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Whether they be young or old, short or tall, large or small, most New Bern mothers have at least one thing in common.

Each of them, at one time or another is apt to turn to Mother Goose in quest of delightful reading material for their offspring.

Much of the advice a real mother may give her youngster is destined to be forgotten or disregarded in later years, but we oldsters still remember the rhythmic phrases of early nursery rhymes.

There have been poets far superior to Mother Goose, but it is doubtful that all of them put together have achieved the lasting fame that still adheres to her name.

Who was Mother Goose anyhow? Don't feel ignorant if you can't answer the question, since no one else can answer it either. This we do know, if she were alive, she would be in the neighborhood of 300 years old.

Perhaps you've heard she was a Boston widow named Elizabeth Goose, who made up little ditties and sang them to her grandson. Grandmothers (and grandfathers) being the affectionate souls that they are, the story sounds plausible.

According to the oft repeated version, the father of the grandson referred to happened to be a printer. Impressed by the rhymes, he supposedly published them in 1719, less than a decade after New Bern was founded.

It is a good story, except for the fact that it is just as fictional as our Mother Goose characters who have stood the test of time. Not so much as one copy of the book has ever been found, despite great research.

This in itself is not conclusive, but even if we assume that such a book once existed, the story of Boston's Mother Goose doesn't stand up. Long before then, the same intriguing name appeared.

As early as 1679, a French master of fantasy named Charles Perrault published a volume of fairy stories titled "Tales Of Passed Times, by Mother Goose." One of the stories called "The Master Cat" is the same yard we know here in America as "Puss In Boots." Another, loved by New Bern children of every generation was "Sleeping Beauty."

Eventually these stories found their way to England, but years before they did that birthplace of many literary masterpieces had its own rhymes and jingles designed to appeal to the very young.

In the year 1760, a London publisher by the name of John Newberry lifted "Mother Goose" as a signature from the aforementioned French fairy tales, and transferred it to the nursery rhymes you can probably rattle off from memory.

To give you an idea of how old the Mother Goose rhymes really are, it is a historical truth that the "three blind mice" are mentioned in a poem that was published in London in 1609.

"Sing a song of sixpence" appeared in a play that was written in Shakespeare's time,

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IN DEEP THOUGHT—Little girls do an awful lot of thinking, and three year old Teresa Leigh Hickman of Wilmington is no exception. She is the daughter of Frank George Hickman and the former Jackie Barnes. Frank once worked as an electrician for Earl Laughinghouse, here in New Bern. Later he graduated from N. C. State University with a BS degree in Industrial Management and Personnel. He is now District Supervisor for the N. C. Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and has work shops at Wil-

lington for the mentally retarded and handicapped. Capturing the pensive mood of a three year old and recording it on film isn't easy, but Eunice Wray, whose Mirror portraits of children delight our readers, was equal to the challenge. The wonderful world of childhood belongs exclusively to the very young, so what Teresa has on her mind is a secret as secure as the mystery that lies behind Mona Lisa's smile. At best we can only guess, and probably fall far short of the mark.