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PRENATAL SUPERSTITIONS

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

FOLKLORE 276

VERNON AND JAN McDANIEL

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BOWLING GREEN, KY 42101

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We interviewed five ladies in the Park City area, and compiled a folklore collection on the subject of prenatal superstitions.

The first lady we interviewed was Mrs. Linda Crane. She lives at Route 2, Park City, Kentucky, she has four children ranging in age from seven years to two weeks. Her husband is construction worker so she has had to travel around quite a bit. Each of her children were born in different states and she has been exposed to a large variety of superstitions in many parts of the country.

Since we were un able to record our conversation with Mrs. Crane on tape, the following statements are those contributed by her. After each statement given by Mrs. Crane, is the corresponding number and statement, if any existed, that was listed in The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, Volume 6.

1. You should never make fun of anyone who is deformed or your child will be deformed.

117. If you mock a person that is deformed, you or your descendant will be deformed like the person you mocked.

2. If you are informed that the child you are carrying is sick, and you have not already decided upon a name, if you name it, it will get well.

160. If an unnamed baby falls ill, name it, and it will get well.

3. Honey and turpentine will cause a women to miscarry.
 23. A teaspoonful of turpentine every morning for nine mornings will produce an abortion.
4. If the doctor predicts birth on the thirteenth day of any month the baby will come early to avoid being born on an unlucky day.
 130. A person born on the thirteenth day of the month will surely have bad luck.
5. If you dream about the baby before it is born you'll have a hard delivery.
 164. If you dream of a pretty infant it is good luck.
 165. Dreaming of an ugly infant is bad luck.
6. If you carry your baby up front it will be a boy.
 147. If a woman is larger in front during pregnancy, the child will be a male.
7. If you carry your baby in the back it will be a girl.
8. If you count by two's a lot during pregnancy you will have twins.
9. You can count the number of lines in your hand to tell how many children you will have.
 131. The number of crosses in your hand indicates the number of children you will have.

Interviewer: Vernon McDaniel
Informant A: Alice England
Informant B: Dorothy McDaniel

Next, we interviewed Mrs. Alice England and Mrs. Dorothy McDaniel, in a table discussion about prenatal superstitions. Both Mrs. England and Mrs. McDaniel are from the Park City area. Mrs. England is seventy-five years old and the mother of four children. Mrs. McDaniel has six children and is fifty-one years old.

We were able to record their comments, so the following is the tape as we transcribed it. If there is a corresponding statement in The Brown Collection, the number and statement will follow the Informant's comments.

Interviewer: We're interviewing two ladies tonight from Park City, Kentucky. They are Mrs. Alice England and Mrs. Dorothy McDaniel. Let's find something out about the two ladies. How many grandchildren do you have, Mrs. England?

Informant A: I have fourteen grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.

Interviewer: How old are you?

Informant A: Seventy-five.

Interviewer: O.K., sounds like you have had plenty of experience in this subject we're talking about, prenatal markings and superstitions.

Informant A: Right smart and not too much either!

Interviewer: O.K. Mrs. McDaniel what type experience have you had with this subject?

Informant B: Well, I've raised six children. I've had plenty of it.

Interviewer: Do you have any grandchildren?

Informant B: Yes, fourteen.

Interviewer: What's the youngest?

Informant B: Two weeks old.

Interviewer: O.K. Have you done anything as far as home remedies for these children?

Informant B: Yes I have.

Interviewer: What are some of them?

Informant B: Well, my little granddaughter had the thrash and I let a man blow in her mouth.

Interviewer: What is the superstition behind this?

Informant B: It's suppose to cure the thrash.

Interviewer: Mrs. England can you tell me anything you've heard or practiced when you had your children.

Informant A: When I had my children I used to doctor 'em, I'd give 'em medicine I'd made at home, things like that.

Interviewer: What type of medicines did you have?

Informant A: Black Drough and such as that, what I gave my children.

Interviewer: When you were pregnant did anyone tell you things you should or shouldn't do?

Informant A: Yes, they told me not to look at any body dead and things like that.

114. A pregant woman should not look at a corpse, lest the child suffer a deformity.

Interviewer: What was this suppose to do?

Informant A: It was suppose to mark the baby, if I had looked at it.

Interviewer: Mrs. McDaniel

Informant B: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Can you toll me any experiences you've had while you were pregnant?

Informant B: Well, I've had so much to go on, I don't know what to tell first.

Informant B: While you're carrying your baby if you eat too many pickles, then there'll be a pickle mark somewhere on the baby.

