

They Have Yarns from The People, Yes

Carl Sandburg

They have yarns
Of a skyscraper so tall they had to put hinges
On the two top stories so to let the moon go by,
Of one corn crop in Missouri when the roots

Went so deep and drew off so much water
The Mississippi riverbed that year was dry,
Of pancakes so thin they had only one side,

Of “a fog so thick we shingled the barn and six feet out on the fog,”
Of Pecos Pete straddling a cyclone in Texas and riding it to the west
coast where “it rained out under him,”
Of the man who drove a swarm of bees across the Rocky Mountains and
the Desert “and didn’t lose a bee,”
Of a mountain railroad curve where the engineer in his cab can touch
the caboose and spit in the conductor’s eye,
Of the boy who climbed a cornstalk growing so fast he would have
starved to death if they hadn’t shot biscuits up to him,
Of the old man’s whiskers: “When the wind was with him his whiskers
arrived a day before he did,”
Of the hen laying a square egg and cackling, “Ouch!” and of hens laying
eggs with the dates printed on them,
Of the ship captain’s shadow: it froze to the deck one cold winter night,
Of mutineers on that same ship put to chipping rust with rubber hammers,
Of the sheep counter who was fast and accurate: “I just count their feet
and divide by four,”
Of the man so tall he must climb a ladder to shave himself,
Of the runt so teeny-weeny it takes two men and a boy to see him,
Of mosquitoes: one can kill a dog, two of them a man,
Of a cyclone that sucked cookstoves out of the kitchen, up the chimney flue,
and on to the next town,
Of the same cyclone picking up wagon-tracks in Nebraska and dropping
them over in the Dakotas,
Of the hook-and-eye snake unlocking itself into forty pieces, each piece
two inches long, then in nine seconds flat snapping itself together again,
Of the watch swallowed by the cow—when they butchered her a year
later the watch was running and had the correct time,
Of horned snakes, hoop snakes that roll themselves where they want to go,
and rattlesnakes carrying bells instead of rattles on their tails,
Of the herd of cattle in California getting lost in a giant redwood tree
that had hollowed out,

Of the man who killed a snake by putting its tail in its mouth so it
swallowed itself,
Of railroad trains whizzing along so fast they reach the station before
the whistle,
Of pigs so thin the farmer had to tie knots in their tails to keep them
from crawling through the cracks in their pens,
Of Paul Bunyan's big blue ox, Babe, measuring between the eyes forty- two
ax-handles and a plug of Star tobacco exactly,
Of John Henry's hammer and the curve of its swing and his singing of
it as "a rainbow round my shoulder."

<http://www.nexuslearning.net/books/holt-eol2/Collection%206/yarns.htm>