

Memories of Beaufort in the Nineties

By Thomas H. Carrow

(Editor's Note: This is a third in a series of sketches on Beaufort during the 1890's.)

The principal hotels or eating houses were the Davis House at the west end of Front Street, run by Miss Sara Ann, and the hotel run by Mr. Bill Dill that had a porch on the second floor from one end to the other. It was located on Front Street, west of Turner and east of the house later occupied by Carl Chadwick, which I think, was called the Dunn House. My impression is that this hotel was popular in its day. It had a bar and was convenient for men who liked to take a "dram" now and then without being exposed to view. There were two other bars, one on the east and one on the west side of the County Dock where a man could slip in without being seen. I notice that people don't seem to have much embarrassment in going into the ABC stores nowadays and most people like a nip, even the young ladies. But in all my days in Beaufort I never heard of a woman, either young or old, taking a drink. But a few were addicted to drugs.

"Uncle" George Russell, who had previously run a farm on New Bern Road, came to town some time about 1890, possibly a little earlier, and set up a store and boarding house that later expanded into The Russell House. The genius of that house was "Miss Helen," the wife of George Russell. Of all the men and women I have known in the South or the North, I can recall not a single one who was more industrious than "Aunt" Helen Russell. God bless her soul. She earned her rest.

I can't forget "Miss Emma Manson's House" on Front Street. It was just west of the Davis House. She had a regular clientele and was popular as a hostess. I can recall how on a summer's evening, both The Manson House and The Davis House porches were filled with happy boarders enjoying the south wind that always seemed a little more delightful in Beaufort than elsewhere.

There were two eating places in Beaufort that started, I know not when, but functioned until I departed from Beaufort. "Aunt" Mary Wright's and "Aunt" Becky Shaw's, one on the east and the other on the west side of Turner Street above Front. I doubt whether fish were ever cooked better than by these two lovely old negro characters. On looking back, however, the appointments appear to be very primitive, and I doubt that they would get an "A" cafe rating today.

There was also a restaurant run by a rather big and somewhat pompous fellow named Bill Fisher. Seems he did a little bootlegging, which was very common in those days.

IX

Religion

I often wonder if people were more interested in religion in the nineties than today. Seems to me a greater percentage attended church. I am certain that religion was more commonly discussed, especially certain tenets, such as baptism by immersion or "laying on of hands."

Dancing was proscribed by all the churches except Episcopal. My stepmother, an Episcopalian, was a good dancer and thought the people who eschewed dancing were unreasonable and so expressed herself, quoting the scripture to prove her position. Events seem to have justified her position.

Recollections of such things are not reliable, but I have an impression that people in the 19th century were somewhat kinder and more thoughtful of each other than now, but I may be mistaken because I can recall many instances in the nineties of "man's inhumanity to man." I fancy that having less of other things to think about, people thought more of their responsibilities than they do today. I do know that many people were tardy in paying their bills. This may have been due to hard times which nearly always prevailed. A big bunch of fish selling for 10 cents, cotton 6 to 10 cents per pound, and big luscious watermelons for 5 to 10 cents each, illustrates how little farmers, fishermen, and other workers received for what they produced. It was hard for most people to accumulate any money whatever.

I am greatly impressed with my recollection of how the preachers in the churches emphasized the certainty of going to hell and burning in perpetual fires for violating the laws of God. I am quite certain that this doctrine had some effect in restraining people from doing evil, but I am not sure it stuck. There were many who "got religion" every time we had a revival. There was a man named Page who lived out on New Bern Road who usually came to town on Saturday and got drunk. It was said of him that he turned over a new leaf every Sunday, but he was the same old Page on Saturday.

Nevertheless, there were scores of sincerely religious people in all sections of Beaufort and throughout the County. There were a number of lovely characters who assumed leadership in the respective churches: Mr. Jas C. Davis and Mr. Net Taylor in the Episcopal; Mr. William Duncan and his son Tom, Mr. Dey, and the Potters in the Methodist; and Mr. John Davis, father of my schoolmate, M. L. Davis, in the Baptist. Out on the New Bern Road, "Uncle" John Russell was the leader and acted as preacher in the Free Will Baptist Church for many years. I have no hesitancy in saying that "Uncle" John was one of the finest Christian gentlemen I have ever known.

"Aunt" Betsy, wife of "Uncle" John, and "Aunt" Laura, his sister, beautified and dignified the farm house which was hard by the church. I often thought it was the cleanest place in the county. The brothers, "Uncle" Tommy, "Uncle" Billy, "Uncle" John, and "Uncle" West Russell represented the highest standard in character that it has been my earthly privilege to know. They lived within a mile of each other on Russell's Creek, four miles from Beaufort. I cannot remember one single imbroglio in which any one of them was ever involved.

"Uncle" Lija Springle lived across the road from "Uncle" John Russell and had a fine home and a well-maintained farm.



MISS ETTA PERRY AND MISS ANNA DUNCAN

Dressed in the shirtwaists and long skirts, typical of the 1890's, these two young ladies of Beaufort rest on a summer day on the porch of a Beaufort home.

