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Boyd's Influence As Writer, Citizen Widely Noted On 20th Anniversary Of His Death

(David Whisnant, who holds B. S. and M. A. degrees, is currently working on a Ph. D. dissertation, a literary biography of James Boyd, at Duke University, Durham. The following article has appeared recently in several of the state's leading daily newspapers—Editor.)

By DAVID E. WHISNANT

Twenty years ago last week, the eloved North Carolina novelist ames Boyd collapsed while attending a dinner party for British Army officers at Princeton University. He was to talk to them the next day about the South, as part of an orientation course on American life. Dressed in his habitual tweed jacket and plaid tie, he was in the midst of one of his famous and witty stories when he suddenly fell forward onto the floor.

Two hours later, shortly after midnight on February 25, James Boyd died, and North Carolina lost not only one of its most brilliant writers but also one of its most energetic citizens.

Widely Esteemed

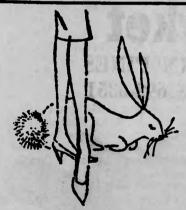
Boyd was loved and respected beyond the state's borders. At his funeral, a wreath of ivy from Princeton's Nassau Hall was placed on his coffin, an honor custom-arily reserved for Princeton presidents and trustees.

many as the author of novels of ing. America's past, among them "Drums" (1925), "Marching On" (1927), and "Long Hunt" (1930). Others knew him as the gay and tral "roots" were in North Carosparkling leader of a fashionable lina, the roots of his heart could circle of fox-hunting enthusiasts not have been more firmly emin Southern Pines, where he was planted in the soil of his adopted founder and Master of the Moore County Hounds. To the townspeolina from the time of his boyhood ple of Southern Pines, he was visits to his grandfather's farm "Jim," the friendly publisher of here, and to the end of his life the town newspaper. But every- he spoke glowingly of the state to one who knew him, knew him as a charming, softly urbane, warm-

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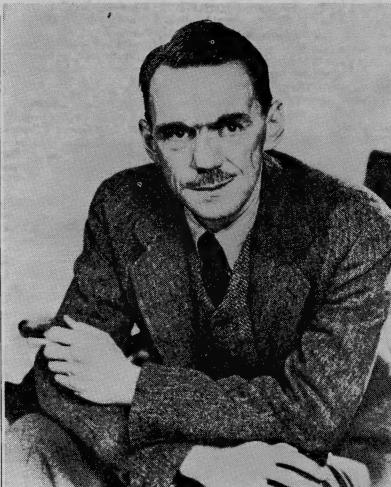
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JAMES BOYD

aristocratic tradition.

Held No Illusions

civilization," and the North, with

a "low type of more advanced

The young writer spent count-

less days and nights roaming over

North Carolina searching for liter-

ary material, often in the com-

pany of his closest friend, Paul

Green, who remembers

Boyd with profound affection, re-

calls that he never flaunted or

displayed his considerable wealth.

even in the remotest provincial

boroughs of the state. Humble,

principle "that every man has

something sacred about him," and

that "this sacredness is held to be

inherent and perpetual; no ruler,

no religion, no group of men, no

government is justified in viola-

ting it. It is the first principle of a

man's life and nothing takes pre-

cedence over it."

Close Companionship

civilization."

Boyd's interest in the South

Deeply Devoted Although it is not true, as is often said, that Jim Boyd's anceshomeland. He loved North Caroanyone who would listen, The eclectic Southern Pines literary circle of the 1930's came together largely because of his enthusiasm for North Carolina, and some of

state their permanent home. Born on July 2, 1888, James the Carolina Sandhills region was awarded him an honorary doctor- ed the bulk of Jim Boyd's writing laid about 1895 when his grand- ate. father Boyd, stranded for a few hours by the break-down of a railway engine in Southern Pines. woodsmen's axes.

the writers remained to make the

When young Jim came back from World War I, he and his with a "high type of primitive wife Katharine settled on this land. Mrs. Boyd still lives in the charming house they built there, although she recently donated a great part of the original family property to the state of North Carolina for use as a nature pre-

Early Talent

Boyd early displayed considerable talent for writing, and after receiving an award for his writing at the Hill School, he went on to Princeton, where in 1908 Struthers Burt found him to be an "especially brilliant" student. Burt read the young man's latest stories and poems, and noted that "the mark of the writer"

From Princeton he went to Cambridge University, where his wit and charm overcame British reserve and allowed him to be admitted to the social and literary circles of the University. He returned to the United States two years later with profound admiration for the British people.

