

Brunswick Between Bookends

By Eugene Fallon



RECLUSE. By Cornelius Blackmon. A pamphlet subtitled, Hermit of Brunswick. 62 pp. Privately printed about 1892 in Richmond, Va.

An off-beat little tale, purporting to be about one Plato Clay, unmarried white citizen of Brunswick who inhabited roughly that region west of Holden Beach. One cannot help but wonder if Blackmon were writing straight, or allowing his imagination full play. The story opens with the author timber-cruising in the pine barrens of lower Brunswick. The time is the early 1870's. Blackmon takes many and varied cuts at what he found in North Carolina. Its residents, writes the author, "were quite backward and

practically uneducated." There were other things about Lower Eastern North Carolina with which the Virginian found fault. The food was poorly prepared and (he says) "sanitation is almost non-existent."

If, indeed, Blackmon did encounter a "bearded scarecrow of a man" (Plato Clay) living "half in and half out of a hollow tree, with only some brush and marsh grasses added in a sort of lean-to affair against the trunk of the tree" the reader suspects that he fastened upon his discovery with something approaching glee. At least the author is unsparing of Clay. We find not only "a matted growth of unkempt hair, filthy beyond description," but "a set of yellowed and snagged teeth

ferocious to behold" on the head and in the mouth of the hermit. Perhaps by exerting the proverbial charm of a Virginia gentleman, Blackmon writes that he slowly won the confidence of the eccentric Clay; and that strange caricature began to confide in him (Blackmon) "the secret and twisted thoughts of the subnormal human mind."

Thus we learn that Plato Clay was not always anti-social. Plato lived, according to Blackmon anyway, "the usual dull life of a backwoods dolt" right up to the time they wished to induct him into the ranks of the Gray Plato admits that he had "not the \$300 necessary to keep me from soldiering." In fact Plato adds, somewhat unnecessarily as it were, that "I had not that much money in my whole life." And so Plato took to the woods.

But why, in heaven's name, a tree? Blackmon answers that question: "I couldn't trust these here scoundrels around." Plato tells him. "They wood have turn't me in for a little bit," and he figured he could live unobserved with the animals; perfectly willing to risk the peril of squirrels nut-hunting.

Blackmon is suddenly called back to civilization (i.e. Richmond) however, and we are forced to leave Plato Clay up in a tree.

Here, we would think, is a splendid lead for historians. A small safari might even today penetrate the woodlands lying between Holden Beach and the much-traveled U. S. Highway 17, in search of some bleached bones and several long hanks of hair, lying in or near a blasted tree as empty as the dreams of poor Plato Clay.

A Patriot And A Statesman

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sources, pouring good money after bad, as if the securities had no end. The money chambers emptied anon, and still the stubborn Smith fought recklessly against ruin. Came the day when nothing was left. Nothing at all. And like wolves came the land sharks and the users, slaving, snapping at the heels of whom only yesterday was a hero.

Poor Smith. Not long before the final indignity was thrust upon him, he remarked plaintively: "If they will only give me time, I will salvage my holdings and repay every last dollar I owe them."

But it was not to be. They came for Benjamin Smith one December day. Came for an old man, living in a house that was no longer his; and carried him, protesting bitterly, off to a jail situated in a town named in his honor! Smith was 74. He had, although he mercifully did not realize it, but a month to live. And die he did, on January 8, 1826, in a cell like a common felon. Perhaps Smith, a college man, recalled the lines written by William Shakespeare, of Julius Caesar, which went:

"When the noble Brutus to him stabbed, ingratitude then burst his mighty heart, and he fell . . ." The charge against Benjamin Smith, former state governor? "Indebtedness" they called it. And it was in debtor's prison that death claimed him, right in Smithville. The history books say that he "was seized with a violent fever which carried him off in hours." But was it truly fever? Did shame and the memory of man's perfidy play no part in

had come up one of the creeks, and investigation showed that it was from Southport and had, several feet aboard. A bright idea struck us: We left our trees near where the boat was moored and wrote a message in the mud asking whoever owned the boat to please bring our trees to Southport with him when he came.

Thus relieved of our burden—but not of the pressing obligation to bring home a tree—we came back to town to await developments. We made our way to the yacht basin, and a short time later Leon McKelthan came out to his dock. Included in his cargo were our two Christmas trees, special delivery!

this man's sudden passing? I leave this question to each reader to examine in his heart.

And they wouldn't allow the corpse its liberty there was a law on the books, a repulsive bit of legislation which combined the most less and archaic nuances to be found in early English law, senseless and pitiless provision that the body of a debtor not be claimed by relatives or friends for burial, unless creditors were paid with cash security the amount of interest. Such law, needless to say, has long since been stricken from the books of all civilized nations.

