

# The NEW BERN MIRROR

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Signing something without first reading it is risky business, and signing a paper to be filled in later by somebody else is equally hazardous.

That's what a number of persons involved in the "shell home" case tried here this week did. Included among signers were a school teacher and a minister. Thanks to this recklessness, and confidence obviously misplaced, it was possible for a smooth-talking operator to perpetrate acts not in keeping with the laws of the land.

The rich and the poor, the socially elite and the spurned, the wise and the stupid have at least one thing in common. They yearn to own a home of their own. Because the desire is so prevalent, it wasn't surprising when the shell-home idea expanded into a boom of gigantic proportions.

Right from the start it was apparent that some of the get-rich-quick characters attracted to the bonanza were less than lily pure. They swarmed like flies, and soon the field was so saturated by salesmen that all sorts of promises and approaches were used in an effort to corner the market.

Misrepresentation isn't something that was unheard of before the shell-home boom came along. Slickers have been victimizing the gullible since the beginning of time, and there is reason to believe that these shady dealings will continue as long as man inhabits the earth.

What tripped up a goodly number of the shell operators was their improper handling of deeds of trust. These mortgages, in many instances, were drawn up by the operators themselves, rather than by attorneys, and signatures were not witnessed by a Notary Public. When names were signed before the paper had been completed, which was improper, the signer was at the mercy of the party to whom the deed of trust was made out to.

Shenanigans like this prompted a wholesale probe by the State Bureau of Investigation, at the request of North Carolina's Attorney General.

Over at Elizabeth City, three men have been charged with violations of the law in their shell-home activities, and indictments have been returned by the Pasquotank County grand jury. One defendant is charged with forgery — all three are charged with illegal law practice.

In fact, one of the accused was already facing trial on 27 counts of illegal law practice when he was indicted on additional counts this week. Even before this column can get into print, there's a strong possibility that the long arm of the law will reach out and apprehend others.

At Graham, the shell-home picture is dominated at the present by civil actions. Suits already exceeding \$150,000 have been filed in Alamance Superior Court, and still more are anticipated. In this instance, the operators are from Mebane, and the kingpin of the lot was, before his downfall, associated with four corporations.

Here in New Bern, the shell-home case that ended up in Craven Superior Court this week was centered around a stranger in our midst. It is true the world over that human beings will place their faith in an unknown without hesitation, while casting suspicious glances at their neighbors.

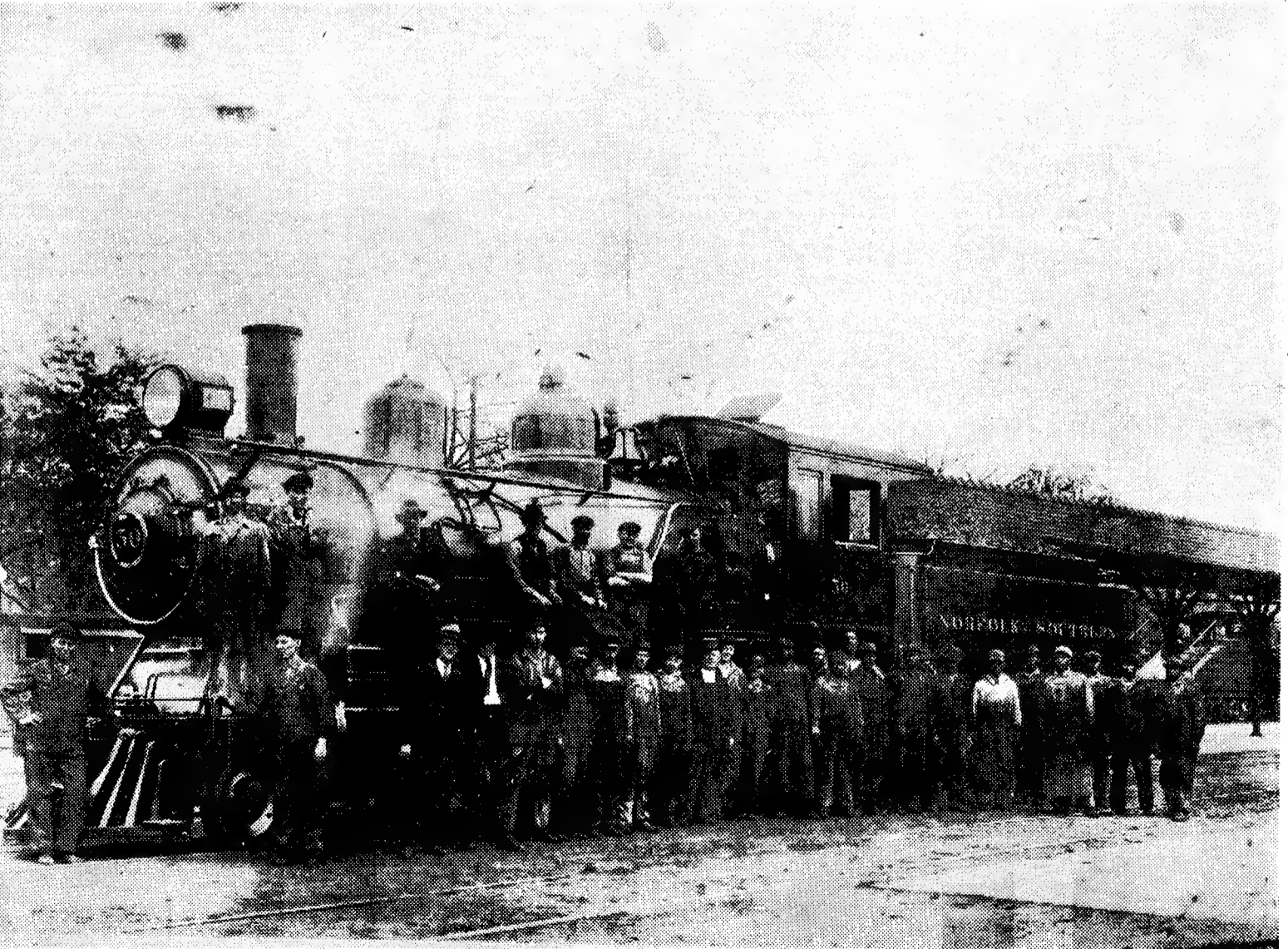
There's a verse in the Bible that says something about a prophet not being without honor, save in his own land. Like many another verse from the Scriptures, the words still apply. Some of the newcomers embraced here on short notice, through the years, have been as phoney as a plugged

(Continued on Page 8)



WE POINT WITH PRIDE—New Bern has good reason to be proud of Catherine Latta, seen here with a Burlington composer, Helen Eaton. Her beautiful voice has

meant much to music lovers of the community, who not only admire her talent but her gracious manner.—Photo by Florence Hanff.



READY TO ROLL—It was a proud day at the Norfolk Southern shops several decades ago, when the complete rebuilding of this iron horse became a reality. In this rare photo you'll find Ceph Gaskins, Jim Brooks, W. P. Edwards,

Phil Thomas, Walter Sandlin, Duff Mallard, Claude Allen, Fernie Gaskill, John Battle, Lee Conaway, Tom Gaskins, W. W. Miller, and Harrison Batts.