

A Mountaineer Fell in Love with the Coast . . .

And Made North Carolina's Outer Banks Famous

By Ruth Peeling

North Carolina's shores may be water and barren sand but to Aycock Brown it has become green pasture—this mountain-born scribe fell so much in love with the coast that he had to tell others about it, thereby making the area from Southport to the Virginia line green pasture too for hunters, fishermen, surf swimmers, boathmen and all who delight in the romance of the coast.

Charles Brantley Aycock Brown, who has the reputation of getting good publicity for anyone or anything when all other so-called writers fail, was born in Happy Valley, between Lenoir and Blowing Rock on Oct. 7, 1904 and never saw the ocean until he was 20 years old.

Four years later on a spring day in Beaufort, while walking down Pollock street toward the water, the view across Beaufort inlet stole his heart away and he vowed he would never leave the coast again.

On that day began his first experience as a reporter for the Beaufort News, published then by W. G. Mebane. But the days and years that preceded that event were full of varied experience and many trials for the aspiring journalist.

Aycock's longing to be a newspaper man supplanted a childhood desire to be a great naturalist like John Burroughs. His boyhood in the mountains where his father was superintendent of the Sam Patterson estate and late overseer at Occonooneechee Farms put him on "speaking terms" with all the birds, butterflies and animals.

He knew the songs of birds, collected butterflies, and even began a pet stock farm where he had guinea pigs, squirrels, ferrets and half a dozen different breeds of rabbits.

To catch big moths that flitted through the woods at night he'd hang a lantern on a tree to attract them and certain types he caught were brought at a dollar each by a collector in California.

In his rapid-fire way of speaking the free-lance writer and photographer who has had more experience interviewing than being interviewed, said that he got most of his ideas and urge for communication with nature from Gene Stratton Porter's books such as "Girl of the Limberlost." He read

with an unquenchable thirst. His four-part name, Charles Brantley Aycock Brown, was given him two weeks after he was born. The Patterson estate on which the Brown family lived was owned by the man who was then state commissioner of agriculture. One day when the governor of North Carolina, Charles Brantley Aycock, came to visit Commissioner Patterson, Papa Brown asked the governor to come take a look at his new son. The governor did so and Mr. and Mrs. Brown decided to give their latest offspring the full name of the governor of North Carolina.

Members of the Brown family totaled eight. Besides the parents and Aycock, there were three brothers and two sisters, two of the boys being younger than the son with the governor's name. None of the others were endowed with names of notables. Aycock later dropped the Charles Brantley, but his oldest child, now 16, bears the full name too.

Before C. B. A. Brown reached the age of 10, the family moved to Occonooneechee Farms in Orange county, farms owned by the late Gen. Julian S. Carr, a Confederate general. While there, Mrs. Brown was bitten in the ear by a spider, and this, the coastal writer believes, was the beginning of illnesses which led to his mother's death.

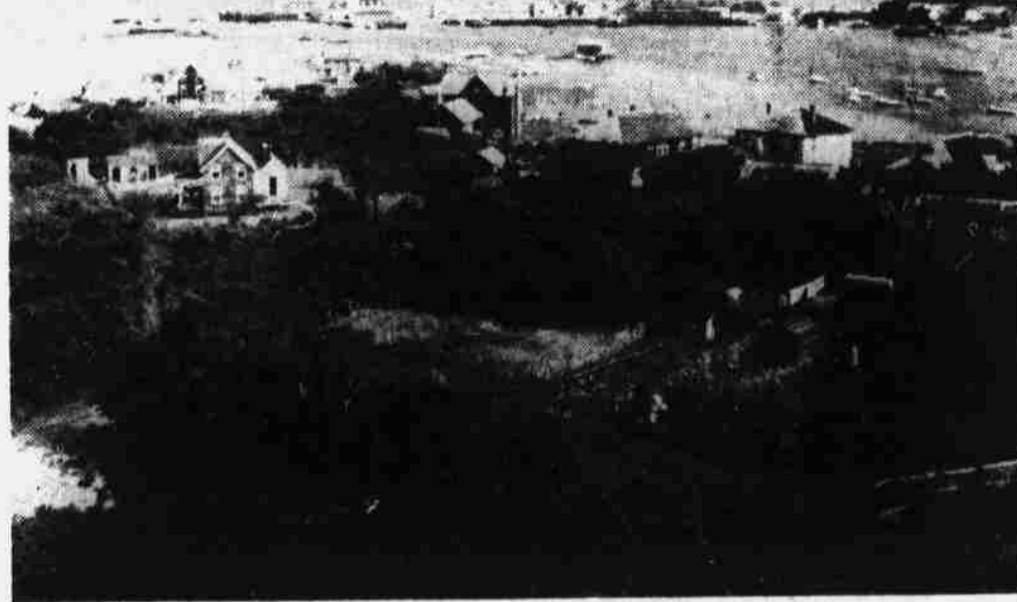
Hoping to improve Mrs. Brown's health the family moved back to the mountains and it was shortly after that time that Aycock said one of the most impressive events of his childhood occurred. He and his three younger brothers had never been christened and he was while his mother was on her deathbed that the three of them were baptized in her presence.