Following a brief and unsatisfying stint as a teacher and then as a magazine writer, Boyd plunged into Red Cross war work, having been refused by the A.E.F. because of a chronic sinus condition. But his love for his own country determined to fight, and after a corrective sinus operation he was accepted in the Ambulance Service. He served 18 months in the worst of St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives before being sent home with an aggravated sinus condition that was to cause constant pain and countless operations throughout the rest of his

Early in 1920, Boyd moved to North Carolina with his wife, entered spiritedly into the life of the region, and returned to his life-long interest, writing. John Galsworthy saw some of his work. praised it, and encouraged him to continue writing. In September, 1920, his first story was accepted by Scribner's Magazine. He continued to publish short stories while working on his first novel, "Drums," set in Revolutionary

The Human Values But Boyd should not be remem-

bered simply as a "historical nov-

North Carolina.

dents about the subject they loved most, wrtiing. Boyd's home in Southern Pines was a frequent stopping place for many other writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Laurence Stallings, Scott Fitzgerald, and the "hungry Gulliver" Tom Wolfe, who used to come unannounced in the small hours of the morning, and fall asleep on the living room

As the clouds of war gathered in 1940, the novelist's concern for democracy and its destiny caused him to organize a patriotic group of actors and playwrights who tried in a positive way to counteract Nazi propaganda. "The Free Company," which included Paul Green, Archibald MacLeish, John Steinbeck and others, presented a very successful series of radio plays in 1941.

times the two went to square

dances with their wives, attended

Negro revivals with solemn in-

terest and talked endlessly to stu-

'Private America'

Boyd felt that the roots of American nationalism lay in each man's valuing his "own private America," as he himself valued North Carolina.

In 1941 he bought the nearlydefunct Southern Pines Pilot, built it into a strong weekly newspaper, and used much of its influence on behalf of the war effort in the North Carolina Sandhills, Josephus Daniels congratu-James Boyd was known to ly personable, witty human be- elist." He was interested in his- Tar-Heel aristocracy" by becomtory not for itself or for romantic ing editor of a "country journal." exaggeration, but for the sake of The paper has continued to flourpeople, and for human ideals and ish in the competent hands of Katharine Boyd.

"Drums" shows the thought-ful eighteenth-century North Car-which coincided with the last olinian's struggle between com- years of Boyd's life, bore for him mitment to a democratic ideal and as for most people a constant longing for the form and taste of threat of bewilderment, fear, upheaval, and absence and loss of For the next 15 years Jim Boyd loved ones. But the effect of these entered more and more into the uncertainties upon him was unlife of his beloved North Carolina. usual because of his uncommon From Southern Pines where he poetic sensitivity. From this senwas a leader in local affairs his sitivity he derived an infectious efforts reached out to the whole calmness. He wrote to Paul Green state through such activities as after Pearl Harbor that "Nothing his presidency of the North Caro- is left, on this earth at least, for lina Literary and Historical Asso- us to believe in, except the spirit ciation in 1928. The state return-ed his love in small measure in This turning inward to the calm-Boyd was the son of a prominent 1935 when his "Roll River" was ness and certitude of familiar re-Harrisburg, Pa., coal dealer. The awarded the Mayflower Cup, and lationships and felt truths is the foundation for his attachment to in 1938 when the University burden of the poetry which form-

during the final years of his life.

Agonized Longing His poetry cries longingly for continued strong, and he loved possession of that rootedness and bought a pine-covered hill-top to it, its people, and their history wholeness which gives meaning from desecration by passionately, but without illusion, to life, for the lasting truths of He once described the Civil War human experience which afford as a struggle between the South, quietness at the center of turmoil.

I do not know the ending to this day Or how much of our hope is lost

or won, But trust that at the end I, too can say To the unborn who follow:

Daughter. . . Son The sky and the sea speak loud, But the earth speaks clear. Put an ear to the ground. Listen. You will hear.

But though Boyd was tormentpersonable, unceasingly witty, he ed both by physical pain and by sought and found entrance into the agonies and excesses of war, the hearts of people wherever he he never lost his faith in humanity and its potential. In a poem Perhaps they felt instinctively not published until after his death his commitment to the democratic he affirmed:

> Though there is torment in man's life To strike me dumb, to strike me

dumb, What of this singing in my blood?

Whence does it come? Whence

Jim Boyd heard and felt as Many evenings in Green's home n Chapel Hill, the two discussed fully as anyone ever has "the endtheir wanderings and read, in the less ground-swell of the deep," company of lively friends, each and he interpreted it and expressother's recent writings; Boyd, as ed it by pouring out his life selfwas his habit, pacing up and lessly in the interest of his belov-down as he read or talked, his ed North Carolina, his South, his and for Great Britain made him bright, clear eyes flashing with country, and his art which emwit and enthusiasm. At other braced them all.

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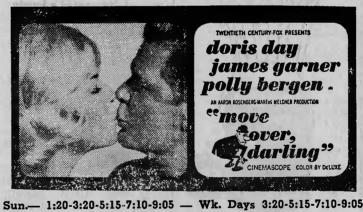
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