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It's a mighty far piece from New Bern to Asheville, and in many respects those of us who live on the coast haven't got much in common with folks up there in the mountains.

However, the fact that all of us are proud fellow Tar Heels — from Manteo to Murphy — makes every New Bernian we've talked with feel like the new Miss America is virtually a next door neighbor.

Hundreds of miles separate our town from Asheville, but this distance evaporated into thin air Saturday night when Maria Beale Fletcher, as Miss North Carolina, won the nation's most coveted feminine crown at Convention Hall in Atlantic City.

You need not be told that thousands of men, women and children in this first State Capital on the shores of the Neuse and Trent stayed up to view the contest on their television sets. No one dared dream that Miss North Carolina would be the eventual winner, but local citizens didn't want to be caught snoozing if the miraculous happened.

Maybe it was the lighting, but most readers of The Mirror will admit that Maria didn't look too impressive when she made her initial appearance Saturday night. We are inclined to agree that the way she had her hair fixed was, as another woman would say, too "severe."

Perhaps it was a case of getting used to it. Anyhow, her attractiveness seemed to grow as the evening wore on, and it was a foregone conclusion that she would qualify for the top five finalists. Like us, you no doubt figured at this point that she would finish no lower than third, and had as good a chance as anyone else to go all the way.

It might well be that Maria had the Miss America crown sewed up before it came time to answer a humorous question and a serious question for the judges. In other words, mediocre answers might not have killed her chances for the honor, if she had floundered and muffed her lines.

However, leading or trailing in the competition up to that moment, the Asheville girl certainly did better on the questioning than any other contestant. The serious question she drew from the box suited her perfectly, and she made the most of this very fortunate selection.

In fairness to the other contestants in the finals, they might have been able to give a creditable answer or an exceptional one, if given the opportunity to answer the same query that Maria drew. And faced with a different question, Miss North Carolina might not have done so well.

For example, Miss Minnesota's lamentably poor performance in the question and answer portion of the contest wasn't entirely her own fault. Her first question didn't make too much sense, and her answer made still less. Unnerved by the realization that she had goofed at a crucial stage of the contest, she didn't have much chance to regain her equilibrium and answer the second question intelligently.

Judges for the Miss America contest give plenty of consideration to physical charm and talent. No one can find fault with that. Still, after all other things are considered, you may rest assured that a girl's intellect weighs heavily in the voting.

Just looking pretty, as she makes her round of public appearances during a busy and very trying year, isn't enough for the young lady who wins the crown. She will be called upon to make hundreds of talks, and will be interviewed by countless reporters and commentators.

Silly answers and clumsy speeches would quickly get Miss America labeled by a demanding press and an exacting public as "beautiful but dumb." Having graduated from High school in three years with a straight

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HIGH IN THE SKY—This aerial photograph of New Bern, snapped by John R. Baxter, is one of the most unusual pictures we've ever printed in The Mirror. What appears to be smoke is actually clouds. These cloud formations are

responsible for the shaded areas in the photo that you'll detect if you look closely. Some New Bernians were basking in the sunshine while others moped under the overcast.



HEAP BIG INJUNS—We are grateful to Emmett McSorley, who uncovered this rare photograph of New Bern youngsters who performed in Harry Foote's production of "Hiawatha" just 56 years ago. Emmett is the reclining boy on

the right. Albert Hibbard and Charlie McSorley are on the back row. John McDaniel and Murray Pugh are on the second row. Can you identify the others?