

LOTS OF QUIRKS IN BUSINESS

# Numbers To Rhythm — An Auctioneer's Chant

"The chant of an auctioneer is developed individually," the tall, beefy man said. "Each chant is different, just like a personality."

The man who spoke was Kenneth Ray, tobacco auctioneer at the Mountain Burley Warehouses for the past eight consecutive seasons.

As he spoke in his easy-going manner, the last stacks of burley were being carried off the platform at one of the Boone warehouses. "It was a pretty good season this year," he continued. "Tobacco was off somewhat this year, though, due to an increase in acreage. But all in all, it was a good season."

Several seasons have passed since he himself was a farm boy working in the tobacco fields near Tabor City. "I was always around tobacco. I used to listen to them auction the tobacco off when I was a kid. Later, I asked one of the warehousemen if I could auction a line of tobacco; they let me, and I've been in the business ever since."

His red cardigan sweater blended with his blue pin-striped shirt to mirror a collegiate look in this college town as he expounded on the art of auctioneering. "And it is an art," he said. "There are lots of quirks one must learn."

By quirks, he was referring to the countless pauses, motions, and mannerisms which are associated with his profession.

"All that an auctioneer says in his chant is numbers," the dark-skinned speaker said. "He says numbers over and over to a certain rhythm and tune." Asked to go through his chant slowly so that the young hands of the Watauga Democrat could copy the phrases on paper, Ray said, "Who gimme sixty, sixty one, sixty two, gimme sixty three . . ." and so on.

The fundamentals of auctioneering, Ray said, are as follows: One dollar to fifteen dollar bids are quarter-dollar bids; fifteen to twenty-five dollar bids are half-dollar bids; the rest are dollar bids.

Whittling at a side board with a small pocket knife, Ray related that there are only about 700 tobacco auctioneers in the world. "It takes from three to five years to become capable of being a better auctioneer," he confided as his blue-grey eyes stared intently on the two-by-four in front of



KENNETH RAY

him.

A piece of wood shaving dropped to the auctioneer's left shoe. Ray tapped his shoe against the warehouse wall, knocking the curl of wood from its resting place.

"I like auctioneering because it affords me the opportunity to meet different people in different towns and to make friends with them," he said between meticulous strokes with the sharp blade.

Turning to one side, the six-footer boasted, "No greater tobacco is grown any place in the world than right here in North Carolina. This state is the largest grower of tobacco of any state in the union. And we grow the best."

Obviously well read on the subject, Ray noted that the United States is the biggest exporter and importer of tobacco in the world. Although North Carolina raises some Turkish tobacco, most of the blend is imported, he said.

"There are three main ways of curing tobacco," Ray continued. "Here in Boone and northwestern North Carolina the farmers air cure their tobacco.

This is peculiar outside this area. In Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Canada, Southern Rhodesia, and South America the tobacco is flu cured. The latter is done with synthetic heat.

"And in Kentucky the farmers use the dark-fired or smoked cure."

There are only three burley markets in the state, according to Ray. They are Boone, Asheville, and West Jefferson. "Boone is known as the Burley belt," remarked the auctioneer. "Greensboro is the old belt and Tabor City is the border belt."

Ray rambled through other interesting facts such as the auctioning of tobacco in Canada and the preparation of the tobacco for sale in Rhodesia.

"In Canada auctioning is done by the clock system. The clock system is a clock on the wall which is set in motion at the opening of the bidding. If it begins at \$70, say, it will tick once, then drop to \$69, tick again, then drop to \$68. Or it might start at a point and go up the scale. At any rate, the first buyer to stop the clock

gets the stack of tobacco."

And in Southern Rhodesia, the farmers bale their tobacco much as Americans bale cotton here. "Oh well, maybe that's not of interest to everyone," Ray laughed, dropping his eyes in a boyish grin.

The chanter doesn't spend all his time selling tobacco. When he's "on the road" and whenever possible, he travels back and forth to his home in Tabor City. That's a 237-mile trip one-way from Boone.

But, then, Ray has a lot to travel home to—six shining faces.

Married to the former Miss Mamie Porter of Union county, Ray has five children. Ronald, at 18, is the oldest. He is a freshman at Pembroke College this year. Others are Roger, 16, Mitchell, 13, Gregory, 11, and Robbin, 17.

Auctioning lasts about five and a half to six months each year in the South, Ray said last week. "During the off-season I barber in Tabor City."

In addition to this, he is active in the Tabor City Baptist Church where he is a Sunday School teacher, is a past president of the Jaycees, is a member of Masonic Lodge number 563, is a member of the Rotary Club, and is a past town commissioner.

## Bethel Senior Club Meets

The Bethel Senior 4-H Club met at Bethel School Friday morning, January 11, with Linda Farthing presiding. The devotional was given by James Tester.

W. C. Richardson, 4-H Club leader, gave the boys instruction on taking soil samples and sending them to Raleigh for testing. Mrs. Martha Jenkins, 4-H leader for the girls, talked to them on the selection of fabric, also on how to select skirts and sweaters to match.

John David Farthing, reporter.

One of the warehouse workers, straining his aged back as he pulled a cart of tobacco past the auctioneer, cast a congenial nod at the taller man, Ray, who a moment before was pawing the floor with his right foot, whistled and said, "Hey, looks like you've got a load there!"

"Yep," came the reply. "And there'll be more of 'em next year."

"See you then," Ray said as he waved his broad hand and stepped towards the office door. "See you then."

## Growers Face A Reduction Of Burley Crop

A number of Watauga County tobacco growers face a reduction of their 1963 burley tobacco allotment unless their marketing cards are returned to the ASCS county office by February 11, 1963. Proper account of the disposition of tobacco produced on any farm is not complete unless the producer

carries out this part of the regulations.

No 1963 notice of allotment will be mailed to any producer until his marketing card has been returned or proper disposition of his crop has been accounted for. This is one of the responsibilities of growers which should not be overlooked. Cards may either be brought to the ASCS office or be mailed by enclosing in an envelope addresses to the Watauga ASC County Committee, Box 231, Boone, N. C.

## Berryhill

### Rites Are Held

News has been received here of the sudden death on January 9th of Edward P. Berryhill, of Concord. Services were held for Mr. Berryhill on January 10th.

Surviving him are his widow, one son, Donald, a former resident of Boone, and one grandson, Johnny, all of Concord.

TRADE AT HOME

# 1963 RAMBLER WINS "CAR OF THE YEAR" AWARD

from Motor Trend Magazine

Each year the automobile industry eagerly awaits the selection of one car as "Car of the Year" by Motor Trend's impartial experts. For 1963, this most-wanted, hardest-to-get honor goes to Rambler... *for outstanding design achievement and engineering leadership.* Read why Rambler won this prized award over all other cars.



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"Summing up . . . it looks like the new Rambler will be an even better buy than it has been in previous years."

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