

James Martin, another craftsman and businessman with many long-standing friends departed our midst last week. James, for several years operated a furniture store here for Miss Minnie Barker and later had his own television and electronic shop. In earlier years he was among several from this area who worked for R. G. LeTourneau Company in Toccoa. He especially was helpful to many youngsters in the area who had an interest in mechanical and electrical toys. His collection of toy trains is legendary and covered several rooms upstairs at his home where this miniature railroad would actually “run through the walls” from one room to another. He was a great and wonderful helper to many youngsters. He had the rare ability to communicate with them on their own terms and level. There was no small accomplishment. His presence in this community will be greatly missed by many who were friends and associates on a personal and business level.

January 6, 1993

### **Time of Year for Sears Catalogs**

It was noted with interest recently that Sears may close up to 100 stores. The history of this leading retail firm means many different things to many people—especially those who are old enough to recall some of the 1930’s and 40’s.

Just about this time each year, the whole nation was covered with Sears catalogs for most of this century. It was a ritual that was anticipated with some delight. Many depended on this source for information and supply.

My father, the late C.R. Hunt, carried mail as a city carrier during much of this time, and I am old enough to remember his individual struggles with his job during Sears “catalog time.” The rules of U.S. Postal Service have changed considerably since that era, but as I recall city delivery carriers were required to walk their entire routes each day. If there were Sears catalogs, which could weigh up four or five pounds each, they, too, had to be hand delivered by the city mail carriers. It was one of the job requirements. So be it, if the carrier could only handle 20 or 25 catalogs in his back pouch along

with other mail to be delivered. He simply had to return to the post office and reload, distributing to customer in the order of the route. This was quite a challenge physically as well as mentally trying to keep the catalog delivery going along with other scheduled mailing.

Many people looked forward to the Sears catalogs for they reflected most everyday items consumed by America. Too, catalogs had utility to them beyond being a shopping tool. When new editions replaced old editions, the oldest ones were conveniently placed in outhouses where they were, perhaps, the forerunner of modern toilet tissue. This was an accepted fact of life throughout most of the South. In the early part of this century there were many rural homes that were not equipped with bathrooms and the convenience of running water. During the WPA days of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration in the 30's, anyone who did not have an outhouse considered adequate could apply for one to be built by WPA crew workers. A great many were constructed. Nearly all of them were equipped with Sears catalogs at some point.

While Sears did considerable expansion in post war years after WWII, many smaller towns were places where catalog orders were taken. Some of the larger metropolitan areas included stores in developing malls and shopping centers, but most people past 60 years old were more familiar with the regularly mailed catalogs. Two were especially big editions, Fall and Spring.

The late Walter Duckworth once told a story about a citizen living during this era of the "outhouse" toilets. The gentleman was doing "his thing" at one of the outhouses when he was suddenly bitten in a very private area by a black widow spider. The spider inflicted considerable pain and concern to the occupant who immediately rushed himself to the local doctor. He was treated for the bite, though it took him several weeks to recover. Once recovered, he encountered a lady in the community who heard he had been bitten and treated, but apparently, didn't know the exact location of the "bite." She kept pressing him to reveal the exact nature of the experience and further wanted to know exactly where the man was bitten.

Finally, in desperation, the man finally answered her pressing question: "Well, ma'am, the only way I can tell you for sure, so you'll understand is...if it had been you in that outhouse, you wouldn't have been bit!"

January 13, 1993

## **Beacon Continues to "Make Warm Friends"**

Beacon Mfg. continues to "get the job done" making blankets and bedspreads, etc., at the Oconee Mill plant here and in Swannanoa, NC.

The company's been doing that for a long time. The Oconee Mill presence in Westminster has long been an economic main-stay for the town and area. It continues in that capacity along with other growth in the immediate vicinity. However, the Oconee Mill plant is the largest employer within the city limits and has been for many years.

Many interesting people have been associated with the company over the years. The original founder of the company, the father of the late Charlie Owen, Sr., started the company about 100 years ago in New Bedford, Mass. The company was sold several years ago but continues to maintain the Beacon name and is reputed to be one of the largest manufacturers of blankets in North America. This is no small accomplishment when one considers the economic peaks and valleys of recent years.

While the Owen family continues a successful manufacturing operation in the Swannanoa Valley of North Carolina, it is independent of Beacon. According to Roy Luckadoo, a retired Weave Room manager who worked for both the Owen family and present owners of Beacon, the Owen plant in Swannanoa is being managed by a son of "Charlie Jr." Roy and his wife, Robbie, retired several years ago from the Oconee plant and about two years ago moved back to the Arden, NC area where they have more family members.

The stories that originated within the confines of Oconee Mill are nearly limitless. When the late T. Henry Wood moved to Westminster to be plant manager of Oconee Mill, it was a "yarn

mill." T. Henry did a lot of things progressively as time and economic conditions allowed. He helped expand the plant several times and was very active in promoting textile baseball with the Oconee Mountaineers team.

Later Plant Manager George Taylor made a considerable contribution to the plant's growth and stability as did Fred McGuffin who worked with great dedication during some severe economic crisis the company faced. Present manager Jeff Blair must also be doing things "right" since the company recently announced the purchase of nearly 90,000 square feet of additional warehouse. Of course, those who have been a part of the company will be correct to point out that it is the dedicated teamwork of the company employees that make the progress. The leadership can only lead when there is willing and able followers. It all boils down to the fact that every individual has responsibility and a vested interest in the company's success.

The story keeps coming to mind that was told to me years ago when the Owen family owned Beacon. The late T. Henry Wood was then plant manager. Periodically, Charlie Owen Sr. principal owner of the company would make a trip down to Westminster from the home office in Swannanoa, NC. Most of the time, officials at the plant here had advance notice of Charlie's departure from there and his expected time of arrival here. Thus, often preparation was made for his visit—such as additional sweeping, air-blown cleaning of machines, etc.

Charlie Sr., was not always formerly dressed in suit, coat and tie. As often as not he would be wearing clothing suitable for working a shift in any part of the plant. On this trip, he was able to arrive at the plant without any advance notice. He made his way to the back of the mill, went in unannounced and observed a worker busy blowing lint from a machine. According to the story, Charlie said, "Hey there, do you keep this place this clean all the time?"

"Oh, hell no," came the immediate reply. "The only reason I'm doing this today is because we hear there's going to be some big shot bosses visiting pretty soon and we want to look good."

