

The Foothills View

"We See It Your Way"

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BOILING SPRINGS, NC

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Editor's Note

Not-So-Humble Farmer Is Here

Beginning today on our editorial page you will find the observations of The Humble Farmer, whose column is becoming a favorite feature in newspapers across the country.

The "farmer" is Robert Skoglund, a former graduate-level lecturer in linguistics whose letterhead now reads "Rotovating and Mowing."

Skoglund, a self-styled reclusive bachelor of 46, lives in an ancient, ramshackle yellow farmhouse in St. George, Maine. A sheep staked out front cuts his grass while he mows for others. Driving around the country to visit state press associations and newspaper editors, he travels in a dump truck. The imposing Mercedes Benz reporters have noticed parked behind the farmhouse is a relic of a spell of high-cotton in what the farmer assures us is an increasingly humble existence; his ads in local papers now offer, "Fields and Horrid Ugly Bushes Mowed."

It was ads of another sort that helped launch him into the column business. As a lark he sent in a few post-card entries to personal classified columns in small papers. Things like "Man living in filth, poverty, ignorance and squalor wishes to meet attractive, educated, affluent young woman who seeks a mission in life."

When people began turning to the classifieds first, a publisher decided to put an obvious talent to work. So have we, and about 75 other papers. And *Foothills View* readers will probably not notice that the farmer is from Maine. He, and his side-kick Gramp Wiley, could just as well be in Flint Hills, Prospect, or Mount Pleasant. We hope you like him as much as we do.

Going To The Mat



Jamie Nolen (above) from Boiling Springs works toward competes with wrestlers in his weight class in the 23-school a win, as the Crest senior came out on top at the South-sectional tournament at Charlotte, Feb. 12-13. If successful, western Conference Wrestling Tournament last Saturday Jamie then will move up to the regionals at Kannapolis, week. Jamie, the son of Rodney Nolen, has won 16 consecutive matches without a loss. The 167-pounder next Salem.

W. J. Cash As Reporter

He Signed Stories "Jack Cash"

The Mind of the South will have out-lived its Boiling Springs author W.J. Cash next week. Cash, a sardonic wit who at 41 committed suicide four months after his book was published Feb. 10, 1941, probably would have found that fact a grim hilarity. But by completing his book before ending his life, Cash was a professional journalist: he finished the story before he left the office.

Discussions since of *The Mind of the South* have not centered on Cash's work as a journalist. But newspapers and news people played a large part in that book's being written. A program to be presented next Wednesday at 10 a.m. at Gardner-Webb College is titled "W.J. Cash: The Man and His Times." For much of those times he was writing *The Mind*, 1929-1941, that man was a journalist. And he was known in the newsrooms not as "W.J." but as he signed his news stories: Jack Cash.

"Jack Cash would come up to the *Star* when I was working there," recalled Dr. Wyan Washburn in an interview this Monday. "I argued with him a great deal." Dr. Washburn, now a physician prominent throughout Appalachia, also is remembered by North Carolina journalists as a highly professional reporter and editor at the *Star* from 1934 to 1939. "Cash didn't know the South that I knew," Dr. Washburn said.

Dr. Washburn was among a circle of local journalists at the *Star* in the 30's and 40's who, like the "Shelby Dynasty" in politics, dominated their field. They included: C.A. "Pete" McKnight, who later edited both the *Charlotte News* and *Observer*; Kays Gary, the columnist; Jay Jenkins of Boiling Springs who later became a top investigative reporter for the *Observer* during the 60's; and Cameron Shipp, later book editor at the *News*. Shipp, according to Dr. Washburn, affected the content of *Mind of the South*:

"Cash would get Cameron Shipp to challenge him on points he ought to put in his book," Dr. Washburn recalled. "And he got Mrs. Erma Drum, the society editor at the *Star*, to tell him how to re-arrange the sentences and punctuate it and how to make it say what he wanted to say."

"I know Cash would never have been able to get it (the book) ready for the printer if had not been for Shipp's needling and Mrs. Drum's getting it into shape," Dr. Washburn said.

The *Charlotte News* provided Jack Cash with not only a Depression-proof salary of \$40 a week but also a home for the eccentricities that clung to him. "Cash was eccentric in his personal life, eccentric in his

[Right] W.J. Cash, author of *The Mind of the South*



Editor Pete McKnight (left) lived on the same floor as Cash at the Frederick apartments during the 30's. When he heard Cash's phonograph player stick on a record "at enormous volume" on Saturday nights, he knew his friend's condition:

"I would open his door, turn off his phonograph, and help him into bed."

The Frederick is still popular with literary types today.

After Shipp left Shelby to edit the book page of the *Charlotte News*, he also was responsible for getting Cash jobs as a book reviewer and, in October, 1937, as a full-time editorialist at that paper. Cash worked for the *News* until 1941; unquestionably it was the happiest time of his adult life.

thinking, and eccentric even in writing the book," Dr. Washburn emphasized. But at the big-city newsrooms of the 30's and 40's, including the *Charlotte News*, any eccentricity short of ax murder probably would not have been noticed.

Pete McKnight provides a picture of 1939 when

these two Cleveland natives both had apartments on the same floor at the Frederick building:

"Cash, a lover of good music, had a substantial collection of recordings and an early hi-fi phonograph. My key fit his door. I had his permission to play his recordings for my dates or to borrow from his library at any time when he was away."

"These were the days before Cash met, and later married, the vibrant and talented Mary Ross Northrup. He did not drink heavily, but even a small amount of alcohol affected him strongly. On more than one Saturday night, coming in from a date, I would hear Cash's phonograph replaying a record, at an enormous volume, and would open his door, turn off the phonograph, and help him get undressed and in bed."

Nevertheless Cash found time to complete his manuscript of *The Mind* as well as write daily editorials and book reviews of startling quality. "I find it rather incredible," said McKnight, looking back, "that literary writing of such high quality was appearing in a rather small afternoon Southern newspaper in those grim depression years."

Finally Cash completed his manuscript, and shortly before he left the *News* for Mexico had lunch with his publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, at the Hotel Charlotte on Feb. 20, 1941. A News photographer snapped the scene. Knopf, with his European mustache and leanness, suggests a greyhound in a three-piece suit. Cash, his premature baldness somehow giving him a dapper look, airily traces a metaphor in the air with a smoking cigarette. Ashtrays, dirty dishes, and a bottle in a brown bag litter the table in front of them. To a couple sitting at the next table, these two exotics would be easy to place: Newspaper Types.

Please turn to Cash, page 8