The drama of a dramatic Benjamin Smith was not quite run out. One more remained, and it was fully characteristic. Lanterns in a crowd, a hurried hole in the side of earth, a few whispered words in the black of the night, Benjamin Smith disappeared to the view of all men.

This came about a few of his friends, learning of Smith's death, hastened to the jail at Smithville. Eribing turnkey they carried the body away through the darkness and did not stop until they had the old cemetery.

John D. Bellamy's "Memoirs of an Octogenarian" published in 1942 at Charlotte, renders the following exact account of that last, memorable adventure through which the case of one of North Carolina's oldest old men was carried:

"Early in 1826 was in Smithville, conversing with Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Smith—the mother of Kate Stuart Brunswick fame. She told me that many years before she had been sitting on her porch, well-dressed, splendid looking gentleman approached, and inquired himself as R. Barnwell Lett, Jr., of Charleston, South Carolina. He asked if she could give him any assistance in locating the grave of his brother, Governor Benjamin Smith. She told us she certainly could; she could show him the identical spot; she had helped bury him.

"Mr. Rhett enjoyed several negroes to excavate the grave, located in the old Smithville Cemetery, but for only a few bones, and these could not be identified. Mrs. Lett, remembering how often she had heard the Governor complain of pain in his left side caused by a bullet he had received during a duel, suddenly flung-sifter from her home, she returned, and carefully sifted the ashes of the grave. Finally she found the flat, lead bullet, on the left side of the disinterred coffin.

Mr. Rhett had the remains removed to St. Philip's Churchyard, at Old Brunswick town, and placed a marble slab—the memory of his brother, Benjamin.

There is little more to tell. R. Barnwell Lett, in reality, James Smith, young brother to Benjamin. Like his father in temperament, he left Orton Plantation in a great rage with Benjamin, who he said "had cheated" him of the valuable holdings. Reaching Charleston still in a fury, James had changed his name and had gone on to make his own personal fortune.

There is yet another ironic footnote to the saga of Benjamin Smith. During the war between the States, a Union boat had shelled the ruins of Old Brunswick town, trying to dislodge a company of Confederate riflemen who were using the picked walls as a bulwark from which to worry federal ships and troop movements on the river. One of the shells smashed Benjamin Smith's marble memorial.

Many years later an admirer of Governor Smith probed the ruins and succeeded in finding the smashed memorial. Painsstaking work uncovered the parts of the inscribed memorial. And the Masons of Southport in 1917 raised a new memorial over the spot once guarded by James Smith's labor of brotherly love.

Thus ends the story of Benjamin Smith. If any governor of the great state of North Carolina ever had such a dramatic and seaguar career, I have yet to read of it.

A little cooking sherry adds flavor to black bean soup. Garnish with a slice of lemon and one of hard-cooked egg.

1961 TAX LISTING — NOTICE —

List Your Real and Personal Property Starting Tuesday, Jan. 2nd, 1962.

All property owners and tax payers are required by law to return to the List Taker for Taxation for the year 1962, all the Real Estate, Personal Property, Etc., which they own on the first day of January. Be Sure To Bring A Complete List Of Your Personal Property. All male persons between the ages of 21 and 50 years must list for Poll Tax during the same time, except those exempt by law for physical disability.

All persons to whom the foregoing applies who fail to list their Real and Personal Property, and/or Poll Tax will be guilty of a Misdemeanor and subject to a fine or imprisonment upon conviction.

NORTHWEST TOWNSHIP, E. W. Aycock, Lister

- January 2, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Perkin's Store—Northwest
- January 4, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Navassa Grocery
- January 8, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Herbert Brew's Store
- January 10, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Leo Medlin's Store
- January 12, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Applewhite's Store—Maco
- January 15, 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. Leland Postoffice
- January 17, 2 P. M. to 6 P. M. L. & M. Grocery—Woodburn
- January 19, 2 P. M. to 6 P. M. Forest William's Store
- Leland Grocery Each Tuesday Evening 6 P. M. to 9 P. M. through Jan.

