



The NEW BERN MIRROR

PUBLISHED WEEKLY
IN THE HEART OF
EASTERN NORTH
CAROLINA
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2000 Arendall St.
Morehead City, NC

VOLUME 9

NEW BERN, N. C., FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1966

NUMBER 36

A magician who appeared on NBC's Today Show the other morning paid high tribute to the late Harry Houdini, greatest of all escape artists. It must have brought back memories to New Bernians who are in their fifties or older.

This editor recalls that as a boy he raked leaves to get the price of admission for the first installment of a Houdini serial starting at the Athens (now Tryon) Theatre. It proved so wondrous, we labored each Saturday after that for the dime that entitled us to see the latest thrilling episode.

Houdini, if our recollections are correct, made several serials, and measured by juvenile standards they were all magnificent. Like the one and only Lon Chaney, who specialized in horror rather than amazing feats of deception, the Great Houdini was in a class by himself.

Getting back to the magician on the Today Show, he couldn't cite an instance for Hugh Downes in which Houdini met his match, although he admitted that all such performers do fall at one time or another.

We're no authority on the incomparable escape artist, but fled away in our memory is an occasion when Houdini almost met death while performing for a large gathering of Boy Scouts. Rest assured he never forgot this near tragedy.

The act, dreamed up by Houdini, called for him to be tied to a stake. A fire was kindled around him, and his problem was to loosen the bonds before the flames reached him.

One of the Scouts got the idea of using fishing line from a rod and reel instead of rope, and Houdini--wanting to be a good sport--agreed against his better judgement. It was the biggest mistake of his life.

Everything went wrong. An unexpected breeze fanned the flames, and the fishing line, tied in expert knots, refused to yield as quickly as Houdini had counted on. No one realized his predicament, but before he escaped in the nick of time, his body was criss-crossed with deep lacerations. Not until it was over did his youthful admirers know that they had come close to seeing a man actually burned at the stake.

One of Houdini's amazing escapes saw him trussed up completely, locked inside a trunk, and tossed overboard. He was able to survive during his stay beneath the water because he had learned how to achieve suspended animation. He made full use of the limited oxygen available to him, before he gained his freedom and rose to the surface.

Despite his astounding feats, he made no claim to being a superman, and took no stock in the claims of fortune tellers, crystal gazers and others who professed to have supernatural powers. In fact, he delighted in exposing the secret manipulations of all quacks.

Before he died, forty or so years ago, he confided to his wife that he would attempt to get through to her from the spirit world. Many approached her in the years that followed, with messages they insisted were from her husband, but the words that Houdini and his wife

(Continued on page 8)



ON ITS WAY—New Bern's historic John Wright Stanley home, where George Washington slept while visiting our town, rounds the intersection of Hancock and Broad Streets, enroute to the new location selected for it on George Street near Tryon Palace. Note work-

men, shivering in Monday's chill, early morning air, perched on the roof. The structure once stood at the site of New Bern's present post office, and later on New Street.—Photo by Billy Benners.



WAIT FOR ME—Tagging along like a tot following her older sister, a smaller house that nestled behind the large structure once used as the New Bern - Craven County Library plays follow the leader at the corner of Broad and George Streets. At the right is

the Cole-Waldrop home, and on the left is what was once St. Luke's Hospital. In the dim distance is the spire of Craven County Courthouse.—Photo by Billy Benners.