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Letter From Burnsville,

'A Mighty Good Town'

(Reprinted from the Greensboro Daily News, Sunday, August 1st.)

BY: W. C. BURTON

This is being written from Burnsville, which is in the heart and seat of Yancey County, and the heart and seat of much of my affection Burnsville is a real mountain town with real people. It is not one of your quasi-quaint gifte-shoppe mountain towns

Some tourists come here, the lucky ones who have learned its charms, the perceptive ones who have chosen this place above the resorts that look like a transplanted slice of Coney Island. A moderate quota of Yankee arteries are hardening here — and very nice people their owners are I must say.

A few disconsolate gall bladders and superannuated city livers are re-ting here in the abodes of the summer citizens. In the main, though, this is a healthy, normal, mighty good town, going about its daily chores with no fuss and feathers and accomodating the newcomers into the pattern of life with an easy, off-hand hospitality and a natural friendliness.

Quality Of Familiarity

It is a pattern which has changed as much as need be (which is not so much at all) with the years. It has a quality of familiarity, a sense of deep-rooted solidity which is eternally comforting. There are some ways here that haven't changed since the first hardy settlers moved in through the craggy pass and stood looking in wonderment at Mount Celo and the crest of Mount Mitchell in the distance and the broad, rich, rolling Celo Valley and said "This is far enough. This is where I will cut my logs and build my house for there can be no more beautiful country farther on. This is a good place to live."

I suppose the automobile and silk-smooth roads, and television and silk-smooth tongues, and other such miraculous evils will homogenize the whole world one day. Then it will be the ghastly experience of all men to look around them and see nothing except the mockingly monotonous image of themselves, mirrored and remirrored for as far as the eye can see and travel.

For a while, however, some places offer a sanctuary from the foolish movements

and noises of the world and Burnsville is one of them.

There have been some changes with the passing of time, of course, and not all changes are bad. As far as modern conveniences, the pleasant, useful and salubrious aids of 20th century civilizations are concerned Burnsville is as well fixed as any place you'll find.

Put Burnsville and a big city—any big city—toe to toe and add up the score. The big city has more people in less space. The big city has more noise, smoke, dirt, ugliness, violence, greed, hustle, hokum and ulcers. I'll take Burnsville, a place where you bathe your eyes in beauty every time you open them.

Of changes there are all kinds, some of them inevitable. Some are glad changes. Some are sad. I have been coming up here every summer for almost 20 years and I've seen quite a few take place.

The first show I ever appeared in at Parkway Playhouse, its very first season and that was 19 seasons ago, was Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." Many Burnsville citizens took part in it. Among them were Bill and "Ginny" Banks, a good-looking newly married couple. Bill played "Doc" Gibbs and Ginny helped with technical work and was on the book.

She Was The Star

This season their daughter, Sherry Lisa Banks, was a star of the opening show. She played the child Helen "Kelle" in "The Miracle Worker" and turned up a remarkably compelling performance of this exceedingly difficult role. A lovely little girl with flowing blonde hair, Sherry Lisa is definitely a glad change. (I'm privileged to note that Bill and "Ginny" are still a good-looking couple.)

In some Burnsville friends, M's. C. R. Hamrick, Dover Fouts, Grady Bailey, Rush Wray, Mrs. Frank Lewis, (the excellent Exum), Bruce Westall, (dapper cousin of novelist Tom Wolfe) the Ray Brothers and some others, I can detect little or no change.

Glad And Sad Changes

"Bunny" Bennett, the cute gal in the light booth this year, is another glad change. She's the daughter of Mark Bennett, the state legislator, and Lib Bennett, also of that "Our Town" cast.

The sad changes include



Mrs. Grace Banks, Secretary to Chamber of Commerce, is shown on the Church wagon at the Crafts Fair here Saturday.



Gordon Bennett, director of the Parkway Playhouse

Mrs. Arney Fox, Editor
The Yancey Record
Burnsville, N. C.

Dear Mrs. Fox:

Tonight the Parkway Playhouse will close its curtain on the 1965 summer season — its nineteenth consecutive schedule of "straw-hat" entertainment in Burnsville — and by this weekend the theatre group will have dispersed to their homes, north and south.

Each of us, living within his individual world of experience, has many treasured memories of the past summer in Burnsville and its many cordial friendships. We want to tell you and all the people of Burnsville how grateful we are for your friendship and cooperation in all our problems, year after year. Without your help we would not be able to carry on our summer programs, including the Arts and Crafts Festival which is increasingly successful with each annual repetition.