TOWN CREEK TOWNSHIP, Raymond Earp, Lister

- January 1 Home
- January 2 Lofton Lewis
- January 3 South Bound
- January 4 Bige Bowling
- January 5 Pete's Place (River Road)
- January 6 Douglas Hawes
- January 8 E. O. Rabon
- January 9 Johnnie Mills
- January 10 Bishops
- January 11 Pen Benton
- January 12 Phelps's Esso
- January 13 A. P. Henry
- January 15 Skipper & White
- January 16 Andy's Esso
- January 17 Clark's (Orton)

SMITHVILLE TOWNSHIP, Carl Ward, Lister

- January 1, At Midway from 9 A. M. to 11:30 A. M.
- January 2, and Each Week Day Except Saturday During January At Tax Office 9 A. M. to 4:30 P. M.
- January 6, Saturday, 9 A. M. to 11 A. M. Mrs. Arnold's Store
- January 13, Saturday, 9 A. M. to 11:30 A. M. Cox's Store Bldg.
- January 20, Saturday, 9 A. M. to 11 A. M. Howell Point-Faircloths Store
- AT HOME EACH SATURDAY 4 P. M. to 5 P. M.

LOCKWOOD FOLLY TOWNSHIP, Kenneth Hewett, Lister

- January 2, 9:00 A. M. to 12:00 Noon W. E. Bellamy's Store
- January 2, 1:00 P. M. to 6:00 P. M. Bud Tindall's Store
- January 3, 9:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. Newman Fulford's Store
- January 4, 9:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. Harry Galloway's Store
- January 5, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Cedar Grove Store
- January 6, 9:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. R. E. Bellamy & Sons
- January 8, 9:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. Woody's Store
- January 9, 9 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. Red Bug Grocery
- January 10, 9 A. M. to 6 P. M. J. E. Kirby's Store
- January 11, 9 A. M. to 6 P. M. Oak Ridge Station
- January 12, 9:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M. Community Service Center
- January 13, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. R. E. Bellamy & Sons
- January 15, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Bud Tindall's Store
- January 16, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Newman Fulford's Store
- January 17, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Cedar Grove Store
- January 18, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Oak Ridge Station
- January 19, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. Community Service Center
- January 20, 9:00 A. M. to 6 P. M. R. E. Bellamy & Sons

SHALLOTTE TOWNSHIP, J. B. Ward, Jr., Lister

- January 2, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. Parker Store—Grissettown
- January 3, 12 Noon to 4 P. M. Aaron McLamb—Thomasboro
- January 4, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. Ivy High Store—Calabash
- January 5, 12 Noon to 4 P. M. A. D. Long's Store—Thomasboro
- January 6, 13, and 20, 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. Washam, Warlick & Harrelson Co.
- January 9, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. Anchor Hotel—Village Point
- January 10, 9 to 4 P. M. The Gift Shop—Ocean Isle
- January 11, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. John Todds Store—Sauspan
- January 15, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. Wallace Hickman's Store
- January 16, 9 A. M. to 11 A. M. Summersette Store
- January 17, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. The Ward Co.—Longwood
- ALL OTHER TIMES AT HOME.

WACCAMAW TOWNSHIP, Odell Jenrette, Lister

- January 2, 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. Camp Branch Church
- January 3, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. Roddie Bennett's Store
- January 4, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. W. B. Evans Home
- January 5, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. L. C. Babson's Store
- January 8, 9 A. M. to 4 P. M. D. E. Simmons
- January 9, 1 P. M. to 4 P. M. Frank D. Inman's
- January 10, 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. Pearl Jones Store
- January 11, 9 A. M. to 2 P. M. Ernest Milligan's Store
- January 12, 9 A. M. to 2 P. M. George Piver's
- January 13, 9 A. M. to 2 P. M. Lonnie Evans Store
- January 15, 9 A. M. to 2 P. M. Randolph Long
- January 16, 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. Willie Marlow's

