

The NEW BERN

MIRROR

PUBLISHED WEEKLY
 THE HEART OF
 THE NORTH
 Regional Library
 400 Johnson St.
 New Bern, NC 28560

Through
 THE
 Looking
 Glass

VOLUME 16

NEW BERN, N. C. 28560, FRIDAY, AUGUST 17, 1973

NUMBER 23

Inevitably, those of us who have been around for awhile associate trivial incidents with familiar landmarks.

Occasionally, when glimpsing the spire of Centenary Methodist Church this editor recalls an occurrence of quite a few years back. The short item we wrote about it for state papers and wire services appeared in the foreign press too.

It read: "Those wolf whistles attracted of late by girls passing New Bern's postoffice are strictly on the up and up. So far up, in fact, that the young ladies were puzzled until they located the source.

"It isn't a new species of bird at all, but steeplejacks perched on scaffolding surrounding the spire of Centenary Methodist Church. From that lofty vantage point, they have been taking time out to observe feminine pedestrians. When it seemed appropriate, shrill approval was accorded.

"As yet, none of the girls has shown signs of falling. As for the steeplejacks, they couldn't afford to take a tumble for a strange dame. It would prove fatal, under the circumstances."

In newspaper circles, brief stories of this type are called "brights." Because human interest is universal, they often hold global appeal. This one made it, since male appreciation of a pretty girl's dimensions knows no geographical boundaries.

Yesterday was when Hollywood invented talking pictures, and New Bernians eagerly awaited installation of the necessary audio equipment at local theatres. Aside from putting thousands of theatre musicians out of business, talkies were a calamity for a number of top movie stars.

John Gilbert, dear to the hearts of females around the world, was an early casualty. On the silent screen he had no equal and feminine viewers imagined that he was blessed with a marvelous voice.

Much to the contrary, he talked through his nose, and his image as the Great Lover departed with the speed of a tomcat splashed with a pail of hot water. There were other idols littered along the trail of advanced entertainment, but Gilbert's plight was the most disturbing.

Nelson Eddy was waiting in the wings. He couldn't act a lick, and his face had the fixed expression of a cigar-store Indian. But the guy could sing, and that was enough to get him by.

Mostly he co-starred with Jeanette McDonald, who not only warbled beautifully, but was pretty. She was also vivacious enough to offset the unbelievable dullness of Eddy in musical love scenes.

No one fared better in those early talkies than Al Jolson. Famous on stage, but largely unknown in America's small towns, he signed a contract that George Jessell turned down, and became an instant movie



SHE STARTED IT—Along about 1960, shapely Betty Bland, who was very much at home on water, became New Bern's first Aqua Maid at famed Cypress Gardens. She could ski with the best of them, and the trail she blazed was followed, over a period of years, by four other New Bern girls,

Sylvia Piner, Beth Lansche, Janice Shapou, and Donna White. Collectively, they gave our town tremendous publicity. Their professional performances demanded a lot, but the five of them were equal to the challenge.