Never revealing his identity, Charlie just shook his head and mumbled something like, “Yeah, I think I understand.”

January 20, 1993

### **Nothing is Constant—Except Change!**

A new President of the United States is scheduled to “take the helm” this week. He ran for office on a platform of “change.” He, too, has already experienced change. The campaign rhetoric—which is inherent of all politicians—will never reflect precisely what has been advocated. This is nothing new. We will probably always have politicians making promises that cannot be kept or shouldn’t be kept, perhaps. In a world climate that may threaten our national and individual well being, certainly a wise leader will make decisions needed to meet whatever challenges. Somewhere it was written, “A wise man may change his mind; a fool never does.” Regardless of one’s political preference, the United States has a new President and a new “team” whom we trust will make decisions in the best interest of the greatest majority. What has been said, what has been promised in campaigns, or whatever political philosophy is adopted should be put in perspective to reality. The guessing and hoping for better things to come is over. It is now decision time. The load will not be light nor easy to bear. The final burdens will somehow be born by each of us. Adversity will not disappear from our nation any more than it does from our individual daily lives. We are a strong and determined nation that can and will rise to the occasion of whatever is required. We can and will remain that way if we continue to “change” when it is necessary.

It was my privilege to meet with two interesting groups recently. The Oakway Senior Citizens hold monthly meetings at an activities building connected with Bethel Baptist Church. It has been several years since I had a chance to talk with many of these fine citizens. It occurred to me, as I observed these folk gathering to share a covered dish supper and great fellowship, that these moments of communication are truly precious. The experience of those gathered was meaningful and represented the very best of

what America is all about.

Another group with which I was privileged to meet is the Westminster Chamber of Commerce at the year ending director's meeting. This group has been able to do some things that were abandoned by others. They remain organized and active. They have endorsed and executed plans for promoting the town and area. Many have been successful. No doubt requiring hard work and thankless hours of dedication by its membership. Few organizations get things done without some hard "driving" by those dedicated to a cause. Obviously, it's much easier to "sit back" and observe than it is to make the wheels "turn." It's not always popular to make decisions and take action. Those involved are often the object of unjust criticism, but most accept that as a "part of the territory."

Retiring President Gresham Barrett has been at the "controls" of the Chamber for the past year and will be succeeded by Mrs. Billy Campbell. It should be an interesting year for all concerned and perhaps productive in promoting their program. Good wishes to all, and may your perseverance be rewarded. It is not often that I am able to quote Plutarch, but here's something he said: "Perseverance is more prevailing than violence; and many things cannot be overcome when they together yield themselves up when taken little by little."

Another fellow who made considerable contribution to our lives, Thomas A. Edison, said:

"If you get up at 7 o'clock and go to bed at 11 o'clock, you have put in sixteen good hours, and it is certain that you have been doing something all that time.

The only difference is that you do a great many things and I do one. If you took the time in question and applied it in one direction, you would succeed. Success is sure to follow such application.

The trouble lies in the fact that people do not have one thing to stick to, letting all else go."

January 27, 1993

## The “Cuckoo’s Nest” Remembered

If you saw the movie, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” you got a few glimpses of reality—whether you know it or not.

It was an experience I’ll long remember that happened just after WWII in the mid 1940’s. The place was a U.S. Navy hospital located on Lake Seneca near Geneva, NY, by the name of Sampson. It had been a Navy base constructed in connection with the war effort. After the war ended the base hospital had been converted into a facility to treat T.B. and other respiratory diseases.

I, along with hundreds of other Navy and Marine personnel, were confined and isolated there for treatment. The treatment then was primarily bed rest with a procedure known as pneumothorax and a few other surgical remedies. Streptomycin, a strong antibiotic was only in developmental stages, and was available in a very limited way to only a few patients.

Bedrest, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, was the main course of treatment for “active” T.B. patients. Many of those therein confined outwardly appeared to be strong and could hardly understand why they couldn’t be discharged and sent home. Others were not as fortunate. Some had deteriorated into skeletons and were assigned to the few private rooms located on one end of the open ward. There they either got better or eventually passed away if not transferred to a facility closer home.

It was a period of time when the government was trying to find a way to cope with post-war problems. The Marshall Plan for Europe and GI bill to help returning service people with education were just being implemented.

Those who had made it through WWII, many who had seen hard action, or like me, who simply got caught up in the effort only a few months before WWII ended, were all cast into this facility to fight this other battle for survival—namely T.B. Tuberculosis was then a known killer, a silent disease that often infected the lungs and sometimes other body parts, consumed energy and often life itself. It was and is a potential killer and is reported to presently be making a “comeback” as a killing disease with new strains of bacteria

that are “drug resistant.”

It was not a “fun thing” to be confined. To have been healthy in a prison environment would have been more desirable. But there we were, and nothing to do except “bed rest,” read, try to eat and sleep.

Holidays were particularly emotionally depressing. Everyone wanted to be out, but passes were rare and for most of us impossible. There was a back porch—properly called “solarium,” attached to the open ward. On this particular ward, two Marines occupied the beds there. One was a big man, Sgt. Garrison; the other a skinny Sgt. “Snake” Larkin. Somehow these two had access to an occasional pass. They also had a car that had been allowed in and out of the base that featured a hidden compartment which could conceal two cases of whiskey.

On occasion, the “solarium” was the ward’s bar operated by the two resident “bootleggers.” Those who were able and wanted to participate could buy “booze” and often did when the ward doctors were gone for the day, and especially during holidays.

A rather shapely and “busty” nurse named, “Maycheck” had the duty one day when the entire ward was under the influence of alcohol. Sgt. Garrison was near the center of the open ward of about 50 beds engaging Nurse Maycheck in conversation when Sgt. Larkin slipped behind her with one of the 3-wheel laundry buggies used for dirty linen collection.

Suddenly, the unsuspecting Nurse Maycheck was lifted off the floor by the giant Marine, Sgt. Garrison, and deposited in the buggy with her bottom down and feet sticking out. Sgt. Larkin then proceeded to push the screaming Nurse Maycheck up and down the open ward—that is until the officer of the day arrived and rescued her. No real harm done, but the experience remains deep in memory.

The Sampson experience was interesting if not always therapeutic. Too, I’ll always remember a lifelong friend, Roy B. Strickland, who made a real effort to visit me in this unusual hospital setting. It was no small trip those days to travel from here to there by train. Exhausting and inconvenient as it was, Roy didn’t pay much attention to those matters. He just came on up and a great moment of



reunion was perhaps the best medication that could have been administered at that time.

