



# The NEW BERN MIRROR

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Gus Mann wasn't in Havana when Fulgencio Batista relinquished his role as Cuba's dictator, but the local dry cleaner can recall how, 25 years ago, he had a ringside seat for the revolution that brought Batista into power.

Mann was serving in the U. S. Marine Corps at the time. For almost a decade, President Gerardo Machado, an unscrupulous dictator like Batista was to become, had subjected the predominantly poverty-stricken Cubans to cruel injustice. There was great unrest, and Gus along with other Marines found himself stationed in a mighty ticklish locale.

Machado's corruption had embraced high ranking officers of the Cuban army, and these officers were living like kings in one of Havana's swankiest hotels. In the slang vernacular of our day, they never had it so good.

Batista, only a sergeant, was strictly on the outside looking in, and he wasn't happy about it. He knew firsthand what was happening, and how money was being squandered by his superiors, because he was attached to an office making dispersals for this luxury.

An opportunist, like all budding dictators, he spread the word among fellow enlisted men. A so-called "sergeant's revolt" was engineered. Machado was forced to flee, while the aforementioned high ranking officers barricaded themselves in the hotel where they had been living it up.

"Tension was high," says Gus, "and the Marine Corps issued orders to us to remove all ammunition from our firearms. We didn't feel so comfortable about it either, especially when people standing in doorways would spit at us as we passed by."

A revolt is no pretty thing to look upon. "I saw soldiers knock children senseless in the street," the New Bernian recalls. "The uprising was as brief as it was successful for Batista and his followers, but it was vicious and violent."

Batista, lacking heavy arms, had trouble rooting the Army officers out of their hotel fortress, so they were offered a chance to surrender without punishment. "All we want you to do is leave the country," the officers were told.

"They filed out," says Gus, "and lined up in front of the hotel. But instead of the freedom counted on, they were mowed down in a hail of bullets. Some of the officers broke and ran, but they were slaughtered with the rest."

Disorder and violence continued during a succession of military dictatorships. Then in 1935 a new constitution, similar to our own United States Constitution, was adopted, but Batista, sporting the rank of colonel, remained in control.

Batista became president in 1940, and still another constitution was drawn up. Among other things, it provided for social insurance, and a maximum work week.

For whatever it may be worth, it must be said in fairness to Batista that he gave full support to Uncle Sam during World War II, and Cuba declared war on the Axis four days after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

On the surface, the government's operation under Batista appeared to be democratic, dictatorial though it was. It had a president and a cabinet, and a Congress consisting of a senate and a house of representatives.

In a situation where the voice of the people meant little, it is ironic that voting was compulsory for both men and women. By contrast, we in America can really assert ourselves with our ballots, and yet millions of us never bother to



**MIST MAGIC**—Fog lifting along the Trent, in the early morning hours, reveals this scene of serene beauty. Here, in the Land of Enchanting Waters, there is little of Life's ugliness at dawn. High noon may portray harshness, born

of reality, but at sunrise all things are lovely, and the world is good. How true that is on rivers such as ours.—Photo by Billy Benners.

## James Davis Holds Limelight During National Print Week

Although National Printing Week is set aside to commemorate the patron saint of printing, Benjamin Franklin, on his birthday—January 17—New Bernians can point to the occasion with pride too.

It was here, in 1749, that an enterprising Virginian by the name of James Davis introduced printing to North Carolina. The town was slightly less than 40 years old, when Davis set up the first press in the state.

Just two years later, in 1751, he started the very first newspaper in the Old North State. Dubbed the North Carolina Gazette, it boasted of "the freshest advices, foreign and domestic."

The Gazette, a weekly, was published for six years before it folded temporarily. On May 27, 1768, it resumed publication until the Revolutionary War. Whether Davis himself made this second attempt at newspapering is a matter for conjecture.

Aside from publishing the first Tar Heel newspaper, Davis also had the distinction of publishing the State's first book. It came out in 1752, and was a revival of the Acts of the General Assembly. Bound in yellow leather, it was referred to by citizens as the "Yellow Jacket."

Davis didn't confine his efforts

vote.

What Batista is thinking about today, as a banished ex-dictator, The Mirror is in no position to say. But for Gus Mann the clock has turned back 25 years, to events he will never forget.

to the publishing field. He served for some time as New Bern's postmaster, and was a magistrate. He may have dabbled in other things too, but the full story wasn't passed along to posterity.

More, of course, is known about Benjamin Franklin. He too published a Gazette—the Pennsylvania Gazette. It was destined for longer life than the Davis weekly, and still exists as the Saturday Evening Post. No magazine enjoys quite the same prestige that the Post can lay claim to.

Franklin was the fifteenth child in his family, and what he accomplished might make a pretty good argument against birth control. He

learned the printer's trade because he lacked the money for a formal education.

He was a hard boy to handle, wore out his welcome in Boston at the age of 17, and ran away to Philadelphia. With a lone silver dollar in his jeans, he decided to straighten up and fly right.

It was an amazing transformation. Once vain, sarcastic and unruly, he cured his own juvenile delinquency, and while still a teenager became a polished and patient gentleman. He remained that way ever after.

He owned his own printing office at the age of 23, and for the next 20 years was the foremost

journalist in the colonies. Once each year he published Poor Richard's Almanac, and it sold to just about everybody everywhere.

Of course, neither Franklin in Philadelphia nor Davis in New Bern actually pioneered printing. No one knows when it all started, but the Chinese were printing volumes on tissue paper as far back as 868 A.D., and probably long before that. The volumes printed in 868 still exist.

The Chinese carved ridges on soft wooden blocks to correspond with characters they wanted printed. They coated these ridges with watery ink, laid a sheet of porous tissue paper over the blocks, and smoothed it with a brush. They got good results.

The earliest surviving European print bears the date 1418, but it is believed wood blocks were used as early as 1350. The use of movable type was a European invention, and such type was utilized in Europe and China as early as 1041.

So you see, New Bern's James Davis in establishing a printing press in our first State capitol was strictly a Johnny Come Lately. However, he was still the first in North Carolina to print a newspaper and print a book, and not only New Bernians but all Tar Heels owe it to his memory to pause momentarily and pay their respects during National Printing Week.

Money may not bring real happiness, but many will say the imitation is almost perfect.

## Mirror Medals to Be Awarded For Creative Writing and Art

In order to provide recognition for students at New Bern High school and Central Junior High who show promise in the creative fields of art and literature, The Mirror will award six medals this year.

Mirror medals are to be presented at each of the two schools to the three students who submit the best article or essay, the best poem and the best drawing or painting.

All entries must be in the hands of The Mirror by April 15, and must be entirely original. There are no limitations as to length of prose and poetry, or size of art entries.

Nor are they any restrictions as

to subjects. The Mirror feels that writers and artists, whatever the age level, are entitled to freedom of expression, and in this instance there will be no restrictive barriers to hamper those who have creative aspirations.

Neither the editor, nor any other New Bernian, will judge the entries. They will be passed along to distinguished outsiders who are well qualified to give a fair and impartial appraisal of the entries.

The Mirror hopes that its medals for creative excellence will in some small way spur the efforts of budding writers and artists, who might otherwise go uninspired and unrecognized.