He was a sterling character and reared a large family, Martin Ross, Charlie, Lloyd, and two daughters, Laura and Sallie. "Uncle" Lija had a lovely little bay mare, Sal, and a big mule that he kept in perfect condition, and of course, a milk cow. The week ends I spent with him were thrilling. We went possum hunting Saturday night and on Sunday, I joined Laura in the horse and buggy for church. I remember, too, the luscious wild strawberries I picked on the edge of the woods.

X

Style

Style, or what people wear, plays an important part in their lives. The "look:" "old" or "bold" is a consuming lure to both men and women, particularly to the younger ones and to the old ones who refuse to grow old. Now, clothes require money and money was a scarce article in Beaufort in the nineties. Thus the wardrobe of all but very few was limited. The professional men, with some exceptions, and some business men, wore Prince Albert coats or cutaways with pants to match, or odd pants, and black bow ties. The hat was usually a black felt. High hats were rare. This ensemble would last a long time and I think in many instances few changes were available. Whether it was good looking or not, it was supposed to be dignified, especially if a stiff shirt and a high collar were included. No doubt many a vacuous brain deceived itself into thinking it "had something" because it donned a Prince Albert and its trappings.

The young men wore either suits, all of the same cloth, or odd trousers. The odd trousers came in after those with a suit were worn out and replaced. Stiff shirts and high collars were "the thing" for dress. Collars, picadilly's and wing, always reached the chin. Bow, four-in-hand, and ascot ties were worn. Children usually had two suits, one for Sundays and special occasions and one for week days. A very popular cloth was Kentucky jeans because it was as near indestructible as cloth could be made. Dry cleaning hadn't come in, and I do not recall that woolen clothes were sent to the tub.

I am at a loss to describe the clothes worn by girls and the grown ladies. I seem to remember that a certain odium attached to Mother Hubbards which, as I remember it, fell over a woman's shoulders like a man's night shirt, without a belt. They came down to the ankles. This was "home" apparel.

For the young ladies, the style for a time was very big, inflated sleeves. My impression is that shirtwaists were worn to a greater extent than full dresses. In any event, the skirts were long. I am inclined to believe that three or four dresses were the maximum that most young women had at any given time. I know plenty of girls now who can boast of a dozen or more per season. I do remember that some of the elderly women had a silk dress, usually black, that had been doing service for a long time. Styles didn't change as they do now. The fact is, however, that so far as charm was concerned, some women had it and some didn't; if nice clothes were available, they helped. If the beauty of clothes is proportionate to yardage, the girls of the nineties had it all over the girls of '48; if the converse is true, the latter win. I am a poor judge because I love them both.

XI

Tragedy on a Bicycle

Locomotion has played an important part in human destiny.

Thus the invention of the bicycle was a great boon. I remember very distinctly the first one that was brought to Beaufort. I was in the early nineties, maybe a little earlier. I am sure, as incredible as it may seem today, the advent of the bicycle excited as much wonderment as the automobile did when it arrived. It wasn't long before a number were secured by Beaufort people. I never owned one but managed to beg a ride now and then. On one occasion it caused me great sorrow.

In 1896 William Jennings Bryan was a candidate for the Presidency. He was scheduled to make a speech in Goldsboro. The A. & N. C. R. R. ran an excursion from Morehead. It was my first train trip and probably a precursor of what was going to happen to me in future years, for I became a railroad man four years after. We rode to Goldsboro in an open freight car with strips of lumber placed across the top for seats. On arriving at Goldsboro, we witnessed by far the biggest crowd of people I had ever seen. It seems to me the estimate was 1,000.

Soon I met George Dewey, the son of a gentleman by the same name, who occasionally visited the Winfield Chadwicks in Beaufort. George had a brand new bicycle. He gave me a ride. It was all decorated in red, white, and blue in honor of Mr. Bryan.

I rode down the street between two railroad tracks as if I were flying. Then, I turned and started back and when I reached top speed I ran into a railroad tie and demolished the front wheel. Such mortification! I had to lug the bicycle past the crowd and return it to its owner. Having done so, in my childish embarrassment, I could only say that the wheel must not have been very strong to have given way under such a light blow. I heard Bryan in Philadelphia many years after that. Needless to say, it reminded me of Goldsboro in 1896 and the wreck of George's bicycle.

XII

Politics

Speaking of Bryan reminds me of the political situation in Beaufort and North Carolina from '90 to '98. My memory is very spotty because of the immaturity of my mind, but some facts are very clear. The Republicans carried Carteret County in 1894 I think for the first time. I was just 14. My father was elected Recorder of Deeds and Mr. E. Carl Duncan was elected as representative in the State Legislature. Daniel L. Russell was elected Governor on the Republican ticket in 1896. There were other Republican victories, but I have forgotten the details. However, the change was very temporary as the Democrats recouped their position in 1898. Meantime, I personally reaped the benefit of the temporary victory because of my experience in the Court House.

It is interesting to notice that the issue in the County in the campaign of 1894 was "Long seines and pound nets must go." Mr. Duncan campaigned on this issue and won. He evidently "carried my father along."