There is ample evidence, in fact, for a movie such as "Cuckoo's Nest." It is at least one movie that isn't totally without basis. Looking back, it was fun, but nothing one would care to repeat.

February 3, 1993

### **Oleta Marett Made Positive Contributions**

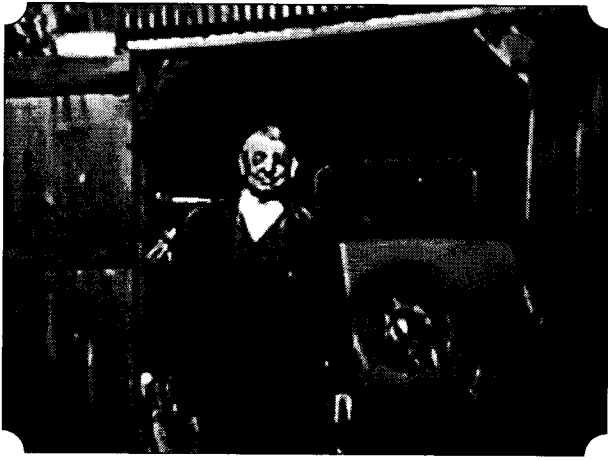
A phone call this week from a friend was a gentle reminder that Mrs. Oleta Marett, distinguished citizen, is soon to leave her home here for a retirement center in Laurens.

A "drop-in" in her honor is scheduled Sunday afternoon at the Town Depot by friends and colleagues in the Westminster Garden Club.

While Mrs. Marett has distinguished herself in this community and county, she also has been a successful parent, who, along with her husband, the late Elijah (Lige) Marett, raised three children. As a former teacher, she understood and stressed the need for training. All of their children graduated from college. Larry is now plant manager for Hyland Industries in Cheraw; Mary Alice and her husband, Robert Clayton, live in Conway, and Harriett Sue with her husband, Andrew H. Cross, live in Cayce.

Oleta has been active in the D.A.R. For many years she furnished this newspaper with articles and information regarding the chapter's activities. Always neatly written copy was the "norm" from Mrs. Marett's pen. She would have been a successful professional journalist if that had been a chosen endeavor. Indeed, she was always "up to the task" of reporting any event as easy reading.

Recently, the Walhalla Chapter of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, honored Oleta's 25 years of work with the D.A.R. at a luncheon. Oleta was born in Traveler's Rest, in Greenville County to Van Perry and Susan Green Ashmore, where they operated a farm and owned a grocery store. Her mother, Susan Ezerilla Green, is a descendent of Isaac Green, one of the fierce fighters for American Independence during the American Revolution.



*A.L. Gossett,  
founder of  
Westminster's  
Tugaloo Tribune in  
1909. Shown with  
his "B" Model Ford  
in 1936. Photo by  
Dr. W.C. Frierson  
from a 16 mm  
movie camera film  
strip.*



*Walhalla's Keowee Courier  
Editor Ashton Hestor, in  
foreground with Receptionist  
Jean Duncan at left.*

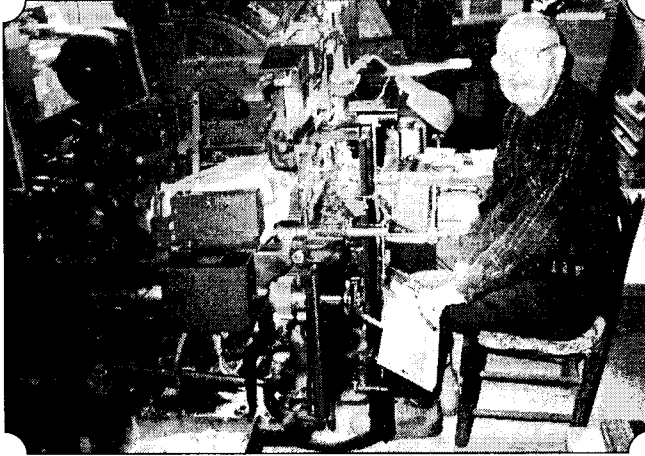


*Staff Members of  
The Westminster  
News and The  
Keowee Courier,  
l-r: M. Trotman,  
Jack L. Hunt and  
Tim Duncan*



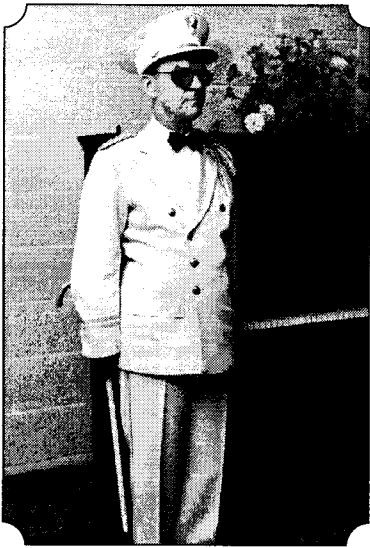
*Bill Burley (left) & Bill Carter (right) at Burley's Store, hold a high level session, West Union, SC*

*W.C. "Bill" Felder at his Linotype at the Felder Printing Company on Main Street. He was a former owner and publisher of the Tugaloo Tribune*

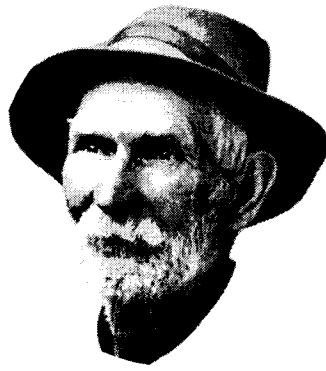


*Fred McGuffin (left) a former Plant Manager of Beacon's Oconee Mill plant in Westminster & Jack L. Hunt (right), the founder of The Westminster News in 1953, and a former owner and publisher of Walhalla's Keowee Courier.*

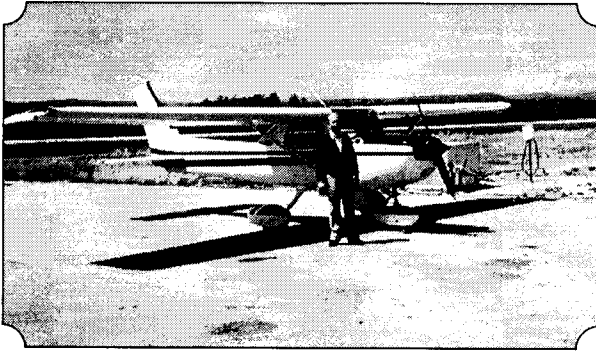




*Clarence Butts the first Bandmaster at WHS who was an outstanding musician though blinded by an accident in his early youth.*

