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UA37/23 WHAS Broadcast No. 50

WHAS
Western Kentucky University
Earl Moore

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WHAS BROADCAST No. 50

January 12, 1937
4:00-4:30 P.M.

From Extension Studio in Bowling Green

Strings and Voices "College Heights."

Moore Western Kentucky State Teachers College greets you all both great and small with the words of our college motto — —

Voices Life More Life.

Moore Life More Life is our motto and our wish for all our listeners.

Vibratone Chords.

Moore The program today is entitled "American Folk Heroes." This subject will be discussed by Dr. Gordon Wilson, head of the Department of English at Western Teachers College. Dr. Wilson has for many years been a thoroughgoing student of folklore, particularly as it affects local American customs and traditions. He is the author of the series of articles now appearing in about one hundred Kentucky daily and weekly newspapers under the title "Tidbits of Kentucky Folklore." He will now discuss "American Folk Heroes," with incidental folk music being supplied by our studio musicians, who are students in the College. Dr. Wilson.

Wilson The very nature of American life since the first settlements were made has caused us to produce many oddities of character. Before 1800 there had appeared in tradition and in literature such types as the frontiersman or scout, the canny rustic philosopher, the Indian, and the Negro. The early nineteenth century brought into public consciousness such types as the Southern owner, the poor boy who became famous, and the strong man or boaster; by the end of the Civil War all of our folk heroes were known, the later ones being the
cowboy, the desperado, and the Pike or professional pioneer. These ten characters seem to be our distinctive popular heroes.

We sometimes think that the Indian did not become a popular figure until he was a vanishing memory of olden times.

Rutan  Tom-tom music (10 seconds)

Wilson  In reality one of the hardened Indian fighters who overcame Pontiac in 1765 wrote a play within a year after this outbreak in which he drew the red man as a hero of epic proportions. Philip Freneau, the poet of the Revolution, wrote several poems on Indian life, and in the early nineteenth century Bryant, Whittier, Cooper, Simms, and Custis carried on this literary tradition. Investigators like Schoolcraft studied lovingly the history and lore of the Indians; the monumental ALGIC RESEARCHES blossomed into Longfellow's HIAWATHA.

Dye  Indian music, violin  (about 1:30).

Wilson  Even today nothing catches our attention any more quickly than Indian tradition: musical, literary, or otherwise.

Dye (violin) and Arnold (tenor) begin

"By the Waters of Minnetonka"

Musicians like Lieurance have taken Indian melodies and made them great music. And folklorists all over the land are preserving every scrap of Indian custom and tradition.

Dye and Arnold  "By the Waters of Minnetonka."

Wilson  As soon as the first settlements were planted along the coast, daring souls began to seek out wilder and more inaccessible places. The frontiersman or scout was a reality long before the great trek to Kentucky and the West. Cooper drew this type best, but he was merely putting into books what all the settlements had known for generations.

When the West became our frontier, it was easy for people to transfer their conceptions of the scout to such actual characters as Davy Crockett, Buffalo Bill, and Kit Carson. So thoroughly had this type
become a folk hero that it is nearly impossible to separate actual events in the lives of the Western scouts from traditional happenings that have been the common property of scouts since the earliest times in America.

*Dye (violin) and Atcher (tenor and guitar)* "Oh Susanna." fading for:

Wilson

The Pike or professional pioneer was a close relative of the scout. The name was given in California to the dustcovered, tobacco-chewing immigrants who had come from Pike County, Missouri, with their large families and their few earthly possessions. Joe Bowers early became a representative of the race. It seems that Joe needed a financial start before marrying his girl in Missouri and therefore went to California and tried to raise a stake.

"My name it is Joe Bowers; I've got a brother Ike. I come from old Missouri, yes, all the way from Pike. I'll tell you why I left that and how I came to roam And leave my pore old mammy, my country, and my home.

"I used to love a gal thar; her name was Sally Black. I ask her if she'd marry me; she said it was a whack. Says she to me, "Joe Bowers, before we hitch for life, You'd better buy a little home to keep your little wife'."

And so to the gold-diggings went Joe. There he got rich, but Sally meanwhile had married a butcher "whose hair was awful red." Bret Harte used Pikes extensively in his Western stories; John Hay found the type common in the Middle West; Baldwin, Longstreet, and Sidney Lanier found him in the Southern hills. Every section has its own Pike: hillbilly, share cropper, squatter.

