

Demo Convention: A Mixed Bag

[Editor's note: The following is the final part of a behind-the-scenes report on the recent Democratic convention by author Loyd Little, composer Bland Simpson and cartoonist Bruce Strauch]

"To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone with a new name written on the stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it."

—Revelations 2:17

NEW YORK—When Jimmy Carter finally announced he had selected Walter "Fritz" Mondale as his running mate, some Tar Heel delegates wondered if the manna was turning out to be a hard roll instead.

Robert Morgan, North Carolina's pint-sized conservative senator, said, "Sen. Mondale is more liberal than most North Carolinians would like and more than I would like. But he's a good man and he's an honest liberal. If I had been able to choose, I would have chosen a more states-rights man, but it wasn't my choice.

"I served with Sen. Mondale for 14 months on the same committee and I think he's an honest man. With the experience he will get as vice presidential candidate traveling around the country, I hope he will come to appreciate how well local governments work."

Morgan also said he thought the power of the South would increase in Congress if Carter is elected president. "We're already seeing this right now," he said.

Moments before Carter announced his choice, CBS radio announced over the intercom system of the New York Hilton that Maine Sen. Ed Muskie was not Carter's choice and many in the Tar Heel delegation cheered. Few would or could specify why they did not like Muskie. It seemed that the Carolina Democrats, like most of the other 4,904 delegates and alternates to the national Democratic Convention, wanted a fresh, untainted face in the arena.

H.M. "Michay" Michaux of Durham was one delegate who applauded the choice of Mondale. Asked if he was pleased, Michaux said, "Absolutely. I think people are extremely pleased with him. Sen. Mondale brings to the ticket the national experience that everybody's been talking about.

"Not only that, but he brings a personal experience that a lot of people can accept. I think he is going to add more than any of the other candidates under consideration. I think he can bring in a lot of people.

"I think Sen. Muskie knocked himself out of the running in his speech the first night. I think he was going after it (the nomination) a little bit too hard."

Michaux said he didn't think adding Mondale would hurt the ticket in the South because people would realize it takes all kinds of representation and that Carter himself would carry the South.

"While Mondale is a liberal, he's not a flaming liberal. I don't think we'll have any problem with the ticket," said Michaux.

After the momentary surge in conversation that passed for excitement over Mondale's selection, the North Carolina delegation moved swiftly into more pressing matters such as the absence of coffee at its caucuses.

Jim Sugg, state Democratic chairman, apologized to the delegation that "nothing meaningful had happened about getting coffee

and doughnuts for the morning caucuses.

"It would have cost us \$1,000 to \$1,500, and we thought that the money would be better spent on the fall campaign," said Sugg.

Tired of the harrowing pace, the North Carolina delegation spent the post-Mondale section of Thursday morning meeting talking over packing up and going home the following day. Sugg received a special round of applause for his work in organizing the affair.

Sugg also delighted in handing out 50 or so copies of a 45 rpm record by Tar Heel troubadour Les Waldroop, entitled "The Peanut Farmer," which Waldroop had been peddling in the parking lot of the Hilton. Waldroop had authored "The Watergate Bug" only two years earlier.

An excited gasp ran through the delegation, especially the female side, when a dapper male delegate announced he would be serving Bloody Marys in his suite from 8-11 the next morning and that he "hoped to be up by 8."

What was that "hope to be up" business? Was the twitter from the women an expression of hope that the Bloody Mary man would forget to set his alarm or even call the Hilton wake-up service, and that the early arrivals to the drinkfest would find the man STILL IN BED?

And ruin the convention's Pollyanna aura?"

Chapel Hill land developer Wallace Kaufman, an alternate and also a columnist for the *Financial Times*, summed up the convention this way: "It has been the most boring political affair I've been to in a long time, but possibly the most useful."

North Carolina Attorney General Rufus Edmisten was neither a delegate nor an alternate to the convention, but he was among a large party of guests and friends of the Tar Heel delegation which drifted in, out and around the New York Hilton delegation headquarters.

Rufus has been mentioned by some observers as a potential gubernatorial candidate in the future. And "I'm for Rufus" buttons were indeed circulating around the convention.

But when correspondent Strauch saw Rufus wandering alone down Seventh Ave. outside the Garden, he just shrugged off the whole "I'm For Rufus" affair.

"I don't really see myself running for governor of North Carolina as the office is presently constituted," Rufus said. "You have no veto power and you can't succeed yourself. You spend the first two years making appointments and the next two making enemies.

"Run for Congress? Not after spending 10 years in Washington working for Sam Ervin."

Rufus looked exceedingly relaxed as he tucked the newspaper he was carrying under his arm and strolled on up Seventh Ave. A man without political ambition can always be relaxed, unlike grasping and power-hungry swine like these desperate reporters.

At the Thursday morning caucus, Little noticed one of the delegates, a big beefy fellow who looked like a Midwestern farmer, carrying a square package, out of which he pulled a record album. The album jacket was

an enormous pair of red lips with the name "RUFUS" screaming across the top.

The guy whom the beefy delegate showed it to cracked up at the reference to the state's fighting attorney general. The first guy handed the other a pen and said, "Here. Sign this. We gon' give it to Rufus." Still laughing and giggling, the second man obliged.

Later, the beefy delegate showed the record to Sugg and by that time the album had many signatures on it. Little was across the room and as he turned away he thought he saw Sugg tenderly kiss the lips and shake his head, laughing.

Could it be that the "I'm For Rufus" buttons were actually an advertising gimmick for some hot-shot rock 'n roll singer?

"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."

—Revelation 4:1

Later Thursday afternoon, Strauch got through to Ruth Stapleton of Fayetteville, Jimmy Carter's now-famous sister, at the Americana Hotel.

She had come a long way from her start as a lay Baptist preacher and this week her interviews were screened by a press committee. But Strauch's grandmother was best buddies with her from the old days and had even appeared on "Sixty Minutes" with her, so Ruth did not hesitate to give an interview over the phone.

Ruth Stapleton believes we are on the verge of becoming a Christian country again to the point that people will be able to talk of their belief in God without feeling the least shame or embarrassment. She thinks a change will occur very shortly and is happening independently of her brother's surge toward the White House.

She intensely believes in miracles and described an event in which she and a group of friends prayed intently with their eyes closed for 20 minutes over a small boy with a withered arm. At the end of that time, they opened their eyes to find that the boy's arm had become strong and grown six inches.

"The boy's father is a doctor and there were three other doctors in the group," she said. "If anyone ought to know about these things, it's doctors."

In fact, at least 35 doctors in North Carolina either believe in or at least are sufficiently intrigued by the power of prayer that they have formed an association to investigate the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, Ruth intends to continue her Christian work and perhaps get more involved in politics.

Is Carter what he seems?

He seems to be. He may be, in the opinion of many delegates, an authentic good guy. If there are any skeletons in his closet, he has failed to make enemies who will reveal them.

He may also be as liberal as George McGovern—after all, his platform includes national health insurance—but his issue was integrity of government, not the Vietnam

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