

Paul Seccomb Collection
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Collection Number: Oral History Collection Number 1999-1
Date Donated: April 9, 1999.
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Size of Collection: 2--Two items
Subject of Collection: Butte History Montana History, Folk Music, Irish Culture,
Date of collection: Current 1999
Location: Closet #1. With Oral History Tapes.

History

Today in early 1999, John "The Yank Harrington at the age of 96, is a living breathing repository for the history of Celtic folk music and the history of his town, Butte, Montana, the third most Irish County in the United States.

John "The Yank" Harrington was born the second child in a family of six in Mercur, Utah, on March 10, 1903. His parents, John Peter and Katie were recent immigrants from the Beara Peninsula, County Cork, Ireland. Both parents played the button box accordion, "melodian" as they called it. John "The Yank" began playing at a very early age. After the gold mines in Mercur began to play out (in 1911), John Peter traveled to Butte, Montana and found work in the underground copper mines. Katie and the children joined him in Butte some months later.

As a youngster in Butte John remembers the events surrounding the Granite Mountain and Speculator mine disasters-the worst hard rock mining disasters in U.S. history. At the age of 14 John was orphaned. His sisters were placed in the care of St. Joseph's Orphanage in Helena while John moved in with his Uncle Dan and Aunt Julia

In 1919, Dan and Julia took their family and John back to Ireland. When he arrived at his grandmother's house in Eskaninane, Reentrisk of Allihies Parish, County Cork, she tagged him with the nickname of "The Yank". John found work in the Allihies copper mine, John, then 16, received 4 shillings and sixpence for a day's work

John left Ireland and landed in New York and was able to find work on the Eighth Avenue subway. In the middle of the Great Depression, John "the Yank" headed west to find his family. He ended up back in Butte where the oldest of his sisters, Catherine, now a nurse, had married and was raising her family. John has lived in Butte since.

- Item 1. **A Celtic Century**, John "The Yank" Harrington, Celtic American Folk Music CD ROM
- Item 2. Interview with John "The Yank" Harrington by William Marcus, All Things Considered National Public Radio. March 17, 1999