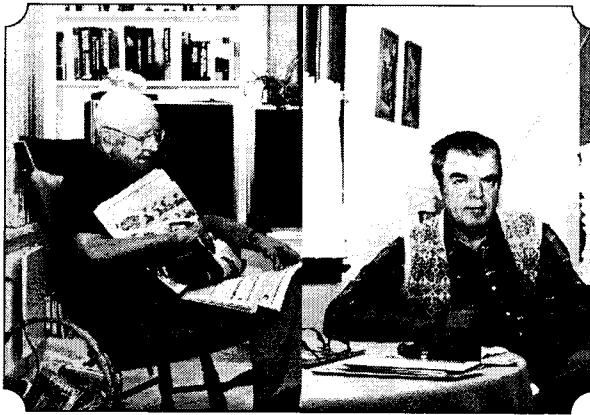


*Silas Butts, "Man of the Mountains" was known far and wide in Oconee County & South Carolina. He lived near Long Creek on Brasstown Creek.*



*W.J. "Bill" Watkins, classmate, was a "flying friend" and a pharmacist in Seneca. He is shown here at the airport in Toccoa with a Cessna 172*

*Doctor E. L. Shuler (left) and Doctor Henry L. Kuemmerer, Family Physicians to Westminster citizens for many years at the Westminster Medical Clinic on North Avenue*





*Roddy King of The Carpentry Shop  
at Beacon Mfg. Plant, Oconee Mill*



*Mrs. Sarah Fields Johns, Teacher  
at Westminster High School, and  
a valued instructor in many  
areas of expertise*



*Roy B. Strickland, Educator, Coach,  
a great friend and fisherman*



*J. Walter Duckworth, a great friend  
and Carpentry Shop Foreman at the  
Beacon Mfg. Plant, Oconee Mill*



*S.F. "Sam" Reeder - served as  
Mayor of Westminster for three  
terms and operated a store for  
74 years on Main Street. His  
wife, Mamie, was a teacher at  
WHS for many years.*

Mrs. Marett first taught school at Fair Play and moved to Westminster when she and Lige married. In early days she was principal and taught middle grades in the Clearmont community two-teacher school. Lige worked in the family business, the Marett Seed Farm, and Westminster Gin and Fertilizer, Co., that had been founded by his grandfather. Oleta also taught at Westminster schools where she taught all subjects in one room at a site near where the Westminster Middle School is located.

In addition to working full-time raising a family and teaching school, Oleta found time to operate a flower shop along with help from Lige.

Personally, I don't recall having Mrs. Marett as a teacher, but indeed, she may have been at some point. However, it is easy to remember that she and my mother, Alma D. Hunt, were friends and may have taught at some of the smaller schools in the county together. There were many one, two, three, and a few four-teacher schools in Oconee. Where we have one school district now, it wasn't so many years past when this county had their own set of trustees who were elected and could effectively hire and fire teachers. Teachers in those schools had many duties in addition to academic training. Many had to build their own fires in the heaters during winter, draw and bring in their own drinking water from the well, as well as rendering whatever health care they could administer along with a great effort to be fair and just in the care and learning process of children.

It was no small job. And the pay? When there were funds, the average small school teacher earned about \$60 per month, during the 1930's. At times, the money ran out and "script" was issued in lieu of pay, which, at some point, could be redeemed hopefully.

Mrs. Oleta Marett has experienced life when being a teacher and a mother was a great challenge mentally and materially. She has been highly successful in this and many endeavors. Her contributions have been good and positive. We can only wish for her, "Godspeed and Good Luck," as she leaves Westminster.

February 10, 1993

## **Fast Cat “Windsock” Took Off and Landed!**

Sometimes strange things happen at the airport. When the late R.G. LeTourneau built a steel plant near Toccoa, GA, he also built an airport on top of one of the nearby hills. It was there he tested much of the newly designed heavy equipment that could literally move many cubic yards of dirt in one sweep. Many were benefactors of R.G.’s efforts. The entire area grew. Schools and colleges were endowed; new businesses sprung up and there were many “spin-off” plants begun. Employment reached into the Carolinas from this plant in the 1930’s. A long list of successful business professionals could track their beginning effort to the “steel plant.”

The airport at Toccoa was the first in this area at that time and attracted many youngsters from Oconee County. The only place planes were landing in Oconee was in a grass field, not designed for planes, to the rear of the old Utica Mill near Seneca. Occasionally a “barnstormer” would fly into the field at Seneca, and anyone with \$2 could purchase a ride of about 15 minutes. At Toccoa, R.G. not only built the first dirt strip which is now runways 9 and 27, but he also constructed a big steel hangar that continues in use today. It was on this red dirt strip with the big hangar that many kids got their first “up-close” look at an airplane.

Several years before the present new hangar was built, there was a small office building near the old hangar where the fixed base operator or “caretaker” of the facility had a phone and handled fueling and other duties.

About 15 or so years ago, one of the caretakers at the field was Mr. Roy Perkins. Roy had retired from a regular job prior to taking on his duties at the airport. He needed something to do, according to the airport commission chairman, Ed Gilmer, and was persuaded to help out at the field. Roy’s wife, a red-haired math teacher at Toccoa High, had passed on, thus he had time “on his hands.” The job suited him. It gave him something to do and required more sitting, answering the phone and talking with locals, pilots and other “airport bums.” He seemed to thoroughly enjoy his job.

Stray dogs and cats migrate to airport property. One such stray

kitten took up residence with “Mr. Roy” at his office. The little kitten was of a mixed background, and featured one ear that had been precisely sliced off at about a 45 degree angle. It was perfectly cut, and Mr. Roy surmised that some young child with a new pair of scissors perhaps destined to be a surgeon, had probably operated on the cat.

The cat became known as “Windsock” and was everyone’s pet. Sometimes Mr. Roy and Windsock would stay late at the airport. It was one of these late summer nights that Windsock wandered away from the office and jumped into the back seat of Mr. Perkin’s car. A summer thunderstorm was building up, and there was little or no traffic in the area; it was time to close shop and go home about midnight.

