

# Excitement Reigns And Tention Mounts As Engagements . . . Twenty Finalists Vie for Coveted Title

evening. On Thursday, the first day of the official judging, I got up at 7:00 so that my eyes would be at least half-way open for the photographers who captured us at 8:30 and kept us busy for three hours, taking both still and moving pictures. By the time this was over I felt like I would never again be able to smile without quivering.

The next thing on Thursday's agenda was a going over by Candy Jones, of the Conover Modeling School, and her assistant, Robert Lado. Candy showed us the proper way to walk and model, and Robert "did" our make-up. Robert nearly went crazy with my long hair which I wore in a bun. He took it down and proceeded to arrange it in some complicated knot. However, Robert was headed for trouble, for he didn't know how difficult it is to keep my hair in place when it is clean. And poor Robert didn't have any of that horrid spray net to help him! So, at 11:45, fifteen minutes before the Rotary luncheon in our honor, my hair was a tangled mess. Finally one of the secretaries for the cotton council rushed in with the needed spray net, and Robert went to work. At three minutes to twelve with the aid of innumerable hair pens and spray net, he arranged my hair into a very fashionable twist. I plopped on a wide brimmed black hat and rushed for the Skyway Room on the top floor of the Peabody where the luncheon was to be held.

The twenty finalists were ushered into the room to the tune of Dixie. We were seated at special tables right in front of everyone. Although I was as hungry as I've ever been in my life, the thought of being observed like a prize bull soon took my appetite. I just contented myself with admiring the orchid corsages given us by the Rotary Club and stared back at the crowd. When everyone had finished eating, each finalist had to take a turn on the T-shaped runway during which we employed the modeling tips Candy had taught us a couple of hours before.

On Thursday afternoon, each of us was interviewed on TV. We were not told ahead of time the questions which were to be asked us. This was also a part of the judging, for it was necessary to see how composed we were before the camera and how well and

tions. The questions fired at me concerned childhood ambitions, life saving, and summer school at Oslo.

We returned to the hotel from the TV show with just one hour in which to get ready for the dinner dance given in the Skyway by the "Press-Scimitar," a Memphis paper. I hastily donned a yellow organdy evening gown, struggled in to long white kid gloves and rushed down stairs to meet my escort.

I had the good fortune to be seated by Mr. Grier, a judge and fellow South Carolinian. He was what Lynn Hamrick would call a "livin' doll" and was thoroughly enjoying his mission in Memphis.

As one might guess we had fried chicken for dinner. I knew that we would either have this or lobster—something difficult to eat. By this time I was absolutely starving, for breakfast was long gone, and I had only picked at my lunch. But I just had the worst time with that chicken! (It was actually a cornish hen, so Mr. Grier informed me.) Mr. Grier glanced over at my plate and remarked, "Ruth Ann, you're going to eat all that chicken if I have to cut it up for you!" With that threat, I dug in with renewed vigor and came out victorious.

After being presented with our escorts in a figure, we danced a while and called it a night. This business of being on display every second was most exhausting.

On Friday morning, the private interviews with the judges began. I was the third victim since my name begins with B — we always did everything in alphabetical order. I must admit the first glance in the room where the judges congregated was, rather scary. They, eight in all, were seated behind a large desk at the end of the long room. Three feet in front of the desk was placed a lone chair—the seat of interrogation. However, the interview wasn't bad at all, in fact I enjoyed it. I was asked such questions as why did I want to be Maid of Cotton, what impressed me most about summer school in Norway, and what is the attitude of Europeans toward America; they also asked about my grades in college and high school and extra curricular activities in both.

The next step was the appearance, before the judges only, in a bathing suit. This in my opinion

was the worst part of the whole contest. I'll never get over it, although all we had to do was walk barefoot down that long runway and hand the judges a card with our measurements written on it. We were measured by a lady from the foundations department of one of the city's leading stores just before parading before the judges. There was also a man to check our shoe size and another to measure our hands for gloves.

I managed a quick nap that afternoon after the finalists lunched with Candy Jones and received instructions for the final judging that night at Ellis Auditorium. At 6:30 all twenty of us boarded a bus for the auditorium. We were wearing street dresses and hats, the regalia in which we were to deliver our 2-minute speeches on why we would be a good Maid of Cotton, and carried evening dresses and hoops in hand. We would change into these after making our speeches.

