

# Memories of Beaufort in the Nineties

By Thomas H. Carrow

(Editor's Note: Appearing here is the second part of a series of sketches on Beaufort during the last decade of the 19th century. The author, a native of Beaufort, is now living in Philadelphia.)

IV

Education in the Nineties

I am here reminded of the educational situation in Beaufort and Carteret County in the nineties. It is hard to believe that some of the citizens, both white and colored, could not sign their names. This fact recurs to mind because my experience in the Court House, where I copied mortgages and deeds and issued marriage licenses, brought me in contact with many worthy citizens who used their mark (x) in lieu of signing their names. Indeed, I observed early in my life that many of our fine citizens had only a modicum of education. I have known, for example, Justices of the Peace who could barely write. Charge it to the ravages of the Civil War for later developments showed that our people had brains aplenty. All that was needed was an opportunity for education.

A remarkable thing took place in 1888. Some Northern philanthropists started, or restarted, a school for the colored children. That marked the beginning of the end of illiteracy among them. Then, about the turn of the century, St. Paul's school was established for white children with "Miss Nannie" Geoffrey in charge. I have no direct knowledge of the functioning of this school, but my impression is that it went a long way toward lifting educational standards in the community of Beaufort. The late C. R. Wheatly, Esq., was a product of St. Paul's school, to mention only one. I also believe the John Todd Noe boys, the younger ones, were beneficiaries of the St. Paul's school. The Reverend Tom Noe, the eldest of the boys, got his start in education through the personal guidance of "Grandpa" Forbes.

Speaking of schools, I should not forget my beloved teachers, Mr. A. B. Hill, of Scotland Neck, N. C., and Miss Julia Read, of Beaufort. They presided over the Beaufort High School as late as 1905-6. Up to the time Mr. Hill came to Beaufort, school facilities were meager indeed. He first taught in the Odd Fellows Temple. Then he occupied the school building in the Court House Square. A photograph of the school, dated 1895, shows some 50 pupils.

Mr. Hill was a remarkable character. He must have been the offspring of the finest of southern stock. The curriculum was varied. The three R's were on the list, but psychology, astronomy and navigation, Latin and Greek were all taught by Mr. Hill.

I recall how I envied one of his brilliant pupils when he was working quadratic equations. This pupil was the present county health officer, Dr. N. Thomas Ennett. Following Mr. Hill came Mr. Gibbs, then Mr. Spillman. From then on, I go out of the picture so far as schools are concerned. By the way, Mr. Alex Potter also taught the public school for a while. I remember his making me stand up on a desk in front of the school for some dereliction, and when I became fidgety, he tanned my legs.

An incident in Mr. Gibbs' School: We boys chipped in a penny each and bought five cents worth of cayenne pepper and when the school was dismissed for lunch, put it on the stove. No school the rest of the day. The fumes from the pepper came it impossible. An entry in my diary dated 1-20-98 reads, "Mr. Gibbs kept us in after school until 6:20 p.m., 2 1/2 hours, the longest time I was ever kept in. May I always remember it." I have.

Two of Mr. Hill's pupils and my closest school mates, M. L. Davis and J. F. Duncan, continued their studies in college and graduated at law. Cecil Taylor took a business course and Tom Ennett selected medicine. I quit and took to the road.

V

Law and Order

The dockets of the law courts in Beaufort today interest me. My father having been Recorder of Deeds four years, I had an opportunity to become familiar with the courts and the cases they tried. The scene has changed. Some of the crimes and misdemeanors perpetrated today are the same as in years gone by, but I notice that at every court, there are a good many divorces. In my day there were practically none. I cannot recall a single divorce having been granted in my boyhood.

One reason is that women were then totally dependent on men. They are not today! I think also that women were then unduly submissive. Too, I fancy divorce would have been a stigma upon the woman. Beyond this, there is a moral aspect to the question. Loyalty to one's spouse was more general in the last century, at least on the surface.

Facilities for "fast" living have led some from the path of rectitude who would not have "fallen" if they had been sheltered as they were in the '90's. It is my very certain impression that marriage is not regarded today as an indissoluble union by many men and women.

Drunkenness was a common offense in my day among a few, both white and black, and the heavy drinkers were well-known in the community. Beaufort went dry in 1897 largely because of the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Tuttle. Then, of course, dealing in moonshine whiskey became a comparatively lucrative business. The corn whiskey bootleggers flourished in Carteret County then just as they did all over the country in the Prohibition era. I can recall a number of names on the bootlegger list. One, I recall, was sent to jail, but he managed to get access to the whole courthouse square and did some horsetrading while he was "in jail."

I can recall only one lynching. The victim murdered a man, a storekeeper on Bogue Sound. A gang took the fellow from the jail and carried him back to the point of the crime and did away with him. Those are the only two homicides I can recall in Carteret County. There was not one case of capital punishment.

