

Ain't nothing like being trend-setter

Ed Henry Smith, the bearded gent who writes a weekly Tar Heel history column for us, will be seen driving around town in what appears to be a 1956 Dodge in mint condition along about next week.

But, looks will be deceiving. Actually, what Ed will be driving in is a 1979 Checker Marathon, good for about 30,000 miles. It's called the Marathon because it is a long distance runner.

There are only about 500 sold to civilians each year, although about 5,000 of the vehicles are manufactured annually.

What happens to the others? People pay to trade them. They are called Checker Cabs.

That's right. Checker Cab Co. manufactures its own vehicles in Michigan, using the dies the company purchased from Dodge.

The dies are of the 1956 model Dodge cars.

"The ones the company sells or leases to the public have everything on them, but the checkered doors and meters," Ed said. "My dad and I are leasing for our textile company. We put in the order about three months ago and all the car lacks now is the government sticker."

Ed will be traveling in high company since William F. Buckley and the Governor of Illinois also drive Checker Marathons. The car is being leased through Checker Cab Co. of Durham and Wade Tynes of Wade Ford is handling the arrangements for the Smiths.

Ain't nothing like being a trend-setter, eh, Ed?

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Speaking of cars, I do believe I am the owner of the toughest Mustang Ford ever

made. Mine is a 1968 model. It's that banged up, dirty light (very light) blue job you've seen me pushing around town ever since I came here over five years ago.

Once in awhile something will go wrong with that little jewel. Nothing major, mind you, just some little something; like the transmission fluid will leak out, oil will screw up my spark plugs, a breather hose will stop breathing, etc.

Bushings in the ball joints go bad now and then and when it's rolling it sounds like thousands of fingernails being scratched across a blackboard and the radiator has sprung a leak or two.

People like to make fun of my Mustang. I remember several years ago when snow fell fast and deep and people who laughed at my Mustang found their own vehicles bogged down. Not my Mustang. I just threw her into reverse and climbed all kinds of hills without any sweat.

Recently I took the Mustang to a garage (I



TOM McINTYRE

ain't gonna say where 'cause everybody will want to go there) to have about 15 things checked out. I know some of the things were wrong and others I only worried about.

The mechanic is a busy gent so I told him he didn't have to be in a hurry.

He kept it for four weeks exactly. And he did a little something here and a little something there, put a new gismo over yonder and tightened up an old gismo down there.

"But you still ain't told me what causes that groaning noise when I brake the car on a righthand curve," I said.

"Nothing visible," he said. "Just old age, I guess."

"Turn an automobile you can't drive but 142,000 miles without something breaking down on it," I said.

"Ain't it the truth," the mechanic said. The bill for all that work and all that time? \$120.

And in case you think the mechanic is a shade-tree boy, forget it. He builds stock cars (that win) from the ground up, too.

EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

Attend public hearing

The city is now in its fifth and final year of Community Development Block Grant funding and tonight the city commissioners will hold a public hearing to determine how the final hold-harmless fund will be spent.

The city was original designated to receive over a five-year period, \$4,160,000. This final year's CD funding is \$338,000.

As in the past four years, citizens and groups with community project ideas are asked to attend the public hearings to place their ideas into the record.

The meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p. m. at city hall.

Bypass gets underway

Believe it or not, the long-awaited Hwy. 74 bypass is about to get underway.

The first phase bid letting has been scheduled for Mar. 27 on a 4.8 mile stretch beginning near Bethware School west of the city limits.

First approved back in the 1960's, the bypass soon became a joke because nothing was ever really accomplished toward getting the rights-of-way and construction. The route even reportedly changed twice before settling in on its present course.

The projected \$45-million four-lane freeway has had its good and bad points; good in that it will relieve a great deal of traffic congestion in downtown Kings Mountain and bad that the bypass route has meant disrupting couple of hundred lives and the loss of vitally needed housing in this city.

Although N. C. Highway Transportation Office officials cannot project a definite completion date for the entire project, they do estimate the end to be in 1983. It is only a guess, just as the estimate made over a year ago by a highway commissioner that the end would be in 1982.

High-rise is promised

Kings Mountain has been promised a high-rise apartment by spring of 1980.

High-rise in its usual connotation is something like the NCNB building in downtown Charlotte or the Trade Center twins in New York City. But here in the historical city, "high-rise" means five stories — a mere 50-feet.

But, with the exception of the old Masonic building in downtown Shelby, the proposed Mountain View Towers complex for elderly will be the tallest building in Cleveland County.

