

Reading The Signs

By JONATHAN PHILLIPS

My adventures along the backroads and byways of the east coast over the past several years have been in connection with a number of missions: beach surveying, gathering marsh mud samples, doing news stories, looking for column material, and simply carrying out all manner of business and pleasure.

No matter what the primary mission of these travels by train, plane, foot, boat, canoe, and Galaxy 500, there has always been a secondary mission: To obtain a representative sample of the restaurants, bars, grills, taverns, pool halls and such between North Jersey and South Georgia.

I foresee this task lasting a lifetime, but I'm ready to share some preliminary results concerning the crude, hand-lettered signs that deck the halls of such establishments.

First and foremost, places that have crude, hand-lettered signs are generally superior to those that don't, even if only because any place that doesn't is probably a McDonald's or a Pizza Hut or in a shopping mall.

This is true even if the sign in question says something excruciatingly mundane like "No Checks Accepted" or "Pork Chop Sandwich, 75 cents." At least in the former case you can deduce that people have occasionally felt comfortable enough there to try to pass checks (would you try to pass one at Burger King or Chic-Fil-A) and in the latter that they run specials on pork chop sandwiches.

Often the signs provide an even better clue to what the place is like and what kind of behavior is expected. "Please wait for a sigh of recognition before bellowing your order like a Holstein bull," read the sign at one lunch counter. Kind of lets you know that it's alright to bellow out your order, but that you should allow a decent interval before doing it.

Small town and backwoods dives offer both the best and worst that civilization has produced. Careful interpretation of the hand-lettered signs offers subtle clues about the type of place you step into.

They needn't be obvious, like the "Not Responsible for Injuries Suffered in Fights With Other Patrons" that I saw in one northeastern North Carolina beer joint. Not much subtlety there, but some messages sometimes take a little thought to properly interpret them.

On the surface, for example, the "Do Not Spit On Floor. Please Use Spittoons" sign in the Wythe Pool Room, Wytheville,

Virginia, may seem to indicate a concern for health, cleanliness, decorum and so forth and to indicate a family-style game room.

When you get to thinking about it, however, and looking at the 16 sand-filled spittoons lining the walls, you realize that such a sign would not be necessary if the Wythe Pool Room did not attract the sort of individual who might be prone to expectorate on the floor if not reminded otherwise.

Signs provide other types of helpful hints. At the Mecca Pool Hall and Grill in Washington, N.C. (still holding on, by the way, to the number one spot in my favorite pool halls of all time list) there is a sign reading: "No Masse or Jump Shots Allowed."

With the kind of guys I shoot pool with, you'd be hard-pressed to get a decent definition of "masse shot," and jump shots are generally taken with basket, not billiard, balls. We don't even know what those shots are, so there is little worry that we'll be trying to execute them.

This kind of sign lets you know that the pool hall is frequented by folks who might want to try those shots, and anybody in that category is certainly capable of winning the rent money and the car keys from somebody who plays like I do.

The message: go play eight-ball or cut-throat on the back table and leave the front table to the guys who would make masse and jump shots if they were allowed.

Some signs I haven't quite figured out yet. The Bait Box Grill in Hancock's Harbor, N.J., has one reading: "We Take the Wall Street Journal For Our Republican Customers. Democrats May Only Peek."

I'm not sure exactly what to make of that, though their companion sign, "If We Act Like We Appreciate Your Business It's Only Because We Need the Money," simply reflects the casual atmosphere and kidding between patrons and staff that occurs there.

Other signs are almost elegant in their simplicity. "No Tipping," at the Carolina Grill in Greenville, is my favorite for obvious reasons.

The bottom line is that when looking for a bite to eat, a cold brew, or a game of eight-ball in a strange town, first find a joint with crude, hand-lettered signs.

Then study the signs to draw any inferences you can about what you've gotten yourself into. Then, just enjoy yourself. But don't spit on the floor, no matter what the signs say. It just ain't polite.

To The Editor Visitors

Bernice Lancaster and Emma Kate Meade were our guests for the Mother's Day weekend. They were enroute to Vanceboro from Port Charlotte, Florida for the summer.

We visited the state historic site of Marjorie Kinnon Rawling's home. She was the Pulitzer prize winner for her book, "The Yearling", and about whom a movie "Cross Creek" has been made. The movie is receiving very good reviews, and is made in Ocala, along the Silver River and Orange Lake. After our visit to the home, we enjoyed a delicious meal at the famous restaurant, "The Yearling" at Cross Creek, FL.

It was a real joy for us to have these friends with us for the church service, the special trip, and to have them in our home for Mother's Day.

Minnie and I look forward to our summer visit to Vanceboro, N.C. about July 18.

Henry F. Speight, D. Min.

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WCHS Graduates 1984

By LELA BARROW

What is Education? My idea of education is to use to the best understanding the principles you have learned in Elementary and High School. Get new ideas and put them to work advantageously. Many of us are going to do great things tomorrow. But tomorrow may be too late. The demand life makes on all of us is to be ready at all times. Live neither in the past nor in the future, but in the present. The surest way not to fail is to determine to succeed - Use your time advantageously - Do not squander your time in idleness.

Perfect freedom is for the man who lives by his own work, and in that work does what he wants to do. Thy actions alone determine thy worth. Idleness brings despair. All good work is done without hesitation, without difficulty, without boasting - bringing happiness.

Build character: make it four-sided, or square, with a spiritual side, a moral side, a mental side and a physical side. On the spiritual side square it with Jesus Christ: on the moral side let the standard be the life set by Christ "do unto others. . ." on the mental side make your ambitions high; on the physical side strive to make the body clean throughly as well as thoroughly. Whether you have little ability or great ability, one talent or ten talents is not a great importance. What you do with what you have is what counts. You can't all be Valedictorians, only one can get that honor. Study and strive to use the gift God has given you. Don't expect your life to be an easy one all the way. There will be

problems, decisions to make, issues to be faced, you have no answer. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Stop, think, meditate the answer will come to you - maybe in a mysterious way.

Before you receive your diploma, think back to when you were ten or twelve years old. Remember some of the foolish things you did, and how you felt about school and education—get a big laugh, skipping school to go fishing.

This is a true story of Virginia Cary Hudson when she was ten in 1904. Her teacher had saved pages of things she had written and clippings of her sayings. This her idea of education: Education is what you learn from books - nobody knows what you know but your teacher. What good will books do me? They will give you satisfaction - I had rather have fun than satisfaction.

P.S. Mrs. Dixon, if your conscience won't let you give me an A, how about a B? If that woman keeps on giving me a zero on deportment I will simply have to see the Bishop. She went to the library to learn of the books - they were dusty and old. Books some people like to read, some people do not like to read and some they never read. Mrs. Simons sits in the middle of the library and George Washington hangs on the wall. The sign says silence but Mrs. Simons talks all the time. This is her idea of education - wish I could give you her idea of religion.

And now may God grant us all a good night's rest and not let the fire whistle blow. Amen. Halleluiah and so be it as it may.

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