The absence of crime in the '90's is attested by the fact that the Superior Court convened only twice a year, and often all business was concluded on the first two or three days. There were



Pictured here are the pupils of Beaufort High school, 1895. The school building, in front of which the pupils are standing, is the present town hall in Beaufort, and originally stood across from its present site in what is now the court house square. In years following 1895, the porch was removed. Standing at the left of the picture, leaning against a porch post is A. B. Hill, principal who is no longer living. Reading left to right, the others are Annie Noe who later married John Rice, Beaufort, Annie Jones, sister of the late C. D. Jones, Annie Davis, now the wife of J. B. Jones, Jr., Maud Davis, sister of M. Leslie Davis,

"Miss Maud," who became the wife of L. L. Dameron, died last June. Wearing the large hat and facing the camera is Lillian Pierce, aunt of Ada, Ethel and Mildred Whitehurst, of Beaufort, in front of her is Lilly Webb, now Mrs. R. T. Willis, Morehead City, and in front of Lilly Webb is Corinne Chadwick, sister of Cooch Chadwick, who later became Mrs. T. A. Uzzell, of New Bern. Looking to the right of the picture toward Mr. Hill is Emily Duncan, sister of J. F. Duncan, who was stricken with typhoid fever and died before reaching 20. To her left is Lucy Davis, also sister of M. Leslie Davis, who died two years ago.

On the step above her is Tom Ennett, now health officer of Carteret county. Next is Hugh Fodrie who is no longer living, then M. Leslie Davis, now county solicitor. Standing next to the post holding his fingers up is Charles Thomas, now living on Turner street, Beaufort. At his left shoulder is Louis Fulford and then Ed Davis, both of whom are dead. In front of Charles Thomas, leaning against the post, is Jim Potter, now owner of Potter's Grocery, Beaufort, and next to him is Charles Skarren, who is no longer living. To Charles Skarren's left is Bill Delemar, now living in Beaufort, then Bert Hill, now a retired Methodist preacher,

and Tom Jones, with derby, who is no longer living. At the left elbow of Jim Potter is Jule Duncan, Beaufort attorney, whose left arm is resting on the shoulder of Murray Thomas, now a county deputy sheriff. In the lower row, reading left to right, are Lela Russell, who later became the wife of Charles Thomas and is no longer living, Betty Davis, aunt of Alonzo Thomas, Addie Thomas, who later married Dr. C. S. Maxwell, Ella Davis, who is still living in Beaufort. Seated on the ground is Jack Dickinson, now living at Wilmington, N. C., Ed Potter, brother of Jim and now operator of Beaufort Ice plant, Dollie Davis, now Mrs.

H. A. Hamlin of Clearwater, Fla., Ella Dill, sister of John Dill, who is living now in New Bern, Etta Davis, now Mrs. H. L. Potter, Beaufort, and behind her, Martha Thomas, who is no longer living, Helen Gibble, who later married Bill Delemar, Chattie Hattell, sister of Charles Hattell, Beaufort, Elva Abernethy, sister of former Congressman C. L. Abernethy. Standing on the first step is Tom Lindsay, who is no longer living, next to him, his head tilted, is Tom Carrow, the author, next to him in the fedora hat is Wilbur Whitehurst, now living in Norfolk. At Tom Carrow's left shoulder, only his face showing, is Jerry Thomas, now living at Suffolk,

Va., then Cecil Taylor, oldest son of Mr. and Mrs. N. W. Taylor who is retired and living in Boston, Earle Dickinson, with his right hand extended and resting on bat, who is no longer living. To his right is John Chapman, now living in Beaufort, then Jim Duncan, brother of Jule, who is now practicing law at Greensboro, Emmitt Chapman, only his face showing, now is a county deputy sheriff, Jule Whitehurst, and Frank Smith. Of the boys sitting in the window, only two can be identified, Frank Skarren, seated, with his hands on his knees and next to him, Cooch Chadwick.

only two lawyers in Beaufort in the '90's that I can recall, Mr. Claud Felton and Mr. C. L. Abernethy.

When lawyers were needed by Beaufort people they usually retained men from New Bern. The Wards and Clarks, Moores and Guions were the leading New Bern lawyers. Mr. W. W. Clark was a brilliant lawyer.

Many interesting incidents came to my attention while working in the courthouse with my father who was Recorder of Deeds, 1894-1898. There was a rather simple-minded colored fellow in Beaufort named Garfield. I don't remember his last name, but he came to my father's office one day and asked,

"How much is a marriage license, Mr. Carrow?" My father replied, "Three dollars, Garfield."

"I ain't got but \$2.50, I'll have to go borrow another half dollar," Garfield said and walked away. He didn't return. How fortunate for the lady!

One day I issued a license to Frank Small, a man well up in his 20's, to marry a girl under 18. After he got the license, someone told him he had to have the written permission of the girl's parents. He scurried out of town with the license and married the girl as soon as possible, fearing he might be unable to get parental consent.