Dr. Harry Greene, our Playhouse sculptor and craftsman who has taken on the hard task of managing the fair, asked me to express to you and all the other persons who were such a big help to him this year his heart-felt gratitude. He noted especially the continuous and varied entertainment provided by Mrs. Ernest (Eloise) Briggs, chairman of the fair's entertainment committee. This was the best entertainment program we have ever had.

In addition to all the entertainers and craftsmen who participated in the fair, Dr. Greene wants to register a great big "Thank you!" to Charles Weston, retired performer, who announced the events with such professional skill and humor and sincerity. Also, his wife who worked at his side, handling the microphones and recorders, from morning until late afternoon.

Finally, we want to thank The Yancey Record for its splendid coverage of all the productions and events at the Playhouse, including the children's play and the special concert we staged for the youngsters in the "Head Start" program. Your valuable aid let all Burnsville and the neighboring counties know what we were trying to accomplish at the Playhouse. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gordon R. Bennett
Executive Director

ANNUAL DECORATION

The annual decoration at the Bailey Cemeteries will be held Sunday evening, August 15 at Uper Jacks Creek.

Exit Union Suit

With all the doings about civil rights, Viet Nam, and Pres. Johnson twisting the arms of Congress, little wonder the news out of Needham Heights, Mass., didn't get the play it rightfully deserved.

So let's try to square things up by calling special attention to the William Carter Company's announcement that the 100-year-old outfit is going out of the union suit business.

Back in the era before and after the turn of the century, the company was a leading manufacturer of union suits. They made them of silk, wool and cotton, and every man wore them, especially in the winter. There were two events a year for a man; when he put them on in the fall and in the spring when he took them off.

But now, the company says, boxer shorts, t-shirts and briefs are the thing and you can hardly pay a man to wear union suits unless he's going hunting, and then he doesn't want an ordinary kind. He wants the special thermal jobs.

the passing of Ed Whetstone, the merry elf of a man who was a primitive artist with many materials from gourds to root carvings. Ed, who poured his love for these hills into sentimental but sincere verse, died last summer.

This summer there were two more missing. Malcolm ("Mike") Ross died suddenly last spring. Once the director of the University of Miami press bureau, Mike was a summer resident of Burnsville. Unwittingly and unwillingly he once injured some local feelings by writing a somewhat too folksy- quaint piece about Burnsville for the National Geographic. He had just completed a book on North Carolina's Cape Fear River for the distinguished Rivers of America series.

Virgil Lusk Edwards, Printer and legend maker, died last March 18 at the age of 86. Author, editor, philosopher and individualist as well as a master craftsman at the printing press, Lusk Edwards was a man about whom I shall have more here later.

Be there a man in his upper years who doesn't remember when the weather turned cold how he reluctantly put on a pair of long handles? And be there a man in his later years who equally doesn't remember with what great joy when spring came around so he could get out of them.

Something else went along with the union suits, too, and that was a pair of high top, lace-up shoes; some had eyes, others had hooks. The ones with the hooks could be laced up faster than the bat of an eye. They, too, have all but disappeared from the scene. And there was something of an art in the way a man folded the bottom leg of the long drawers so that it would fit into the top of the shoe.

And who can possibly forget the Saturday night baths during the winter months? A fellow had worn, believe it or not, his union suit for several days, and Saturday night was the time to pull

out the wash tub, lock everyone out of the kitchen, and crawl into the tub after it had been filled with warm water from the tea kettle on the old wood stove over in the corner of the kitchen.

The bath finished, a fellow stepped out on the cold, cold floor to shiver and wipe, and wipe and shiver until he was dry. Then from a nearby chair, he grabbed a fresh, clean pair of long handles and jerked it on as fast as possible.

A fresh suit felt good. The cotton knap warmed the body and stimulated a fellow to dash out of the kitchen, through the long, cold hallway to the bedroom there to crawl into a featherbed on a cold night to snooze away. Pajamas? Man, no! The old union suit was about the only pajamas a fellow had, unless it was a night gown, which wasn't near as warm as a union suit.

We think things are streamlined today. Huh, nothing was as streamlined as a pair of long handles after they had been worn for a while.

Regret the passing of the union suit? Are you kidding?