



The NEW BERN MIRROR

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Box 808

5¢ Per.

VOLUME 2

NEW BERN, N. C., FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1959

NUMBER 37

Fifty years have vanished into the annals of the past since the Johnnie Cooners staged their merry parades here in New Bern, each and every Christmas morning.

When and how the idea got started, and who did the originating, is something that no one—not even the oldest of the old timers—seems to know. In fact, it isn't certain that it was a strictly local venture. Perhaps there were Johnnie Cooners elsewhere too around the turn of the century.

As the story has been told to us by New Bernians slightly more elderly than we are, the Cooners were a group of young men who dressed up outlandishly and congregated at the corner of Middle and Pollock streets well before sunrise.

Their faces were sufficiently smeared with bright colored paint to disguise their identity, although they had nothing to fear. Vandalism and violence played no part in their harmless antics, as they ambled from one end of town to the other.

Singing and laughing, the Cooners kept their procession going for hours. The affair usually broke up about the middle of the morning, after a good time had been had by all. It was a rather unique way to usher in the Yuletide holiday, but citizens loved the impromptu celebrating and looked forward to it.

Lot of folks who weren't actually Johnnie Cooners barged out of bed by 4 o'clock, and joined the Cooners as they passed their respective homes. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, the parade got bigger and bigger the further it went.

New Bern's small fry had a double incentive to rise early. Not only did they get a pre-dawn peek at the toys brought by Santa Claus, but for good measure could peep out of front windows at the Cooners as they ankle past the door.

Just what motivated the Johnnie Cooners isn't exactly clear. Most of them appeared to be fairly young in years, although it is entirely possible that there were older men in the group too.

Our guess is that the Cooners were men who resented in a rather mild manner the fact that they had outgrown the childhood joys of Christmas. Instead of simply bemoaning the situation, they were determined to take an annual fling at the glorious abandon that had characterized their boyhood.

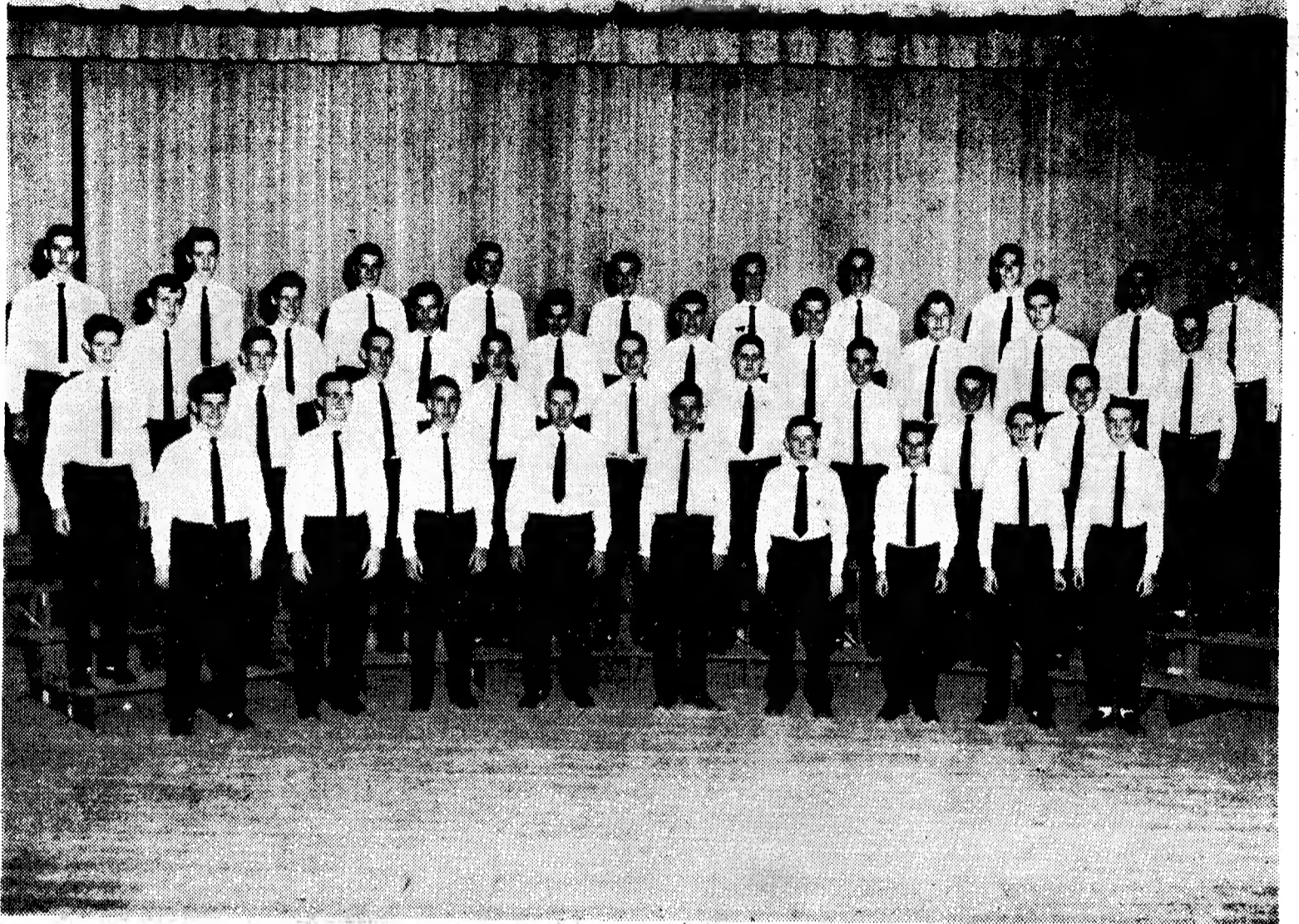
Aside from this, being a Johnnie Cooner gave them a chance to clown. All of us, if the truth were admitted, are clowns at heart. Some of us have the yen persistently from the cradle to the grave. Others of a gloomier nature get the urge less frequently; but somewhere down deep there's a bit of the jester in every normal mortal.