Roy got into his old trusted car to drive home not aware that Windsock was on board. Leaving the hangar office and driving to the highway intersection, he stopped when a sudden clap of thunder followed a bright flash of lightning. Windsock, perched behind Mr. Roy in the back seat, came alive. Needing company, he jumped precisely to the shoulder of Mr. Roy where he “dug in” with his “brakes” for a perfect landing.

Roy said he was absolutely frightened beyond belief and admitted he would have gladly run if there had been available space. Both Mr. Roy and Windsock have now advanced to that great hangar in the sky where they’re probably watching “take-offs” and “landings” down here with amusement.

February 17, 1993

### **“Hitch-hikin” Dog, “Airport” and Snake Alive!**

Otis Mason reminded me of the local “hitch-hikin” dog that once lived here. I’m not sure that I remember this particular dog, but there have been a lot of dogs in my life, so it’s kind of easy to misplace one. Otis apparently knew this dog rather well, and perhaps picked him up during some of his appointed rounds. According to the story, this dog hung around the old ice house



when it was located somewhere in the vicinity of the store building of NAPA on East Main Street.

At that time, during the 30's and 40's, ice for residents of Westminster was manufactured in Seneca and transported to a storage ice house here. The same was done for Walhalla residents. This "hitch hikin'" dog, according to Otis, developed an affinity for catching a ride to and from the Westminster and Walhalla locations. Usually, he would simply jump in back of the ice truck if the driver stopped near him and would enjoy the ride to and from Westminster or the other points to the next town. Traffic was not heavy back then and cars and trucks could safely pick up hitch-hikers, including dogs that were well-known. Otis said this particular dog learned the art of catching a ride. He would sit patiently by the roadside until a friendly driver stopped to take him to the next town. He became known as the "Hitch-hikin'" dog and those who knew him would stop and let him board the vehicle for the ride.

Rae Cain, retired peace officer, called the other day and wanted to know if I remembered "Airport," a little white dog that hung around the field in Toccoa. Part of the time when Roy Perkins was at the office near the old hangar building, both "Airport" the dog and "Windsock" the cat were on the premises. "Airport" just sort of happened up there and became a part of the legendary list of animals that made friends with airport personnel. "Airport" appointed himself the official "greeter" of all landing aircraft at the Toccoa airport. He made his way to the planes as they taxied to the gas pumps or hangars. He was a small dog with perhaps some eskimo spitz in his background.

An interesting thing developed one day at the old hangar office when Hank Martin, the present fixed base operator, flew over to Greenville to pick up a package for Dr. Jim Pickens, an OB doctor at Toccoa. This event happened several years ago when Hank first became the FBO. The package was in the form of a box, and the box had been shipped via air express from Texas to Greenville. The old office was a small space in a trailer. Outside the trailer was a small deck area with steps.

As I recall, Hank brought the box into the office, and placed it

on the floor beside Mr. Perkins' desk. A call was placed to Dr. Pickens' home to advise him that his package had arrived. Soon, he and two of his small children arrived and excitedly anticipated opening the box.

Standing in the office at this time was Mr. Pierce Short, Sr., now deceased, of Clarkesville. Mr. Short, past 70 years of age, had his back turned when Dr. Pickens and his children opened the box. He had no idea that it contained a pet boa constrictor. Dr. Pickens removed the snake, about 9 feet long, draped it around his neck, much to the pleasure of his children. However, when Mr. Short turned around to see what all the fun was about he simply spotted Pickens with the snake around his neck. No time was wasted, Mr. Short bolted out the door, not taking time to use the steps, he flashed by several airport "bums" like a high school track star and didn't even stop to look back until he was on the other side of runway 27. He simply explained that he was frightened by any kind of snake, pet or otherwise, and wasted no time in putting distance between him and the reptile.

February 24, 1993

### **Transporting "Bootleg" Was an Industry**

It's rather amusing to me to observe the "fuss" over whether or not cash payoffs should be legally allowed in South Carolina regarding video poker machines. Whether or not you believe gambling should be legal, immoral, and outlawed is a moot point. We have it now; we've had it in the past, and we'll have it in the future. You can bet on it. The only question is whether or not it will be taxed and/or regulated.

This reminds me of an experience in more youthful days that stuck in my memory. There was a time before industry, welfare, income tax, social security, and all the other so-called "safety nets" of society, when many good people struggled to make a living in this area. The little farms were just barely good enough to keep a family alive. Some of them could hardly do that. In the foothill mountains of the Piedmont, it was tough, and further up in the hills

it was even tougher for many. Of necessity, some felt they needed a better cash flow. For a few, who knew the art and who put forth the effort, making a few gallons of illegal liquor became a way of life. Some did this with great discretion, and prior to the liquor laws, it wasn't illegal. But after the government discovered this was a good business to tax, if you didn't go by their rules, you were considered outside the law. While some illegal stills made "good stuff" in sparing amounts, others went after business in wholesale fashion. Thus the industry of transporting illegal booze was born. Fast, hot-rod, souped-up, speedy cars were called to duty. Except for a place for the driver to sit, most of them were stripped down to accommodate cases of moonshine. The cars were fast and the drivers fearless. It was not only a business necessary for the movement of large amounts of illegal liquor in the 20's, 30's, and 40's; it was also the beginning of what is now heralded as "stock car racing." These drivers, then as now, ran for different reasons, but to outrun the competition was the goal.

The big difference was the liquor car drivers were challenged by the law officers who often chased them or put up road blocks when they had received a "tip." Sometimes the law won, the drivers were arrested, the booze brought to a local police station or the county sheriff's office and poured out publicly. It was a great public relations stunt that actually showed the law of the land being enforced. Usually, the amounts caught and destroyed were probably only a drop in the bucket compared to the total production.

Returning from Clayton, GA one Sunday afternoon in the 40's, I had a first hand encounter with a driver in the transporting business. It was all by accident. The present paved road from Chattooga River was not in existence. There was a little winding dirt road that crossed two small branches. Coming from a weekend with friends on Lake Burton as I approached an area where the road crossed a branch, I saw a car stopped, the hood raised, and a man I knew and recognized. He was a citizen who had lived in the Westminster area and was generally well-respected. He had operated several businesses, apparently was successful, and did not have a reputation of personally "drinking" but had been linked to some transportation

difficulties. I did not look inside his car until I had helped him with a minor problem under the hood. His steering wheel gear shift had slipped loose from the rod connection, thus he was stranded. We rigged the shift rod, and the driver was getting back in the car when I happened to look inside. The vehicle, except for the driver's seat, was stripped and neatly packed with cases up to window-level.