*Dye (violin) and Atcher (tenor and guitar)* "Pop Goes the Weasel," fading for:

Wilson

In our own time the hillbilly is the phase best known, since the wholesale westward movement has ceased. Only rarely has the hillbilly been presented honestly; it takes a genuinely sympathetic mountaineer to interpret the type, with his fatalistic religion, his love of old-
fashioned music, his primitive conceptions of right and wrong,
his wellgrounded suspicions of people from the more fertile areas.

(Dye and Atcher out)

Atcher (tenor and guitar) "Barbra Allen."

Wilson No type is more alive today than the cowboy, in spite of the
fact that he began to lose his place in reality a generation ago,
with the passing of free land. He has become for millions the
symbol of romance, as heroic a figure as King Arthur was to the
disappointed remnants of the days of chivalry. Travellers to the
West came back with Texas cowhorns, Texas saddles, and sombreros.
It was a poor neighborhood indeed that could not boast of one or
more of these symbols of the cowboy, and every fiddler and banjopicker could play or sing "O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie."

Lukes (tenor) "Oh, Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie."

Wilson Since the radio has become common, the cowboy has again come
into his own; cowboy songs, actual or imitation, are heard nearly
every day.

Atcher (tenor and guitar) "Get Along, Little Dogies."

Wilson An actual dogie song, as long as the old Chisholm Trail itself,
reappears often and served as one of the inspirations for "I'm
Heading for the Last Roundup."

Grabill (tenor) "The Last Round-Up."

Wilson As with the scouts, it is impossible to distinguish the actual
cowboy from the traditional figure: Owen Wister's Virginian and
Theodore Roosevelt seem equally real. Will Rogers combined the
achievements of the cowboy with the philosophy of the rustic and is
about the most typical product of our frontiers. The cowboy tradition
seems to be one of our most persistent and picturesque folk contri-
The American bad man is the lineal descendant of Robin Hood and has somehow always attracted the attention of the common man, who no doubt identified him with oppressed people. Our ancestors glorified the people who fled from tyranny to America; it is difficult even yet to keep from identifying our bad men with the national tradition. The spirit of the Civil War found for itself a hero in John Brown; many of the folk identified Jesse James with the Lost Cause, and that may account for some of the stanzas in a popular Jesse James ballad:

Chorus  "Jesse James."

That the desperado as a type still holds romance is attested by the thousands that attended the funeral of Pretty Boy Floyd and the crowd that rushed up to dip their handkerchiefs in the blood of John Dillinger.

Sometimes the frontiersman, or the hillbilly, or some other type blended into that of the boaster or bully. Davy Crockett, famous as a frontiersman, was equally famous for his boast of being "half horse, half alligator, with a little touch of snapping turtle." Mike Fink, the typical riverman, ran the gamut of boasting with his rigmarole: "I can out-run, out-hop, out-jump, throw down, drag out, lick any man in the country. I love the women, and I am chock-full of fight." Others proudly boasted of being able to lick their weight in wildcats, of having nine sets of jaw teeth, of being a steamboat or an elephant, or, in still later times, of being able to fight a circle saw.

Grabill (tenor)  "The Highly Educated Man."
The boaster is only another form of the teller of tall tales. Besides Mike Fink, the riverman, there are three of these mighty yarnspinners in American folk thought: Paul Bunyan, of the North Woods; Old Stormalong, the strong sailor; and John Henry, the giant from Black River, who pitted his strength against machinery, only to go down in a sort of epic struggle in a contest with a steam drill.

Our rustic philosopher has had many reincarnations. The stage Yankee, created as early as 1787 as Jonathan in Royall Tyler's The Contrast, was for many years our conception of the village wiseacre. Lowell's Hosea Biglow is of exactly the same tradition. John Phoenix, Josh Billings, Artemus Ward, Bill Arp—the list of rustic wise men is endless. In our own time Abe Martin, the simple farmer from Brown County, Indiana; Ring Lardner, with his whole society of ungrammatical philosophers; and Will Rogers, cowboy, lecturer, actor, traveller, have laughed us into sanity. Every newspaper has one or more columns devoted to the wise sayings of a typical rustic philosopher, but probably the best representatives of this type are today to be found sitting around the country store, saying wise things that will never find their way into print.