As usual I got through my speech quickly since I was third in line. We had to walk down a long runway which was perpendicular to the stage and extended some 24 feet into an audience numbering 5,000. At the end of the runway was a microphone — no speaker's stand to lean on, and right behind the "mike" were the judges. I could have leaned down and touched them. I wasn't scared when I made my speech, a fact which surprised me greatly. However, my knees were like jelly, and I'm sure the judges could see them shaking if they cared to observe.

After the speeches, I changed into a white embroidered organdy gown and made ready for the last leg of the contest. At last everyone was ready, the judges moved to positions on stage and the final performance began. We were quickly narrowed down to 10 contestants. Then the ten were called individually to the "mike" and asked pop questions by the M. C. My question was "What is your favorite TV program and why?" Thirty minutes passed before the 10 were cut to five and tension was running high. When the last five were announced, their parents were asked to come back stage for interviews with the judges, just as

each of us was interviewed in a private conversation on stage. The judges wanted to be certain that one of us was planning to get married within the next six months, that we were in excellent health, and that our parents approved of the tour and of our leaving school in the event we won.

At 10:30 the second alternate, Ruth Ann Bennett, was announced; the first alternate, Alice Condon, and the Maid of Cotton, Jean Carter. We were so excited! The photographers and news reporters busied us for an hour. Then members of the audience swarmed on stage, asking us to autograph their program.

At midnight, Mother, my escort and I left Ellis Auditorium for the Hotel Gayoso where the Midnight breakfast was held. For the first time in my life I had champagne before breakfast! But by that time I was so tired, the sparkly stuff might have been orange juice. After a round of speeches given by the judges and we three finalists, a delicious breakfast of eggs, sausage, and grits was wolfed down by all.

At two o'clock I returned to the hotel, tired and happy, but at the same time a bit unhappy. Tomorrow I would be leaving the many fine people and new friends with whom I had associated for two full and exciting days.

As I look back on the Maid of Cotton Contest, I see a valuable and rewarding experience. It was not just a beauty contest, for the American Cotton industry was not searching for an empty-headed Venus to be its fashion and good will ambassador. Rather, the cotton industry wished to find the most beautiful girl in the South who was also intelligent, poised, cultured, who had a good figure for modeling and who was at ease when speaking before an audience. The judges searched carefully and diligently among us finalists for the best qualified contestant, and it was the actual participation in the different phases of judging, for example the 2-minute speech and the unrehearsed TV appearance, which made this contest a worthwhile and stimulating experience in itself. For this reason, I feel that each of us who made the trip to Memphis came home a winner, for each of us won to some degree, a measure of personal fulfillment and betterment which we might never have obtained otherwise.

—Ruth Bennett

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became engaged; Bob is now at Richmond Preparatory Institute in Richmond; the other two sophomores to receive diamonds were Betty Ann Parker and Barbara Cornwell. Betty Ann is engaged to Frank Williams of Elkin. Barbara's fiancée is Jerry Norville, an Sigma Alpha Epsilon senior at Davidson. Another sophomore on the list of "unavailables" is Nancy Neese. Nancy is now pinned to Nick Bragg, Wake Forest student. After Christmas, Kackie Adkins announced her plans to marry Garland Chick, who is now stationed in the Coast Guard at Elizabeth City. The wedding will be February ninth.

The Freshman boast of two Christmas weddings—Francis Wagner and Libby Pittard. Also, Nancy Owen became engaged to Ken Davis. Mary Ann Townsend became pinned to a Sigma Chi at Wake Forest, Vernon Sloyd.

Again making news is Ruth Bennett. After placing third in the Maid of Cotton Contest, Ruth received a letter from the chairman of the South Carolina beauty contest inviting her to compete for Miss South Carolina contest and also to represent South Carolina in the Miss Universe Contest. Ruth said that she would have to decline both invitations—she's going to California this summer to visit "friends" who went to Oslo last summer.

## Mexico . . .

(Continued from page two)

As these columns pass each other, they nod or speak, and, often, the boy will join a girl and they will move on together around the square or go for a coke at the nearby "Playa".

"Muy grandioso, muy hermosa, muy amable, muy bonita, muy interesante, muy curioso"—The Mexicans have a word for it, and for my closing sentiment — "He dejado parte de mi misma alli y es preciso que regrese pronto a reclamarlo". (I have left a part of me here, and I must return to claim it.) There is a fountain in Rome where one throws a coin to insure one's return to that Eternal City; but Mexico doesn't need a fountain—once having been there, one must go back to this land of great contrasts. And so, not adios with its finality, but rather, with its promise, hasta la vista—hasta luego—hasta manana!

—Elizabeth Welch

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