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A lot of water has gone under the bridge since an unknown singer out of Nashville made two appearances with a Grand Ole Opry group at New Bern's Shrine Auditorium.

No one, of course, dreamed that this young man, who punctuated his vocal outbursts with swivel-hipped gyrations, was on his way to becoming a multi-millionaire and a world famous figure.

His pelvic movements, as much as his tuneful rantings of Nothing But A Hound Dog and Blue Suede Shoes, set him apart from other country and western performers. For one thing, he didn't sound like he had blocked nostrils.

Poking fun at Elvis Presley would avail nothing at this late date. His behavior, untainted by scandal often associated with show business, speaks well of his character.

Not commonly known is the role played by a cigar-smoking pitchman named Col. Tom Parker in creating and sustaining the favorable Presley image. What Parker did to promote Hadacol earlier, he did just as sensationally with Elvis.

It wasn't a new field for the shrewd Colonel. It was he who he who recognized exceptional possibilities in Minnie Pearl, Eddy Arnold, Roy Acuff, and Hank Williams, and boosted them to the first rung of stardom.

Parker ran across Presley in the early 50's, and carted him around the South for one-night stands, such as those he played here in New Bern. Compared with what the singer makes today, the take in tank towns was trivial.

At the outset, the Colonel couldn't make up his mind whether to gamble on Elvis, or another promising young singer, Pat Boone. He finally decided that Presley had greater possibilities, and a style that the Parker touch could do the most with.

It took some selling, but the hard driving pitchman persuaded Al Weiss, booker for Florida State Theatres, to give Elvis a chance. Weiss was skeptical, but signed the singer for a matinee and two evening shows at the old Palm in Palm Beach, for \$350. Presley was given standing ovations at all three performances.

Weiss immediately arranged bookings in Tampa, Jacksonville, Orlando, Daytona and Lakeland. From then on, Colonel Parker didn't need Weiss to market his product, but he isn't the sort to forget favors.

Three years later, when Elvis was a national rage and building a quick fortune, the Colonel called Weiss and said, "I owe you something. I've got two and a half days open, and you can have Presley for \$1,000 guarantee against a percentage."

Naturally, Weiss snapped it up. He booked the famed entertainer into Miami's Olympia, a theatre that seated 2,100 and the singers' take turned out to be \$9,000. However, Presley at the time would have filled 40,000 seats at the Orange Bowl for a concert and walked away with ten times as much money.

In view of what is permitted

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NOT FOR THEM — The adage that children should be seen but not heard wasn't meant to apply to the cheerleaders who whoop things up for the gridders in the New Bern Recreation Department's Midget League. Pictured in dark sweaters are the loyal boost-

ters of the Bears, and sharing this week's front page are the equally devoted supporters of the Lions. These youngsters drill hard to learn their yells, and back their heroes, come what may.—Photos by Jack Layne.