Had the "law" conveniently come along at that time, no doubt I would have been charged as an accomplice...which I was, by accident.

The gentleman I assisted that day has long since departed this earth. He was considerably older than I, but he never failed to thank me for helping him get his car going each time I met him thereafter. He even tried to pay me for the assistance, but I always considered the fact that I was successful in getting away without any problems as reward enough.

The experience was burned deep in memory. By the way, economics, not the law of the land, by and large did away with the most of the illegal liquor stills and the transport business it created. It just ain't safe anymore and hardly worth the effort.

March 3, 1993

### **"Ole Gene" Told 'Em About Sears**

It's going to be a different USA without the big Sears Roebuck catalogs. Supposedly, the present edition of the winter/spring edition will be the last one. Cutting out 50,000 jobs, they say, 'cause they've been losing money...in the catalog order business.

When the South was largely rural, and especially South Carolina and Georgia, there wasn't a complete household without a Sears catalog. The "wish book" many called it. It was here you could see pictures and illustrations of just about everything. Many people had no immediate access to towns and cities. Sears was their supermarket. It was here they could select, in the privacy of their home, just about anything and even pay for it with "time payments."

It was this big book that brought the world to the doorsteps of rural America, and did further service as an "outhouse" supple-

ment. Back when the Talmadge family ranked high in Georgia politics, “Ole Gene” use to hit the stumps in rural counties as he campaigned for Governor and later the U.S. Senate. He would usually snap his red suspenders—a Talmadge trademark—rare back and let the folks know they really only had three friends they could depend on...God, Sears Roebuck, and “Ole Gene” Talmadge.

Since “Ole Gene” is no longer with us, and Sears is about to discontinue the “big book” catalog, it looks like we’re going to have to rely more on the only other friend left.

He never pretended to be an expert, but “Ole Gene” knew math. He could “out-figger” them city slickers with no pain and little strain. It was during the days when Georgia elected their officials with a county unit system vote. The smallest populated county had two unit votes. The largest—usually Fulton County—had only six votes. By staying on the “good side” of rural counties, a candidate could take three small ones and “wipe out” one big one. It worked wonderfully well for many years until the system changed. Some would argue we’ve been going “downhill” ever since.

The late Joe McCarey, a once-elected and once-dismissed Supervisor of Oconee County, reminded me of the way “Ole Gene” campaigned. He once proposed using giant fans at the mouth of Stumphouse Mountain tunnel to “air condition” the county. A colorful and talented speaker, Joe once compared our tax system in Oconee and in Columbia to a farmer with a cow. In essence, he said it was like the farmer owning, feeding and caring for a cow in Oconee County, but they’re milking her in Columbia, he explained, and only sending back a little trickle of “blue john.”

A distinguished editor Lawrence “Slim” Hembree, passed away this week. From 1938 to 1978, he worked for the Anderson newspapers and was editor for many years of the *Independent*. Slim knew a lot about the newspaper business and understood people with their successes and failures. He had lived on both sides of the track. He never lost touch with the people he wrote about so eloquently. The *Independent* reached levels of circulation during his tenure that haven’t been equalled in recent history. If it happened, you could read about in the *Independent*—both Georgia and South

Carolina along the upper Savannah River valley.

A lot of things change quickly. No more “Ole Gene” politics, soon no more big Sears catalogs, and now Slim has departed for that Great Newsroom in the Sky. He was a great newspaper man, and while he was here, he did his damndest!

March 10, 1993

### **Snuff Dippin’, Tobacco Chewin’, and Liquor Drinkin’**

My Granny Hunt was a snuff dipper. She loved every minute of it. So it seemed. She was from Georgia and was Eugenia Johnson before she married my Grandpa. He was better known as “Biggie”—due to his size, but his real name was Leo. From whence came my middle name.

As a youngster, I recall many wonderful visits to their home. It was a small home, still in existence, just off the Long Creek highway.

Granny Hunt was better known to many as “Genie.” She was a little woman with great determination. She kept the small home in order and “saved” nearly everything. Old newspapers were neatly stacked, tin cans were stored, bits of string were kept. Flour sacks and feed sacks were valuable. She kept them and turned many of them into works of art as decorated quilts, etc. She was a busy woman, and she loved to dip snuff. It was here that I first introduced myself to the little tin can of “Society.” It had a very distinctive yellow label, different from the green label on the “Tuberose” box and the “Railroad” and “Bruton” cans. However, all were about the same size. When Granny dipped snuff it was in a very neat and unique way. She didn’t “wear it” all over her face. In fact, if you didn’t know her, you’d probably never suspect she was “using” snuff. The first time I tried this dusty looking stuff, I almost choked. Later, I found out you’re not supposed to eat it. Rather place it in a corner of the mouth. I never was very good at it, but I tried very hard.

Chewin' tobacco was not as complicated. My Grandpa and my Dad had mastered that art. It just seemed the thing to do for most men. To cut off a chew of "Brown Mule," "Days Work," or "Favorite" was just as natural as getting up every morning and putting on your overalls. Especially was it a handy pastime when working outside, cutting or bringing in wood, drawing water from a well or any of many chores. I could handle the more solid material of chewing tobacco much easier than the dusty snuff.

After several years of trying the chewing in sporadic spurts, I gave it up as an unhandy habit and eventually took up cigarette smoking and liquor drinkin' as a fitting substitute. This, too, led to a series of health problems, inconvenient schedules, nerve wracking "shakes" and a general deterioration of mind, body, and spirit. Having tried all of these vices plus a few more convinced me that if these were required of a successful existence, then I was hell bent and determined to fail. I couldn't handle them very well at all.

I was counseled many times by many good intentioned people to not get involved with these things, but really didn't listen very well. Only when I determined for myself that there had to be an easier route did I begin to understand. No one really has a bad habit "whipped." Yeah, they are still there. One can only hope to handle any problem—habit or otherwise—one day at a time. Yesterday is gone and will not change; tomorrow is only a promise. This is the only day we have for sure. And ain't it moving by fast.

March 17, 1993

### **Ed is "Slowing Down" at Watkins' Grocery**

Ed Watkins is looking "downhill" these days at Watkins' Grocery. He's been there nearly 40 years...perhaps longer than that if younger days are counted. He has worked and gone to school, too, as was once the custom in these parts, since he was a small boy.