What the building will mean to this community, no matter what size it is, is as important as any skyscraper ever erected in any city. It is scheduled to rise in an area of the city known in redevelopment terms as R-96 and this former dense residential section can certainly use the people now that numerous substandard homes have been demolished and the former occupants scattered to the four winds.

William Gilbert of Greenwood, S. C., Mountain View Towers developer, should be commended for his belief in the potential of this city and his willingness to invest so much time, planning and capital to benefit, of course his firm, but more importantly the senior citizens of Kings Mountain.

What's your opinion?

We want to hear your opinion on things of interest to you. Address all correspondence for this page to Reader Dialogue, Mirror-Herald, P. O. Drawer 752, Kings Mountain, N. C., 28086. Be sure and sign proper name and include your address. Unsigned letters will not be published.



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By ANN McADAMS Special To The Mirror-Herald

The Film-Flam Man is alive and well and up to his old schenanigans.

North Carolina State University English Professor Guy Owen published his "Ballad of the Film Flam Man," the first of two books about con artist Mordecai Jones, in 1965.

"Thirteen years ago I had no idea that Mordecai Jones would still be alive. Yet the 20th Century Fox film version starring George C. Scott is on TV somewhere practically all the time and the stories keep going."

Con artists who are now prisoners write Owen, and he declares he is "widely read at San Quinton." He has said that he has even gotten phone calls from con artists on their way through Raleigh who wish to tell him their life stories.

Owen has a new Film-Flam Man short story in the September-October issue of "Tar Heel" magazine and another scheduled to appear in "Tar Heel" early next year. He also has one coming out soon in the "Sanddapper," a magazine published in Columbia, S. C.

SHORT STORIES

In addition, he is now publishing a book of short stories called "The Film Flam Man" and "Other Stories," to appear next year. The book contains selections about the Film-Flam Man and his guitar-strumming sidekick Curley, as well as more serious

stories.

A musical comedy based on the first book of film-flam stories is being performed around the South, primarily by schools and little theatre groups.

On a recent Sunday, the movie version of the "Film-Flam Man" was shown on television.

How does he like the movie?

"Well, I liked George C. Scott and I liked all the minor characters. But I have the feeling that here I spent a year and a half writing the book and the movie script writer took one month and they spent two months shooting it. They only used about a fifth of the novel. The movie is certainly not my novel."

But, he added, "I don't like to see my characters die. As long as they're not being violated too much in another medium, such as film, I like to see them live on."

Owen said the movie was filmed in Kentucky rather than the Eastern North Carolina in which the book is set because North Carolina was too flat and the Cape Fear River too muddy. "The company (a distillery at which part of the movie was filmed) gave them all tremendous supplies of whisky. I imagine they were too drunk to shoot after that," he said with a laugh.

SOUTHERN VERNACULAR

Owen said "The Ballad of the Film-Flam Man" was greatly revised before its publication because his New York editor had a hard time understanding the Southern

vernacular in which it was written.

"I had to surrender a good deal of the flavor of the language because we were trying to get a mass audience rather than just a Southern audience," he said. "I am not saying the book was butchered, but you have to make compromises when you're working in the oral, Southern tradition as I am."

Owen has a collection of Southern poetry — which he edited with his NCSU colleague Dr. Mary C. Williams — coming out in the fall of 1979, and he said it illustrates the Southern tradition.

Entitled "Contemporary Southern Poetry: An Anthology," it follows "Contemporary Poetry of North Carolina," also edited with Dr. Williams, and published last year.

Owen, who has published three volumes of poetry, said he is "almost obsessed" with getting down the flavor of old-time Southern speech before those who speak it die. Some folklorists collect colorful phrases and publish them in alphabetical lists but he prefers to publish them in a narrative context, he said.

He picked up much of the Southern speech he uses in his film-flam stories "at my father's crossroads store and by working as a kid in tobacco warehouses." (He was born in 1925 in Clarkton, N. C., the town he calls Clayton in his film-flam stories). "Some of it came from two and a half years in the Army. And part of it I researched."

MARK TWAIN INFLUENCE

He is influenced heavily by Mark Twain and Paul Green, in their use of Southern speech patterns.

His more serious novels — which he likes to write in between his comical books — include "Season of Fear" and "Journey for Joedel." He has written another serious novel which has not yet found a publisher. It is about "the coming of World War II to the class of 1942 in my hometown" and is primarily set in the shipyards of Wilmington, where the young men who are his main characters work.

Were his serious works easier to write than the film-flam stories for which he is best known?

"Much easier. I'm more at home writing serious things. Comedy is very hard to write and I find very few of my students writing comedy." Owen teaches creative writing at NCSU.