After the death, the family returned to Occonooneechee Farms and Aycock went to school at nearby Hillsboro.

"They had only 11 grades at that time," he relates, "and I got to the 11th grade and got stuck there a couple years, then they left me out."

"Incidentally, I had the hardest time to prove that I was born and then that I was graduated from high school when I started to do intelligence work for the Navy during the war," he relates. Finally, the date of his birth in

He Called It 'Cape Stormy'



Ocracoke—where Aycock went for a two-week vacation and stayed four years.

a family Bible belonging to his sister in Leaksville was discovered, and that was sufficient, the Navy said, to prove that he wasn't hatched or that he hadn't been smuggled into the county on a rum-runner from Cuba.

The high school problem was later solved too.

But a lot of water went over the dam between high school days and service with the Navy. Aycock wanted to be a newspaperman.

"But I couldn't find a job, I couldn't write—and I still can't," the columnist-photographer laughed.

Among the post high school jobs was one as printer's devil on the Orange County Observer which was owned by John T. Johnson. All the type was set by hand. Then he had jobs at grocery stores, drug stores—"I can still fill a prescription . . ." he said proudly, and . . . then at one time I ran a cafe, made the best barbecue and Brunswick stew in Orange county."

Several experiences proved to Aycock that he was no merchandise salesman, one of these was in Charlotte where he attempted to sell "Whispering Mouthpieces for Teleshones" and the other was in Brooklyn, N. Y., where he tried to sell magazines. The whispering mouthpiece,

made of glass, sold for \$1 and fitted into the mouth of the phone. It allegedly magnified the voice to such an extent that one needed only to whisper into it and he could be heard at the other end. "I didn't sell a darned one of those things, I went broke and lived on apples," he declared. "The Bell Telephone company soon banned them anyhow and wouldn't allow them to be sold."

Aycock's frustrated desire to be a newspaperman only made him more determined to break into the racket somehow. And finally it happened.

One day as he was riding on a bus in Charlotte he saw a peach tree in bloom. He wrote a four-line poem about it.

"The first and last poem I ever wrote," he declared. "I can't even repeat the thing now. Anyhow I sent it to Mrs. J. B. Caldwell of the Charlotte Observer who wrote a column, 'One Minute Interviews,' and she printed it. That was the biggest thrill of my life. When I saw it I turned hot, then cold, was embarrassed and pleased."

He was more determined than ever then to be a writer. So he went to Florida. But every editor laughed at him. He had no "experience." So he got a job for six months as a chauffeur, then went back to Hillsboro and finally to West Virginia on a road construction job.

He returned to Hillsboro and began to write historical features on the town. "This was easy," he explains, "because the stories were already in the guidebook."

Actually, it wasn't as easy as that. There are always those little somethings which make a story the kind accepted for feature sections of newspapers, but that, too, was a beginning—a few of the stories appeared in print.

Soon, however, the desire for a real newspaper job led Aycock to Elizabeth City. W. O. Saunders, editor and publisher of the Elizabeth City Independent, had written a story, "Me and My Flapper Daughters," which appeared in the American Magazine.

"I decided after reading that, that I wanted to work for Saunders, so I wrote him a letter asking for a job. He took me up on it," the columnist related, "and as soon as I got in the office he began to say what a fool he was for hiring me. He told me to sit down and write a story. 'My Impressions of Elizabeth City.' I don't know what I wrote, but anyhow I stayed six months."

"I kind of fell in love with one of his flapper daughters and learned that Saunders was going to fire me. So I quit, borrowed \$500 and went to New York."

There the aspiring journalist entered Columbia university in hopes of learning to be a newspaperman. The first month he was there he spent the whole \$500 and had to start working to stay in school.

One of his jobs was as a longshoreman. The first ship he helped unload was a boat from Persia carrying goat hides and dates (the fruit kind).