VI

Distinctive Men

It seems to me men were more distinctive in my boyhood than they are in my age. I can recall a dozen or more of Beaufort whose personalities were altogether unique. To mention a few: Capt. Dave Morse, Mr. Math Phelps, Mr. Dick Rice, Mr. Dory Adair, Capt. Mark Mason, Mr. Jim Davis, "Grandpa" Lewis Forlaw, Mr. Lou Skarren, Mr. Dave Sanders, Mr. Mat Marshall. They were not particularly brilliant men, but different. Perhaps the reason was they forged their own personalities whereas fifty years later everything tends toward standardization even in personality. A boy goes to school, he goes to college, he follows the law, medicine, engineering, or he becomes a skilled worker or a common laborer, and all the while he is making his life fit a pattern made before he was born. In former times, a man made a pattern of life for himself. It was often poor but it was at least original and unique.

VII

Health and Water

The late Dr. Oiler is quoted as saying the average life of

English speaking people who has been doubled in the last 300 years. I have no statistics on the subject, but so far as Beaufort alone is concerned, I am inclined to think life expectancy has been very materially increased since the turn of the century because of the availability of medicine, surgery, and improved hygiene.

The doctors of the '90's were a band of noble souls. They utilized the comparatively meager knowledge they were able to acquire to the very best advantage, but their facilities and their techniques were crude indeed in the light of the advancement that has been made since, say 1900.

I recall the names and faces of only three doctors of Beaufort in the '90's, Dr. King, Dr. Tom Delamar, and Dr. Ben Davis. Each ran a drug store in connection with his profession. My memory of Dr. Davis is more distinct than of the other two. He was a mammoth figure, well above six feet tall and well proportioned. His going to and from the homes of the sick was a very important feature of the Beaufort scene; his drug store was a mecca for the halt and the lame and the diseased who were able to get to see him. My recollection is that the price for medicine included his charge for professional advice. And such a price! Probably 10 cents for a dose of calomel, to mention only one very common prescription.

I believe the prospective mothers of Beaufort put great faith in Dr. Davis as an obstetrician. And heaven knows he had ample practice. Among my own relatives, for instance, I think he must have been present at 8 or 10 births. He administered to the people in the country as well as in the town. I think they came for him and brought him back. He kept no horse and buggy.

Dr. Davis must have had many emergency cases, but I have no recollection of his ever exceeding his comfortable pace. How unlike the present doctors who are always going at top speed whether afoot or in an automobile. Even then, they have a difficult time to treat all their patients. In fact, many doctors of today have their work arranged on the assembly line basis. One of my doctor friends recently told me he performed five abdominal operations in one afternoon and I heard the late Dr. Deever say he had removed 31,000 appendixes. I am not sure that people had appendixes in Dr. Davis' day — at least I never heard of one being removed.

My memory of Dr. Davis is accentuated because he treated me through a 30-day siege of continued fever. Also I used to spend time with him sitting on his front porch step where he

would regale me with interesting and helpful stories. He always kept a pail of cistern water on a shelf in the middle of his drug store and many a weary soul quenched his thirst at this pail. He chewed tobacco constantly.

Water! That was always a problem in Beaufort. Town pumps of which I can remember the locations of 8 or 10 were the principal source although a great many families had their own pumps or cisterns for rain water. Some had wells. Water stands out in my memory because at the age of 10 or 12, I had to carry all that was consumed in our family, and the pump was just one square from our home. Some of the town pumps were known for their good water while the reputation of others was not so good.

Some people feel proud of themselves for keeping clean when they have "city" water and a hot water heater. But those who keep clean when they have to carry water an eighth of a mile and heat it on a wood stove are heroic—that's a job! Turning on a spigot and jumping in and out of a tub is a joy. My sister, who had a large family, properly says that the one thing that modern times has brought her that she appreciates most is running water. Bread may be the staff of life but you must have water to make it. I suspect that some of the sickness visited upon our people was due to an inadequate supply of good water.

VIII

Business

On my annual visits to Beaufort, the present grocery and dry goods stores remind me of the business enterprises and the men who directed them in the '90's and prior thereto.

There were Chadwick and Jones who ran a combination hardware, boat material and grocery store. This was the biggest business in town. Next, was Capt. Thomas Thomas' business. In my day, he was assisted by his son, Alonzo. Captain Thomas had two other sons each of whom ran a farm on the North River Road. Captain Thomas, formerly a ship captain, I think, was noted for holding tight the cash that came his way. That's why he was "rich," as we used to think. He castigated me one day for "chucking" shells in the water, "because," said he, "it will fill up the river."

There were many other small businesses around the town. Mr. Benn Noe is "back landing" and John Stanley Smith "down east" to mention only two. Mr. Bill Dill kept a store for many years where the "Standard" gas station now stands. Mr. C. F. Dey had a rather large general business about where the C. D. Jones Company is. John Arrington was his dynamic head clerk.

(To Be Continued)