"What strikes you as being absolutely hilarious might strike me as not being so funny," he explained.

Owen said he rarely discusses work in progress. He said it is important "to let the book build up" and not disperse energy talking of the book out rather than writing it out.

"My wife used to type my novels," he said, but added that he found out "she was censoring me as she went along. Little things she thought were risque would disappear." She no longer types his novels.

Body displayed over debts



ED SMITH

As late as the 1820's North Carolina had an unusual and gruesome law on its books, and during this week in 1826 one of the state's most outstanding early governors became its most famous victim.

Unsatisfied creditors could, by obtaining a writ, force the heirs or relatives of a recently deceased person to have his corpse placed on public display until his bills were paid. In a time when personal honor was a matter of deepest concern this was regarded as a particularly humiliating fate (and it may well have prevented many a literal "deadbeat".)

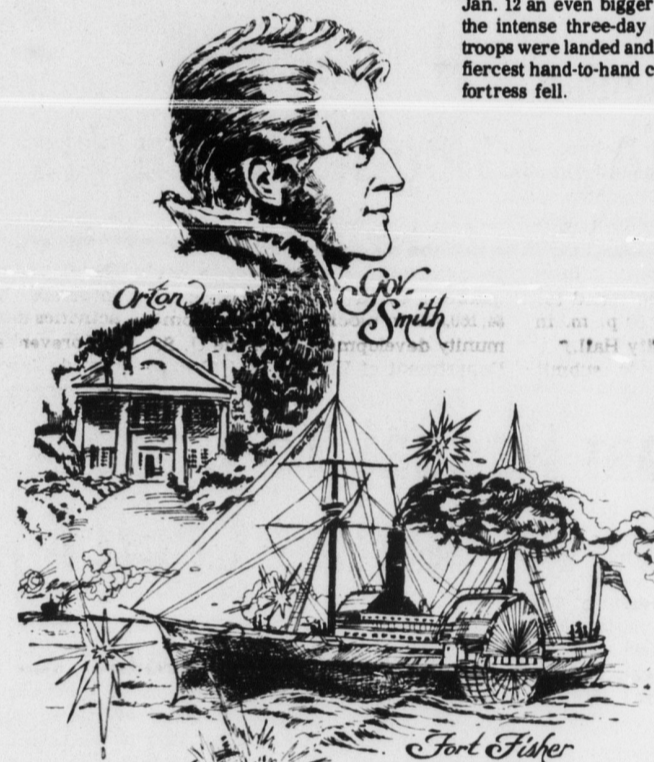
In January of 1826, however, former Governor Benjamin Smith fell victim to the law in an incident so gruesome that its publicity probably caused its long overdue repeal.

Though Smith had been one of the state's wealthier planters, he lost his fortune and died in debtors prison in Southport (which ironically was originally named Smithville in his honor.)

A generous but impulsive and hot-tempered man, he left behind many friends and enemies — and an imposing list of vengeful creditors. Hoping to avoid the humiliation of public display for unpaid debts (which could never be repaid) Smith's survivors had him quickly buried at St. Paul's Church near Wilmington. A group of frustrated creditors proceeded to get a writ anyway, then forced the exhumation of Smith's body and had it placed on display! Their action backfired, however. Such ghastly treatment of one of North Carolina's most famous citizens created a

scandal of statewide proportion, and the law was soon repealed.

Smith served as Governor in 1810-11, and his efforts at upgrading the state militia had left North Carolina far better prepared to meet a British threat during the War of 1812. He was an early advocate of public education, and as Governor gave the state's economy a boost by pushing for the adoption of more industry and manufacturing. Smith was on the largest donor in the establishment of the University of North Carolina, and an early owner of Orton Plantation. Though one of the state's most colorful founding fathers, he is almost totally forgotten today.



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On January 12, 1865, Union forces began an all-out assault upon Fort Fisher. Three days later, after the heaviest naval bombardment ever seen in the Western hemisphere, the fort was overwhelmed.

Situated near the mouth of the Cape Fear River, Fort Fisher had been called the "Gibraltar of America". Its capture sealed off Wilmington, the last important seaport available to the Confederacy and rendered certain the defeat of an already badly-weakened Confederacy.

A huge Federal fleet had attacked the fort on December 24, but their assault, like many earlier ones, had been beaten off by Colonel William Lamb and the fort's defenders. On Jan. 12 an even bigger fleet returned. After the intense three-day bombardment Union troops were landed and following some of the fiercest hand-to-hand combat of the war, the fortress fell.