When the election was over, it was difficult for the Democrats to realize they had been defeated. In fact, the commissioners wouldn't accept my father's bond at their first meeting, thinking, I suppose, he'd back out. But he stuck, and at the second monthly meeting, he was inducted as Recorder of Deeds. He was re-elected, but on the third round went down in defeat to Mr. Lou Arrington. I also think Mr. Duncan was re-elected and later became Collector of Internal Revenue at Raleigh, and later still Receiver for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad. Mr. Duncan was

an astute politician and a fine friend and gentleman.

There was a marked cleavage between Democrats and Republicans. The Democrats looked askance upon the Republicans because the negroes were almost without exception Republicans. At a convention I attended in Beaufort, I heard a negro delegate say in the course of an extemporaneous speech that he "would walk 25 miles to vote the Republican ticket." He meant it. Of course, the memory of Lincoln was still fresh in the minds of many negroes. Children of Republicans parents experienced a certain opprobrium because of their parents' politics. It was rather superficial although white supremacy was the perennial issue with the Democrats.

Mr. Winfield Chadwick was the Democratic leader for many years. I recall that an editorial in the local paper credited him with carrying the election of Carteret County in his vest pocket. And he did. I was in Philadelphia only a short time before I found politicians swinging every election. But they were invariably Republicans.

Corn "likker" was a big factor in politics in those early days. A candidate when electioneering would carry a jug around with him in a buggy and treat the "boys." I suppose they do likewise in automobiles today. They didn't pick them up then for carrying it; you had to get caught making or selling it.

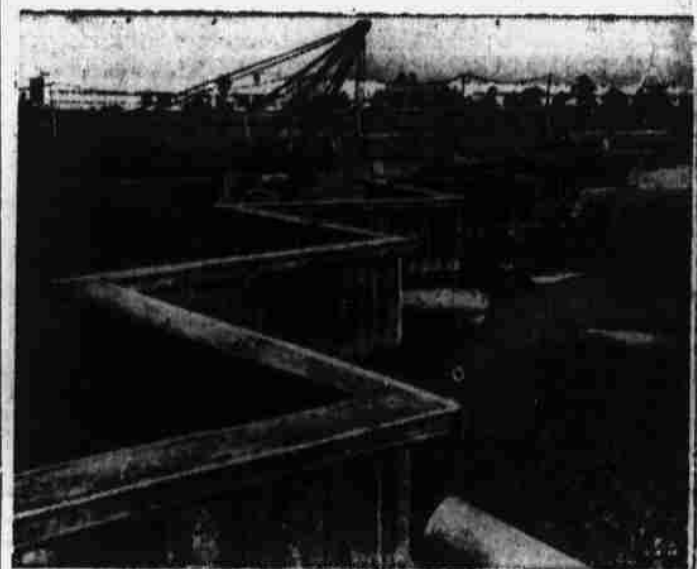
It amuses me to read the political news of today in The Beaufort News. It is almost as if it were copied from the papers of the nineties. Each side always has accused the other of chicanery and inefficiency, not to say downright dishonesty. And, of course, not without some truth. This comes home more impressively in town politics. Incompetency or inefficiency seem to be concomitant of nearly all public performance despite the many fine people in public office.

Now, as to the color line, the New Deal seems to have demolished it as far as possible. In the North, in many quarters, the Democrats have taken over a large part of the negro vote which means that the Republicans have lost it. Regardless of what the political situation was in the nineties or what it is today, the definite signs of the times are that undreamed of changes will take place in the future, but that the perversity of the genus homo will remain the same.

In the early nineties, times were very hard all over the country, and the farmers were hardest hit of all. Out West the Populist party was organized with the promise that if their candidates were elected, measures would be introduced in Congress that would ameliorate the economic situation, particularly that of farmers. As would be expected, a good percentage of the farmers of the country joined up but, alas, like the Progressive and the Bull Moose parties which later came into existence, it promptly petered out, and the poor farmers remained poor. It is heartening to notice that today the present plight of the farmers compares favorably with the rest of the workers of the country. They are riding the crest of the economic wave! It may well be a case of, "He who laughs best laughs last."

(To be Continued)

New Orleans Dredges Lake to Get a Beach



New Pier for Lake Pontchartrain

NEW ORLEANS — (AP) — They're turning part of Lake Pontchartrain bottoms-up so New Orleans people can escape the summer heat.

When they get through, they'll have a 20-acre beach which the New Orleans Levee Board claims will be the largest made by man in the United States.

The Levee Board, a state agency, owns and operates the beach. There has been a beach there for years, but with the city's popula-

tion growing, and storms washing away the sand, the space has grown too small to handle the crowds.

A huge dredge is pumping thousands of tons of sand and silt daily from the lake bottom into an area 2,300 feet by 400 feet. When a million cubic feet has been pumped in as a base, a foot of white sand imported from the Gulf coast by barge will be spread over the top.

The Levee Board has appropriated \$750,000 for the improvement.

NOTICE

Dr. J. O. BAXTER, JR., will be OUT OF TOWN from JULY 5th to 10th inclusive. The office will be open to deliver and accept glasses for repair.

508 Front St.

Beaufort