

## HOBOS AND TRAMPS IN MAYNARD TOWN

The original and only form of locomotion for man from one place to another on this globe of ours was by moving one leg after the other forward. Only in recent times - millenia wise - did he learn other ways. We wish to speak in this paper on those less fortunate brethren of ours of by-gone years who tramped or rode the rails into and possibly out of Maynard.

Webster defines a tramp as one who travels about on foot. Further, he defines a hobo (this is Americanese by the way) as a professional tramp. We are sure that Maynard was graced by both genre. We must also confess to a certain softness of the heart towards these tramps, as differentiated from hobos of the first forty years of the existence of Maynard, for we have dear friends that did exactly this looking for work during the Great Depression of the early 30's.

Carl Sandburg in 1927 published his famous "American Song Bag" from which we have taken these following excerpts of hobo songs to illustrate Nineteenth Century America from their viewpoint. In many ways these are similar to the folk songs that came out of the 30's and the protest songs of today's youth against the crass materialism of present-day Society.

"Halleluja, I'm a Bum" goes back to the 1890's, heard at the water tanks of railroads:

Oh, why don't you work like other men do? How the hell can I  
work when there's no work to do?

Halleluja, I'm a bum - Halleluja, bum again, Halleluja, give us a  
handout to revive us again.

I went to a house and asked for some bread - A Lady came out, says,  
the baker is dead;

Halleluja (repeat)

And so on for many verses. Another song is entitled "Shovellin' Iron Ore"  
and this is usually sung by quartets in conjunction with "We are Four Bums".

Something happened the other day that never happened before

A man tried to get me to shovel iron ore.

Says I, ' Old man now what will you pay?'

Says he, ' two bits a ton!'

Says I, ' Old man, go diddle yourself,

I'd rather be on the bum'

We are four gums, four jolly good chums, We live like royal Turks,

e're having good luck, in bumming about. God bless the man that works.

The fourth and last one is entitled "Wanderin'" We still hear this song today, it has a tremendously haunting quality to the melody.

My daddy is an engineer, my brother drives a hack

My sister takes in washin' an' the baby balls the jack,

An' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.

I been a wanderin' early and late, New York City to the Golden Gate,

And it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.

Been a-workin' in the army, working on a farm, All I got to show for it

Is the muscle in my arm, an' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my Wanderin'.

So now that we are in the proper frame of mind let us read some excerpts from the Maynard Town Reports starting in 1871 - our first year as a corporation;

(READ EXCERPTS - SEE ATTACHED)

A January 8, 1904 news item in the paper tells us of a large number of complaints about hobos begging for food and scaring women.

January 22, 1904 - Officer Connors hurrying hobos out of town. They have to have permit now to stay at poor farm for night.

February 5, 1904 - plan of overseers of the poor forcing hobos to get a permit is working - only twelve last week - up to that time 18 to 25 nightly. William Lord of Stow says they are coming there and Stow may follow Maynard's plan .

The January and February dates on these news items would indicate that these men were out of work and out of money and searching for both. That they were tramps and not hobos.

Most of them no doubt traveled on - some no doubt stayed and became solid citizens



of our community. Lest we judge too harshly these wayfaring strangers - remember - they might be our fathers or grandfathers!

Most of the dates are from Maynard News and the information prior to the turn of the Century was compiled from Town Reports by a jail-bird of 35 years and tramp who traveled to Concord from Maynard daily to jail - we mean Ralph Sheridan our President!

Read at the March, 1968 Meeting  
of the Maynard Historical Society

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