But the most lucrative job was shoveling snow. One dollar an hour, and an all night's work brought in \$10 which was a lot of money then. A magazine selling job was a fizzle.

His homes in New York were in Greenwich Village at the Hotel Albert and then in an attic sort of place on 12th street. The dime subway fare each day up to Columbia university on 116th street and back was too much, he soon decided, so he moved to a hallway bedroom on 115th street.

After about 11 months in New York, the native Tar Heel blood rose to the surface and he came back to North Carolina where he stopped in at The Raleigh Times. There Oscar Coffin, then editor, said he couldn't hire him, he still didn't have enough experience, but advised him to write feature stories.

So again he went back to Hillsboro and started turning out stuff that was printed in the Durham

Herald. Then the Herald called him up and asked him to come work for them as proofreader.

"I didn't even know what a proofreader was," said Aycock, "but I went. The job lasted two nights. I couldn't spell or go anything a proofreader is supposed to know how to do."

But then, of all things, they handed him a job as cub reporter. It looked as though maybe he would be a newspaperman after all. The regular police beat reporter on the Herald was assigned one day in 1:27 to cover the commencement at Duke university, the first commencement since the name was changed from Trinity college. So Cub Brown was handed the police beat. The first day he turned in 32 stories.

"It was simple," he said, "I can write a story about anything I see."

Aycock covered the police beat about six months, making \$35 a week.

"There was an old fellow there at the time. Managing editor I guess, making about \$65. But every week he came over and borrowed money from me. I finally decided that I wasn't going to become an old broken-down managing editor some day, so I wrote three letters. One to Southport, one to Manteo, and one to Beaufort. Just three places I picked out on the map. I heard from Beaufort and went there to work on The Beaufort News for W. G. Mebane at \$20 a week."

That was soon after the bridge to Beaufort was built. After three months on The Beaufort News, Mebane fired his new reporter, probably Aycock says, "because I didn't agree with his political viewpoint. I thought the paper was independent, but it had definite Republican leanings," commented the man who was later to become editor of Beaufort's weekly.

From there he went to The Carteret County Herald, Morehead City. "I was drinking pretty heavily in those days," explained Columnist Brown, who reformed two years ago by unservingly substituting coffee for whiskey in his diet. At a party on a boat one night he fell overboard and it was then that his friends decided he should be sent to some sort of institution to cure his desire for liquor. Instead, the owner of the boat, Bayard Hall, a writer, asked to take Aycock north with him. Ten days later, the reporter returned to the Carteret Herald office to pick up in his portable typewriter.

He apologized to the editor for leaving him in the lurch and asked if he could do anything to help him out.

"That you can't," roared the editor. "Get your stuff and get out." With that Aycock took the job as publicity man for the Atlantic Beach syndicate, which in those days started to put Atlantic Beach on the map—with his help.

Everything on the beach was free. Only a toll was charged to cross the bridge. The Pagoda was the beach dance hall, and though still a firm friend of the bottle, Aycock made the Pagoda and feature attractions of Atlantic Beach known all over the state.

During Al Smith's fight for the presidency, he went back upstate and worked with the Democratic party. Made money, but lost it all on bets that Al Smith would win.

"I had a chance to go to Cuba then with the Johnny Jones Shows, but I decided to return to New York and look for something to do. But when I got there I didn't have the nerve to ask an editor for a job, so I went over to Rutherford, N. J., to see Colonel Dickinson," continued the columnist.

The colonel, who was president of Becton, Dickinson, and Co., manufacturers of surgical instruments, offered Aycock all sorts of jobs, but Aycock decided to keep on following the weary trail toward a newspaperman.

The colonel gave him money to go home and on the way Aycock met a man on the train who was going bear hunting in Hyde

county. So he went with the traveler friend and did a story on hunting which was published in several state papers. On his way home through Little Washington, he suddenly decided to go to Ocracoke.

He had been there the year before, the spring of 1927, on a house party and told Capt. Bill Gaskill, owner and manager of the Pamlico Inn, that he would do a story and publicity for him in return for a two-week vacation. Aycock left Ocracoke four years later.

"I've been on vacation ever since 1928," he said, "because what I'm doing isn't work. I love it."

During the days on Ocracoke, which if being spoken of in a biography of Aycock 100 years from now, might be called the Ocracoke Period, he wrote "Hunting and Fishing and All Outdoors" for the Greensboro Daily News and The Beaufort News. He didn't start supplementing his work with photographs until 1938.