85. A married woman confided that her son bore a birthmark in the shape of a pickle on one hip as a result of her eating too many pickles during her pregnancy.

Informant A: If you go out and look at horses while you're carrying your baby, if you get scared your baby will be marked by a horse.

97. Prenatal fears cause birthmarks on children.

Interviewer: What type mark would it be?

Informant A: Well, it'll be a hoof, they say.

Interviewer: You say you were afraid that you'd have a hoof mark?

Informant A: Yes. I was afraid I'd have a hoof mark so I watched my baby when it was born to see if it had a hoof mark on its foot.

Informant B: While you're carrying the baby and craving strawberries and you don't get what you crave, the baby may have strawberries on its body someplace, too.

86. If a pregnant woman develops a craving for some fruit, drink, etc., and that desire is not satisfied, the child will be marked. Often this mark resembles the shape of the desired object.

Informant A: And if you get scared by a snake, while you are carrying a baby, while it'll have a snake mark on the baby.

Interviewer: Would it be a streak or something?

Informant A: Be in your eye.

Interviewer: Have you ever seen a mark?

Informant A: I've got one in my eye, a snake mark.

Interviewer: Do any of your children have any marks?

Informant A: I don't think my children have any marks. If they have any, I don't know about it.

Interviewer: You've told us some interesting things, have you anything to add Mrs. McDaniel?

Informant B: Yea, Yea. If you get scared, if you get scared and wherever you put your finger or hand on your body, if it's a bad scare, it'll leave a mark on it.

98. Great fright to the pregnant woman will cause the child to be marked. Wherever the woman first touches herself after the fright, the mark will appear on the child at the same place.

Interviewer: Do any of your children have any marks?

Informant B: Not any of mine.

Interviewer: Have you ever seen any of your neighbor's children have any marks?

Informant A: Yes, I have. I've seen them have marks.

Interviewer: What type marks would it be?

Informant A: Well, it would be marks on their arms and on their faces, red places.

Interviewer: Did they resemble anything?

Informant A: Yes. They resembled a watermelon, they said. That's what it was. I've seen them on 'em.

Interviewer: Mrs. McDaniel have you anything to add to what we've already said?

Informant B: Yes. When I was in the hospital with my last baby, there was a lady in there who said she was craving suet the whole nine months, and she was afraid her baby would be born black. Said she craved suet out of the chimney!

Interviewer: We'd like to thank these ladies for the information they have given us. This is our report now, on superstitions.

Our fourth informant was Mrs. Grace Rowsey, also of Park City. Mrs. Rowsey is a seventy-four year old grandmother and former resident of Ohio. We were unable to record our interview with her so the following is a list of the prenatal superstitions that she has heard: There were no corresponding statements in The Brown Collection for any of the information that she gave us.

1. If you carry the baby down low, it will be a boy.
2. If you carry the baby up high, it will be a girl.
3. If you go swimming a few days before the baby is born, you will have an easier delivery.
4. If, at your baby shower, most of your gifts have blue ribbons, it will be a boy. If there are more pink ribbons, it will be a girl.
5. Your baby will always be born when there is a full moon.
6. The color of booties you knit while you are pregnant will determine the sex of the child.
7. A woman once killed moles in her garden while she was pregnant, and when her baby was born it had moles all over its body.

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Our fifth interview was with Mrs. Katie Amos of Park City. Mrs. Amos is a Sixty year old Negro cook who has had nine children and twenty-six grandchildren. We are most proud of this informant because through her entire life she has lived with these superstitions and been around family and friends who believe very strongly in their validity. We were lucky enough to tape our conversation with Mrs. Amos. The following is the tape as we transcribed it. If there is a corresponding statement in The Brown Collection, the number and statement will follow the Informant's comments.

Interviewer: This report is with Katie Amos. We feel very lucky in interviewing her because she seems to know so much about the subject. Katie, how many children do you have?

Informant: : Nine.

Interviewer: How many grandchildren?

Informant. : Twenty-six.

Interviewer: Katie, the list we've compiled here are some of the things you remember. I'll remind you of them then I want you to talk a little more about them, in detail. I have down here about dead person's eyes. What does that bring to mind?

Informant : Well, if you're pregnant that'll make your baby have dead person's eyes, if you look at it, if you look at the dead person.

: 170. If a woman sees a corpse before the birth of her child, the baby will be pale in complexion.

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Interviewer: I have here something about wishing and then touching yourself.

Informant : You'll mark it. There'll be a mark on it somewhere.