Probably our most persistent American type is the poor boy who became famous. He is the modern version of the downtrodden character in the fairy stories: Cinderella among the ashes and Lincoln studying
by a pine-knot fire; the young lad who rose from poverty and
married the princess and Grant following the horse along the
towpath; the beggar maid who captivated King Cophetua and the
Scotch immigrant boy who rose to be a great millionaire-philanthropist—
these are equally possible in the folk mind. This is so real to
most people that it is hard to convince them that many of our great
characters have had an even break and that some of them were actually
wealthy. America as the land of opportunity is an ideal that I find
still living in the minds of the children of people who came to
America after 1900.

Chorus and Strings "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia," fading for:

Wilson The Southern Colonel is so well known that a few deft strokes
will reveal him: goatee, mustache, slouch hat, serious dignity, and
far-away look in the eyes. In literature he seems to have been the
creation of John Pendleton Kennedy in Swallow Barn, published in 1832.
Harris, Page, and others have added little to this early conception.

(Chorus and Strings out)

It would be folly to attempt any other kind of portrait; even if this
type is scarce and always has been, we want our plantation owner to
be a true-blue colonel after this fashion.

Chorus and Strings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," fading for:

Wilson There are three Negro types that everybody knows: the old
retainer-philosopher of the Uncle Remus or Uncle Tom variety; the
Negro mammy; and the comic, or Jim Crow, Negro. The woes of Uncle
Tom somewhat overshadowed his other qualities; it remained for Irwin
Russell, Page, and Harris to round out the picture of the kindly,
quaintly humorous, wise old slave, who took pride in his white folks
and who felt it an honor to entertain the younger generation with
tales about the good old days before the war. The Negro mammy in
real life and in tradition had a freedom of speech allowed only
to such people as the court fools of earlier times. Jim Crow,
introduced in 1835 by T. D. Rice, a Negro minstrel, represents the
comical, irresponsible side of Negro life, the something that we
all like in such modern minstrels as Amos and Andy or Pick and Pat.

(Chorus and Strings out)

Though there are many variations of these types, probably these
ten represent what American folk thinking has thus far produced as a
picture gallery: the Indian, the scout, the Pike, the cowboy, the
desperado, the boaster, the rustic philosopher, the poor boy who
became famous, the Southern Colonel, and the Negro.

Chorus and Strings "Massa Dear," fading for:

Moore This program, emanating from the auditorium of Western Kentucky
State Teachers College in Bowling Green, has brought you a talk on
"American Folk Heroes" by Dr. Gordon Wilson, head of the English
Department and author of "Tidbits of Kentucky Folklore," a series
familiar to thousands of Kentucky newspaper readers. Illustrative
music was provided by students of the College, including William Lukes,
Dale Grabill, Jimmie Arnold, Randall Atcher, Lavelton Dye, and Jimmie
Rutan, soloists; and Mary Gear, Laura Salt, June Kerns, J. Lloyd Lamb,
Gus Baize, Edna Shields, Mary Frances McCheaney, C. C. Evans, Jr.,
Barbara Beyer, John W. Koon, Martha Taylor, Flossie Hibbard, Martha
Katherine Lampkin, William Morse Egbert, Leona Van Dusen, Hazel Kerns,
Robert Chenoweth, John Farris, Nick Ungurean, Hazel Oates, and
William Gleichmann; Miss Mary Chisholm, accompanist; Dr. D. West
Richards, director.

By permission of the publishers "Barbra Allen," "Ch, Bury Me
Not on the Lone Prairie," "Jesse James," "Git Along, Little Dogies,"
and "I Was Born Almost Ten Thousand Years Ago," were selected from Carl Sandburg's "The American Songbag," published by Harcourt, Brace and Company.

We invite you to be with us again next Tuesday at four o'clock C. S. T., when a play entitled "Two Other People" will be presented by students in Dramatics, under the direction of Professor J. Reid Sterrett.

This is Earl Moore saying goodbye until next Tuesday and wishing you Life More Life.

(Chorus and strings up and continue)