STATEMENT STERLING MUTUAL COBLESKILL, N. Y. ASSETS		
1. Bonds	715,546.64	
2. Stocks	59,320.00	
3. Mortgage loans on real estate	5,785.67	
4. Real Estate	77,158.42	
5. Cash and bank deposits	139,897.95	
6. Cash balances or uncollected premiums, net	184,653.78	
7. Agents' balances	84,890.72	
8. Reinsurance recoverable on loss payments	1,047.15	
9. Dividends and real estate income due and accrued	4,047.15	
10. Total admitted Assets	\$1,201,330.13	
LIABILITIES, SURPLUS AND OTHER FUNDS		
1. Losses unpaid	\$ 138,618.31	
2. Loss adjustment expenses unpaid	10,746.63	
3. Contingent commissions and other similar charges	28.20	
4. Other expenses (excluding taxes, licenses and fees)	989.48	
5. Taxes, licenses and fees (excluding Federal income taxes)		989.48
6. Federal income taxes		12,059.40
7. Unearned premiums		11,356.18
8. Excess of liability and compensation statutory and voluntary reserves over case and loss expense reserves		529,549.56
9. Total Liabilities		33,838.27
10. Special surplus funds:		\$282,944.38
11. Unassigned funds (surplus)		187,139.72
12. Surplus as regards policyholders		470,144.10
13. TOTAL		\$1,201,330.13
BUSINESS IN NORTH CAROLINA DURING 1960		
LINE OF BUSINESS		
1. Fire	Net Premiums	Net Losses
2. Extended coverage	\$ 415,681.23	\$ 13,664.67
3. Other allied lines	10,177.69	14,499.88
4. Inland marine	18.36	
5. Auto phys. damage	2,964.18	350.17
6. Total	422,841.46	14,914.65
7. President Donald L. Ryder	\$101,775.30	\$ 42,516.60
8. Treasurer George D. Ryder		
9. Secretary Kevin B. Lynch		
Home Office 1-5 Elm Street, Cobleskill, N. Y.		
Insurance for services: Chas. F. Gold, Commissioner of Insurance, Raleigh, N.C.		
NORTH CAROLINA INSURANCE DEPARTMENT		
Raleigh, April 4, 1961		
I, Chas. F. Gold, Commissioner of Insurance, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct abstract of the statement of the Sterling Mutual Insurance Company of Cobleskill, N. Y. filed with this Department, showing the condition of said Company on the 31st day of December, 1960.		
Witness my hand and official seal, the day and date above written.		
(SEAL)		
Fire and/or Casualty Abstract		
CHARLES F. GOLD		
Commissioner of Insurance		

Waterfront

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and cut two trees, and we had traveled only a short distance when we discovered that we had taken on quite a burden. The car was a full half-mile away, and the going was rough.

NOTICE! NOTICE!

ONLY CALL FOR TAXES

I will be at the places cited below at the time designated for the Purpose of Collecting 1961 Taxes.

PAY NOW AND SAVE COSTS

Township	Day	Time
Town Creek Township	Friday, January 5th	
D. H. HAWES & SONS—Bolivia		10:00 A. M. to 10:30 A. M.
A. P. HENRY STORE—Winnabow		10:45 A. M. to 11:15 A. M.
SKIPPERS (S&W Grocery)—Lanvale		12:00 Noon to 12:30 P. M.
North West Township	Friday, January 9th	
APPLEWHITE'S STORE—Maco		9:30 A. M. to 10:00 A. M.
LEO MEDLIN'S STORE—Hood Creek		10:15 A. M. to 10:45 A. M.
CHINNIS STORE—Leland		11:15 A. M. to 11:45 A. M.
LELAND POST OFFICE		12:30 P. M. to 1:00 P. M.
NAVASSA POST OFFICE		1:15 P. M. to 2:15 P. M.
Shallotte Township	Wednesday, January 10th	
IVEY HIGH STORE—Calabash		10:00 A. M. to 10:30 A. M.
HICKMAN'S STORE—Hickman's X Roads		11:00 A. M. to 11:30 A. M.
JOHN WARDS STORE—Longwood		11:45 A. M. to 12:15 P. M.
SANDERS PARKER STORE—Grissettown		12:30 P. M. to 1:00 P. M.
Waccamaw Township	Thursday, January 11th	
RODDY BENNETT'S STORE—Exum		10:00 A. M. to 10:30 A. M.
RANDOLPH LONG STORE—Ash		11:00 A. M. to 11:30 A. M.
ERNEST MILLIGAN STORE—Ash		11:45 A. M. to 12:30 P. M.
Lockwoods Folly Township	Friday, January 12th	
GALLOWAY'S STORE—Varnumtown		10:00 A. M. to 10:30 A. M.
BUD TINDALL'S STORE—Silver Hill		11:00 A. M. to 11:30 A. M.
C. ELWOOD FULFORD STORE—Supply, Rt.		11:45 A. M. to 12:15 P. M.
R. E. BELLAMY'S STORE—Shallotte		1:15 P. M. to 2:30 P. M.
J. M. PARKER'S STORE—Supply		2:45 P. M. to 3:15 P. M.

Payments May Be Made At Office In Southport Now!
D. H. HAWES, Tax Collector For Brunswick County
Southport, N. C.

Distributed In This Area By
Electric Bottling Co., Inc.
WILMINGTON, N. C.

The Board of Equalization and Review will meet at the Tax Office at Southport on March 19, 1962. Any complaint about Valuation should be taken before the Board at that time.
Please List Your Property With The List Taker In Your Home Precinct.
RESSIE R. WHATLEY
Brunswick County Tax Supervisor