93. If a woman has an intense longing for something like strawberries, whatever place on her body that she touches at the time will so affect the unborn child that it will have a strawberry on its body at the same place she touched her body.

Interviewer: Does it matter what you wish, or whatever you wish there'll be a mark?

Informant : No. Whatever you wish or if you crave it, you'll mark it.

Interviewer: And what do you know about dreams and night-mares?

Informant : Well, if you dream and if you get to jumping in your dream whild you're asleep and your baby, when it comes, it may jump or cry out in it's sleep.

Interviewer: We talked about some animals that had to do with this, what about the squirrel and the fox?

Informant : Well, the fox will run a woman if she's pregnant, and she may get scared of a squirrel.

Interviewer: Will this have any effect on the baby?

Informant : Sometimes, if you get awful scared.

Interviewer: What about miscarrying, will that have anything to do about miscarriage?

Informant : Well, it could have, could make it have a miscarriage.

Interviewer: What about something to cause a woman to miscarriage, you said something about walking around in a circle.

Informant : Well, she could fall down, fall down the steps or get scared of something.

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Interviewer: What's this about ginger tea?

Informant : Well, ginger tea, when you're in labor pains, will bring pains on more.

40. In childbirth, ginger tea increases the pains.

Interviewer: You said something about a knife and an ax under the bed. What does this have to do with giving birth?

Informant : Well, that cuts the pain

45. Put an ax under the bed to cut the pain in two during childbirth.

51. A knife is placed under the mattress to stop childbirth pain.

Interviewer: What did you tell me about killing and picking chickens?

Informant : Well, you could mark your baby.

Interviewer: What was this about a woman you know, a friend of yours?

Informant : Lizzie Hayden (Negro)

Interviewer: What did she do that had to do with chickens?

Informant : Well, she cut hair when she was pregnant and she stole a lot of chickens and ----

Interviewer: What color were the chickens?

Informant : White.

Interviewer: What happened to the baby?

Informant : Well, it was white, with purple eyes.

Interviewer: And she thinks it's because of what she did?

Informant : Yea.

Interviewer: Do you believe that?

Informant : Don't know, Richie isn't right!

Here we have pictures of the ladies who we interviewed:



#1

Grace Rowsey
74 year old resident of Park City, Kentucky



#2

Alice England
She is holding the youngest of her
fifteen great-grandchildren



#3

Dorothy McDaniel
51 year old resident of Park City,

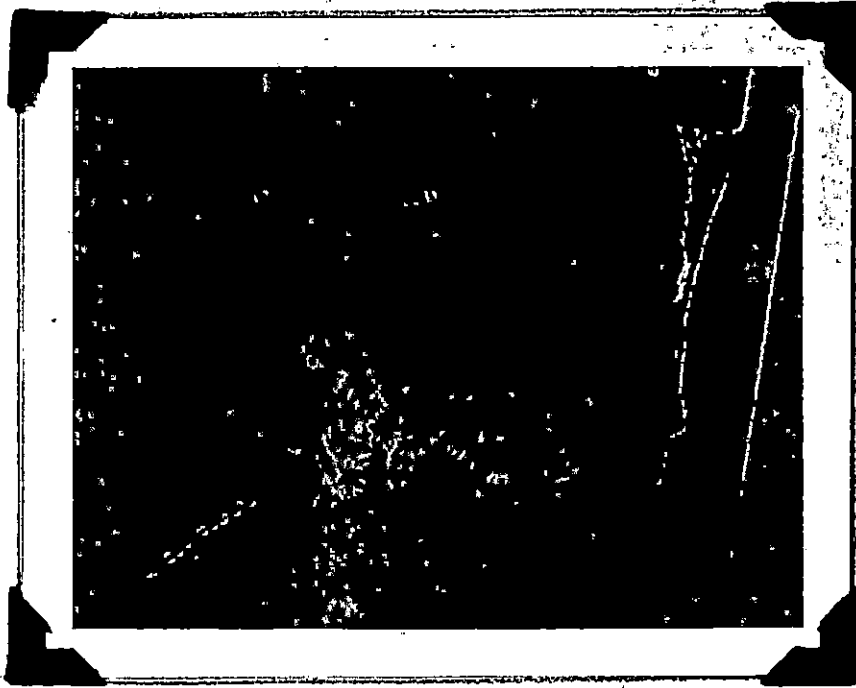
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#4

Katie Amos
60 year old Negro cook
Also from Park City, Kentucky



#5

Linda Crane
28 year old mother of four children now
living in Park City, Kentucky

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