However, this month has marked a milestone for Ed. Turning the magic age of 62, and seeing a continuing diminishing return on his investment, he says he is considering other options.

The store has been at its present location for many years—next

door to Moon's Drug Store and the former Sam Reeder building on the corner of Retreat and Main. For many years prior to that M.D. (Martin) Watkins, Sr. operated the business in the Whitmire building next door to the Felder Printing Company. The late M.D. Watkins, Sr. had a rather strong business there in the 1930's and 40's. The store not only handled a full line of groceries, but many feed and seed items. Customers would gather there consistently and many would have their orders delivered by truck. While Ed's father officially ran the business, he was also a noted "cattle trader." He spent a lot of his time in the cattle business and had others assisting in the store. One rather interesting employee was an older man, the late Mr. Perry Garner. Perry once ran for Sheriff of Oconee County, after having served as coroner, and many old timers, to this day, say he was actually elected, but got "out-counted."

Of course, all the Watkins boys worked at the store when they were not in school during those days. Including the retired M.D. (Jack) Watkins, Postmaster and now builder, and William (Bill) Watkins now a semi-retired pharmacist at Seneca. All of them learned the business from working experience. However, Ed decided to stay with the business when his brothers pursued other interests. He has done amazingly well to "carry on" this family business in the crunch of increasing competition from big super markets, and many other retail facilities that carry many of the same items.

Many of the older customers have now passed on, and Ed is faced with continuing problems of trying to operate a smaller business that requires more time and produces less profit. Through his management and ability to cater to many who survive on limited income checks, he has made it to this point, but says he plans now to gently "coast into retirement."

John Hoover, who has been working with Ed for years— "off and on"—since he was a small boy, has been an able assistant. The specialty in the Watkins' sandwich and deli department has won the attention of several food connoisseurs—including Dr. Henry Kuemmerer. Dr. Kuemmerer has said many times that Watkins' hot dogs are the best there is. No doubt, he is qualified to make this judgement. Dr. Kuemmerer is concerned about this excellent source



for hot dogs should Ed finally close the doors at Watkins.

Whatever happens, Ed and many associated with the business, no doubt will recall many interesting experiences at Watkins' Grocery. Ed has met a lot of different characters at this location who will surely miss him if he decides to "hang it up" for the duration. He has a host of friends who've depended on him for years.

March 24, 1993

### **Plentiful Supply of Idiots Remain**

If you've had to refer to "Roget's Thesaurus" to assist in word definitions, you may have noticed the term, "idiot" as a reference to imbecility, incapacity, vacancy of mind, poverty of intellect, shallowness, dullness, stupidity, obtuseness, stolidity, doltishness...just to name a few.

Perhaps it isn't wise to assign the term carelessly, since "finger-pointing" only reinforces the fact that your thumb is pointing back at the "pointee." Many of us may qualify at times to one or more of Roget's alternate terms.

The point this week concerns the *New York Post*. No doubt on TV you have noticed the special issue of the *Post* which featured its founder, Alexander Hamilton, shedding a tear. Then there were 14 pages or so of editorial content from the staff that didn't spare any barbs for the new publisher/owner. Abe, whatever his last name, came into possession of the *Post* through the bankruptcy courts. He graciously admits to knowing nothing of the newspaper business. However that didn't stop him from firing the entire news staff at one point. Then hiring them back. The paper, a New York tabloid, has been losing money for years. I've never figured out to this day how you can keep on "rolling along" when there isn't enough money to pay bills. They do a lot of things differently up there, but I always thought bankruptcy was the same, or nearly so, everywhere.

It is no secret that many so called "big" daily papers have "bit the dust" in recent years. Production costs plus sharing revenues with TV and many other advertising mediums have cut deeply. A few are winning but more are borderline in the profit area.

Probably, few, if any in Oconee County, really give a damn about what happens to a newspaper in New York. We have enough problems down here to attend to, and no one has “cornered the market” on idiocy, but this Abe, whatever his name, is making a strong pitch.

### **“Thirty” for Abner Hall**

No one knows for sure where the term, “30” originated but many reporters and editors have used it for years to end their stories. Last week, Abner Hall, a former editor of the *The News* and *The Courier* in Walhalla passed away.

For about eight years Abner handled the newspaper business here with great care and respect. He reported the news as he saw it with great integrity. Abner had a young family when he moved to Westminster in the late 60's and was active in many church and community affairs. He served on the Westminster City Council and was active in many civic and cultural activities.

As a publisher of the *Calhoun Falls Times* in Abbeville County, he moved back into that area when he left Oconee in the mid-70's. Later, he ran for Treasurer of Abbeville County and has served in that capacity for a number of terms.

Being the editor of a rural weekly requires more than you can imagine; if you haven't been there, you'll never know. Someone once remarked that if there is a real “jewel of an idiot” within 10,000 miles, soon he'll make an extended visit to the local newspaper office.

Abner seemed to handle all the “cases” that came his way with ease. If he was ever in a hurry or disturbed, I never noticed. He did make a significant contribution to the the “Fourth Estate.”

His was a significant “30.”

March 31, 1993

## **Old Radios, Programs Long Remembered**

Time and the aging process does strange things to the human condition. Many experience the ability of detailed recall of an event 50 years ago, but find it a problem as to where one placed his glasses only 15 minutes ago. Walter Duckworth once commented that after he passed sixty years of age he spent half his time hunting his glasses and the other half looking for a bathroom. He came close to speaking the truth for many of us.

Through an inheritance not long ago we came into possession of an Atwater Kent radio. This may not mean much to the "jet-set" computer crowd today, but in the late 20's and 30's of this century, this was considered one of the "cadillac" entertainment centers.

Looking at it today, this one has a cabinet in good condition and appears that all the parts are there. This was once the centerpiece of a home. Those who were lucky enough to have a radio in the 1930's were privileged down here in the South. Not many stations were available here, and none locally. Most of the time radio listening was scheduled for late evening after all the day's work was completed, the wood or coal brought into fire the cookstoves, fireplace and heaters. Then, if you were lucky, and your wire antenna was stretched outside the house far enough, you could perhaps pick up "Lum and Abner" on WCKY in Cincinnati, Ohio, WSB Atlanta or WLW in New Orleans. Later on, there was WFBC in Greenville. The FBC part of the call letters stood for "First Baptist Church" so I've been told and was where the first broadcasting there originated for this station.