In 1933 he left Ocracoke and went to Wilmington, Del. In the meantime he met and married Esther Styron, of Ocracoke, and to them a son, Charles Brantley Aycock Brown, Jr., was born. At Wilmington he worked on a dredge but left after about eight months and returned to Ocracoke.

In the late autumn of 1934 times were bad. "I was so broke I didn't know where to turn next," he said. "At that time Dr. C. W. Lewis and Dr. C. S. Maxwell, of Beaufort, asked me to come to Beaufort and Fishing in North Carolina," a column carried by three papers, and put out propaganda to retain the railroad line into Beaufort from Morehead City, Norfolk and Southern was going to discontinue it.

"I wrote about everything I could think of, about every tie in the road, working up sentiment for the retention of the line."

It worked. The line was continued but was later bought by Beaufort interests and is now the Beaufort and Morehead City railroad.

At the end of the fifth week of working on the railroad, Mrs. W. G. Mebane went to Aycock and asked him to take her husband's place while Mr. Mebane was in the hospital.

"He had cancer. I didn't know that," commented Aycock, "and when he came back, he was a corpse. Then The Beaufort News went into hands of receivers and I remained as editor. But I followed the wrong policy—that of slaying people. It's not good for a small town, if you expect people to talk to you on the street."

He remained on the job after the paper was bought by William Hattell and just before Pearl Harbor started a semi-monthly, The Ocracoke Island Beacon. He sold about 500 subscriptions and this helped restore his faith in his ability to give people something they wanted to read.

His column, Covering the Waterfront, which he still writes today, was begun in 1934. He has had stories in sports magazines, among them, "Hunter, Trader, and Trapper" and "Sports Afield," but the big story was one on Ocracoke, "Cape Stormy" which appeared



Brantley

several years ago in The Saturday Evening Post. One of the editors from the Post, Wesley Stout, decided that he wanted color pictures of Ocracoke, Hatteras, and all the outer banks, and requested Aycock's assistance in shooting them. Aycock suggested a story to go with the pictures. Stout agreed and told Aycock to write it.

Three days before the deadline Stout wired the North Carolina columnist, who had apparently forgotten all about the story, and to him that if he didn't get the article to Philadelphia darn soon, the pictures would run without a story. One of the magazine's staff writers would handle it. So Aycock set down at his typewriter and in six hours pounded out the article which three months after it was published brought him 1,406 letters inquiring about Ocracoke from Asia, Europe, and every state in the Union.

Soon after the story ran, Ben Thompson, friend of Aycock's, and now editor of the High Point Enterprise, phoned him and said, "The governor would like to do something for you."

"What for?" asked "Cape Stormy's" author.

"For what you did for North Carolina in that story on Ocracoke," replied Thompson. "How about a week's cruise on the Hatteras?"

"I can't," Aycock told him. "My wife's going to have a baby any day now. I can't get away."

"Bring her and a doctor along insisted Thompson.

So Mr. and Mrs. Brown, the son, Brantley, Dr. Laurie Moore Beaufort, and the Brown's next door neighbor, Mrs. Gray Hassell, "who has always been wonderful to us," remarked Aycock, went on a week's trip along the outer banks.

Read on Friday of Aycock's experiences during the war, how Tony Seamon has figured in his career; and meet his pretty little 20-month-old daughter, with the picturesque name, Stormy Gale.

ELECTION NOTICE

GENERAL ELECTION: TUES., NOV. 2

HOURS: 6:30 A.M. TO 6:30 P.M.

REGISTRATION DAYS:

Saturday, Oct. 9th — Saturday, Oct. 16th

Saturday, October 23rd

PLACE: THE PRECINCT POLLING PLACE

(The Registrar can enter your name on any day from October 9th to October 29th. Be sure to see him).

No Registration Can Be Entered After Oct. 29

CHALLENGE DAY — OCTOBER 30th

Absentee Ballots:

(An Absentee Ballot can be cancelled on Election Day, by the Registrar, if the Voter has changed his plans and wishes to vote at the Polls.)

For any voter in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marine.

For any voter who will be out of the county on November 2nd. For any sick voter unable to go to the polls.

Absentee Applications:

Voter can apply to this board by letter or Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Son, or Daughter may apply for the voter.

Application must state Precinct of voter.

Men or women in the Services will be registered by this Board. All others must be registered on Precinct books.

No application can be received after October 30th.

Register or You Cannot Vote! Apply For Absentees Now! Every Citizen Should Vote!

Carteret County Board Of Elections

BEAUFORT, N. C.



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