogs and cattle, steam engines, army mules and row boats, and such thing — but that trolley car, with the little spinning wheel at the end of the pole, spinning along against the electric wire above it; was too much for him. Still, he didn't want to confess 'that there was any doggone thing on earth that he couldn't figure out!' And he didn't want to show his 'ignorance' and especially to my Father or to myself, a twelve year old edition of young Americana, species rusticana.

“I wasn't so anxious to conceal my own ignorance, so with legitimate curiosity asked my Father and Uncle Bill what made the thing go.

“My Father was a thoughtful man, and before answering studied for a moment. Uncle Bill was more spontaneous.

“‘Gosh a'mighty, can't you see what makes her go?’ he exclaimed, ‘It's that danged rod stickin' up out of the top of her. People's gettin' so cussed smart these days all they need to do to run a street car is to got a fish-pole and stick it up out of the roof of her!’”

“Father let Uncle Bill's explanation ride. And I've never forgotten it, but since then, when I've heard variations of the same theme, I've wondered if Uncle Bill's rather [Doubting?] Thomas definition of the motive power of trolley cars was entirely original.

“Sometimes I wonder (although I still chuckle at it) if Uncle Bill hadn't been present when the alleged Chinaman, seeing an American trolley car for the first time, exclaimed excitedly: “No pushee — no pullee — but all same — ee go like hell-ee! I rather think Uncle Bill must have heard the Chinaman's comment, taken his wisdom from the Celestial and added the ‘fish-pole’ as a delicate touch of completeness!

“Anyhow, I've remembered the incident.

“From the farm home in Illinois, while yet in my teens, I listened to Horace Greeley's advice and like human beings have been doing in masses and individually ever since time began, obeyed the call to ... ‘Go West! Followed the 'trail of the setting sun!

“It was out there, in the cow-country, yes, and the sheep country, that I began to sing; perhaps it was because there is something about the open plains and the lonely life of cowboys and sheep-herders [?] although it is unpardonable to couple the words ‘cowboy and shepherd’ in the same sentence, except in mortal combat!) that makes the sound of the human voice—even if only one's own—sometimes a welcome sound.

"Before 'ambition' led me again toward the East I had learned all the old range songs, from "The Dirty Little Coward Who Shot Mister Howard," to and including 'the Dying Cowboy!' I still sing them and I still think they are great songs ...

"But I have learned other songs since then and other things ... too much and too many to tell all at once ..."