For reasons beclouded by the oblivion of years, the Johnnie Cooners were destined to disappear eventually from the local scene. Here again we can only indulge in conjecture. In all likelihood the cause withered on the vine as first one member and then another answered the Grim Reaper's call.

Apparently, the Cooners made no effort to fill their dwindling ranks with newcomers. Considering the popularity of the colorful processions, it would appear that getting recruits wasn't a problem. Many of the curious followers who kept pace with the group as it made its rounds would have been delighted to get into the act.

Anyhow, it was not to be, and the time came that the Johnnie Cooners no longer awakened the citizenry with their songs, their shouts and their laughter. Maybe it was silly business, but Christmas morning didn't seem quite the same after that.

The kids still got their toys, as always, and the grown folks had



THEY SING TONIGHT—Pictured here is the New Bern High school glee club. These youngsters, with the a capella choir and girls glee club, appear this evening in their annual Christmas concert. Left to right, first row, are Nat Powell, James Warner, Ikey Holton, Ricky Greene, Jon Bouher, Dan Kellum, Don Bennett, Joe Hughes, Nelson McDaniel. Second row, Bill Humphrey, Johnny Williams, Charles Adams, Doug Braddy, Michael Turner, Russell

Connor, Bill Whitley, Eddie Cahoon, Jerry Ball. Third row, Sam Birmingham, Francis La Plante, James Conway, Millard Godwin, Carl Guthrie, Richard Simons, Phil Stiener, David Williams, Lewis Mayo. Fourth row, Henry Smith, Robert Truitt, Johnny Ward, Charles Carter, Joe Chance, Jimmy Phillips, David Woodruff, Speedy Bunting, John Zaytoun, Gilbert Scales.—Photo by John B. Baxter.

High School Singers to Give Christmas Concert Tonight

Holiday music raging from the sweetly sacred to the bright and bouncy will fill the air tonight at the New Bern High school auditorium.

Performing under the capable direction of their talented instructor, Donald Smith, the high school a capella choir and the boys and girls glee clubs will present their annual Christmas Concert.

Those who have been privileged to attend such concerts in the past need no prodding in making up their minds to add another delightful evening to their collection of pleasant musical memories. The performances are always excellent, and this should prove to be one of the best.

Whatever your particular taste for well-rendered compositions might be, there is little likelihood that you'll come away from the concert without finding it satisfied quite amply. A program so diversified that it can't possibly miss the entertainment mark has been arranged and rehearsed for weeks.

Opening the concert will be the boys glee club singing a traditional carol—"O Worship The King." It's a song that is familiar to just about

their turkey and trimmings and their toddies with friends. Christmas was pretty wonderful. But never again would the shout go forth on the frosty air that the Cooners were coming. An era had ended.

everyone, but the chances are it will hold new beauty for you when you hear the glee club render it tonight.

In addition, the boys group will

present "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks," "When Christ Was Born of Mary Free," "Tell Me, Shepherds," "Carol, Brothers, Carol," and finally, the rousing "Was-

sail Song."

Many of these youngsters are freshmen, and hence will be making their first appearance in one of the Christmas concerts. To them and to other freshmen in the girls glee club, this will be an extra special night—even more special than it is to all of the other choristers.

For their portion of the program, members of the girls glee club will sing "Praise Ye The Lord" (from Oratorio de Noel), "Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming," "Glory Be To God On High," "Christ Was Born," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Silver Bells" and "Sleigh Ride."

Climaxing the evening will be the a capella choir, recognized year in and year out as one of the finest in the State. As a matter of fact, competent critics have repeatedly said that it compares favorably with the better college groups in North Carolina and the South.

The choir sings as its opening number a Bach composition, "Rejoice And Sing." This will be followed by Palestrina's "O Bone Jesu" and "Carol Of The Bells" by Leontovich. "Heavenly Light," a composition by Kopylow, should have emphatic appeal for the audience.

However, we rather suspect that Dawson's "Behold The Star" will impress those attending the con-



HIGH SCHOOL ACCOMPANISTS

—Photo by Billy Benners.

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