

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Massachusetts)

TITLE Old Irish Mill Worker - Edward O'Neil

WRITER Louise G. Bassett

DATE 11/8/38 WDS. \_\_\_\_\_ PP. 5

CHECKER \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SOURCES GIVEN (†) Interview

COMMENTS

SS Irish Mill Worker

M 2000  
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STATE Massachusetts  
NAME OF WORKER Louise G. Bassett  
ADRESS Brookfield, Massachusetts  
DATE November 8, 1938  
SUBJECT Living Lore  
NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Edward O'Neil, Brookfield,  
Massachusetts.

1. Edward O'Neil was born in Brookfield, Massachusetts, the son of Daniel O'Neil, an Irish immigrant and Sarah Pritchard, daughter of a foreign missionary. Daniel O'Neil a railroad worker and farmer was a hard bitten man with little education and a decided contempt for any one who had. Mrs. O'Neil was gentle and sweet, but completely terrified by her domineering husband. For years they lived in a small house in an isolated part of Brookfield. Edward O'Neil has always lived in Brookfield. When very young he refused to go to school and no one in the family made him. He has never done much work - odd jobs now and again, but has depended on his hardworking sisters to keep him. He scorns any part in the community affairs except to criticize - something he does well and often.



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Assignment: Brookfield

Title: Living Lore

Topic: An Old Irishman tells  
about Christmas

Edward O'Neil, who lives on the "old North Brookfield road, is one of Brookfield's oldest but most vigorous inhabitants.

I met him the other day just as he was finishing a five mile walk, his hands full of bitter-sweet, lovelier than I have ever seen around here. "Oh, where did you get it," I exclaimed. "I won't tell you," he snapped at me, "if I did - you'd tell some one else - then they'd tell someone and purtty soon every fool in town would be goin' there to get some an' there wouldn't be none left. I like it myself an' I'm goin' to keep it fer myself long's I kin. I'll give you a piece though, long's you want some so bad." He selected a long branch with care.

"I'm saving this for Christmas" he added.

"What was the first Christmas you actually remember?"

I asked.

In his faded eyes I saw a far off dreamy look. "The first Christmas I remember was when I was four years old. The reason I remember it was because my mother gave me a big lump of brown sugar with a few drops of peppermint on it. I nibbled at that sugar a little bit at a time all day long and I can taste that peppermint to this day. You see, we were sort of pioneer people and we didn't have much - nor not much to get anything with. Every winter in my early days was hard times.

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"The only other present my mother had to give that Christmas was a quarter of a dried orange peel and she give it to my sister to put in her bureau drawer to make her clothes smell sweet. My father didn't know much about Christmas. He'd been brought up by the Indians. His parents had been killed by redskins and he lived with the Indians until he was nearly twenty. My mother's parents were missionaries and of course she knew all about Christmas.

"I don't remember much about the Christmas's that came after that one when I got the lump of sugar with the peppermint on it, until I was twelve years old when my father gave me six boughten fish hooks. We made most of our fish hooks by forgin' 'em ourselves before the fire. About that time my father got to flat boatin' down the river. Some time he'd be gone three or four months and when he came back he'd bring back things like store clothes and boots, and once he brought me a tie and then my mother'd hide 'em away and keep 'em and give 'em to us for Christmas. And from September 'till Christmas us kids'd have lots of fun huntin' around over the house and wonderin' what we was goin' to get.

"When I was fifteen my mother gave me a rifle of my own for Christmas. My father'd got it in Boston and this, with the exception of the one when I got the peppermint sugar, was my best Christmas.

"I was a grown man almost twenty-one before I ever saw a Christmas tree. A German family moved near us and they had a tree

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every year. They dipped the little candles themselves, colored 'em red with poke berry ink and fastened 'em on the trees some-how with wild turkey ribs. I never'd seen anything so purty in my life as those Christmas trees. We had to work awful hard in them days but we had our fun same as we do now. Well, if I don't run acrost you again, I wish you Merry Christmas." And away he went, being stopped at every half block by someone who wanted to know, "Where did you get that lovely bitter sweet?"

But he only snapped "I won't tell you."