

e-Luminations: The Music Man

Phraseology

The Music Man *abounds in phrases and popular culture references from the early years of the 20th century. Here are a few to help you understand “the territory.”*

Phrases:

Bang beat, bell-ringin’... great go, neck-or-nothin’... ever’time-a-bull’s-eye salesman: A hard-driver who comes to town like the circus and always gets what he’s after.

Jasper: A man from out of town, possibly a hick.

Fiz gig: A giddy flirt (female)

Doxy: A loose woman

Tank town: A small town where trains only stop to get water.

Neck-bowed: Stubborn.

Hawk-eye: A native and/or resident of Iowa.

Jeely Kly: Phrasical stand-in for “Jesus Christ.” Similar in spirit to “By Gob” and “Bejabbers.”

References:

Captain Billy’s Whiz Bang: Risqué humor magazine first published in 1919.

Uneeda Biscuit (1898): The first individually packaged cracker on the market.

Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore (1829–1892): Cornet player and band leader.

W.C. Handy, William Christopher Handy (1873–1958): piano and trumpet player and “Father of the Blues.”

John Philip Sousa (1854–1932): Band leader and composer of marches, like “Stars and Stripes Forever.”

The Great Creatore (1871–1952): Neapolitan band leader Giuseppe Creatore.

Hogshead, demijohn, noggins, piggins, firkins and tierces: Containers used to hold liquids and other goods.

Bevo: Non-alcoholic beer introduced in 1916.

Cubebs, tailor-mades: Early manufactured cigarettes, which were illegal in Iowa in 1912.

Billiards, Balkline and Pool: Billiards refers to all games played on a billiard table, with or without pockets. Balkline (no pockets) was considered a gentleman's game. A pool table (six pockets) was a fixture in betting parlors, hence its unsavory reputation.

O'Clark, O'Mendez, O'Klein: References to famous contemporary cornet and trumpet players. Rafael Mendez (O'Mendez) is an anachronism (he was active in the '30s and '40s, and is an in-joke).

—Beth Bardossi

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