Further up in the eastern U.S. radio was going strong before it was commonplace down here. Special events would be broadcast such as World Championship Prize fighting. Presidential broadcasts, such as the famous "fireside chat" that Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated were important to expedite communication from the seat of government to the people. It was almost a family ritual to listen in to "Amos 'n' Andy" about 7 in the evening, along with "Lum an' Abner" later on and then those famous broadcasts that were especially appealing to youngsters, "The Lone Ranger."

Then there was the sensational newscaster, Walter Winchell, who was sponsored by Jergens Lotion. Lowell Thomas, perhaps the "Dean of Broadcasting" brought stability and reliability to reporting, and God help the young'un that interrupted listening when Lowell Thomas was "giving the news." Lowell was a famous announcer sponsored by "Blue Sonoco."

These old radios had a personality of their own. We had a cabinet model Crosley that could do very well at "picking up" those distant AM stations if the wind was right and not too many "spots" on the sun.

Sometimes during the early summer years it was my privilege to visit a few days in the home of the late Mish Barnett of the Oak Grove section. Mr. Barnett was an Agriculture teacher, farmer and dedicated "coon hunter." He was good at all of these things, but there is one thing that is distinctly recalled about visiting the Barnett home.

When everyone took a noontime break to eat dinner after working in the fields or wherever, Mr. Barnett always tuned his radio to the Greenville station where a special program was scheduled. It was a program of good country and blue grass music sponsored by the Ballentine Packing Company. "Fischer Hendley" and the "Aristocratic Pigs" would come on for about 15 minutes midday. The master of ceremonies was Fischer Hendley, and his show later made personal appearance at many local schools. It was a time when people seemed to have more time to listen.

April 7, 1993

### **Does Anyone Remember "Ole 97"?**

Stories and songs were written about disaster in the early part of this century. We have so many happening so quickly now, it would strain resourceful writers to keep up. Now we have "rap artists" and "crap artists" in addition to television news and talk show analysts giving us all the sordid details. Nothing, however to stir the soul and imagination like the song written about the big train wreck of "ole 97." I don't know exactly where it happened, or the circum-

stances, but I think it was somewhere in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Part of the song has stuck in my mind for years... "He was going down the grade...making 90 miles an hour...when the whistle began to scream...he was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle...scalded to death by the steam."

Whatever brought this to mind may have been prompted by a short visit recently with Jake Barnett of Winnsboro. Jake is a retired Southern Railway Engineer, a former resident of Oak Grove community who visits friends and relatives here frequently. Having been retired from Southern for several years, he now carries a business card that states, in addition to his credentials, "Working Is For People Who Don't Know How to Fish."

Jake has been around quite a bit in the railroading business and was once featured in the State newspaper magazine section in a double-page spread about his experience as an Engineer with Southern. While these recent rains have been heavy around here, they were more like spring showers compared to the flood that hit this area in 1916. Jake brought along a copy of a book that detailed this devastating flood that all but "wiped out" the Southern track system. In written and pictorial detail, this record must surely be standing as one of the most destructive floods of the century. There is a fraternal order that surely binds together those who have labored and experienced the trials and tribulations of railroading.

Most of the old timers around here always carried with them a pocket railroad watch. Any time day or night a train was passing, the watch would be consulted a matter of checking on the "run" as related to the schedule. "Uncle Alex" Leathers who ran a corn mill on East Main Street had railroad ties. His brother, an Engineer with Southern would come through from Atlanta, and blow a friendly message from his whistle as he approached the corn mill which stood in the vicinity of the Shell station. "Uncle Alex" with corn meal covered hat and glasses would walk to the door and look for the approaching engine and pull his trusty railroad watch from his overalls...checking the time against the scheduled "run." It was all routine.

Frank Cashin would invariably do the same thing. Long before he went into the Army for WWII, he had worked for the Southern, and part of it stayed with him. Checking his watch to see “if 30 going North” was on time was a matter of routine.

One of the most interesting things about the Southern route through here concerned the depot building. At one time, the late Mr. S.F. Reeder had visions of closing the underpass next to the railroad depot. He felt Main Street needed this area filled in for more parking. As Mayor of the town for several terms, he was able to prevail upon the authorities in Atlanta to move the depot further down the tracks. This was done and the depot was later moved back to its present location. This may have happened more than once, but it finally got to be a real sore spot with the railroad people. Someone said a call from Westminster to headquarters in Atlanta would evoke some of the most profane commentary known to man or beast.

April 14, 1993

### **If the System is Broke, Fix it!**

The hospital cost horror stories know no end, apparently. But rest assured there will be one somewhere. A talk, recently, with Jake Barnett, former resident, now retired railroad engineer living in Winnsboro was mostly fun, but also disturbing. Jake asked me a simple question which I'm not sure I answered.

He simply wanted to know, “Who sets the costs for services at Oconee Memorial Hospital?”

I told him I wasn't sure, but I believed the hospital administrator was perhaps knowledgeable about all charges and should be held accountable since he is paid a salary (how much...no one seems to know for sure) to administer.

Well, the problem Jake presented is simply this: Recently he had a relative, now deceased, who was a patient at Oconee Memorial Hospital. It became necessary for the patient to be transferred to Emory Hospital in Atlanta. The cost, according to Jake, for the ambulance service from Oconee County to Atlanta was in excess of

\$1,000. In the course of events, it became necessary for the patient to be transferred back to Oconee Memorial Hospital. The services of an ambulance from Emory in Atlanta to Oconee was \$350.

It really doesn't take a mathematical genius to figure the difference in the cost...about \$600 more from Oconee for the same service. Why is that? Jake wanted to know.

I really wish I had the answer to questions like this, but frankly, I don't know either. There is one thing that is known for sure...the system is broke somewhere and damn sure needs a fixin'.

It is stories like this that arouse the public as to what is happening to our health care system. Who could afford such costs unless there was some heavily endowed insurance company or our own U.S. government? Even so, how long can we expect our system to last unless realism begins to prevail. This government and no insurance company can survive the mounting astronomical cost of health care unless it truly is brought under control.

Be not fooled. All this "good stuff" from our government...medicare and medicaid is not free. You and I and every other tax payer is held accountable for the billing...when it comes to paying. It ain't free, never has been and never will be. The abuses of the system will have to be addressed. I'm sure this instance of excessive billing is not an isolated instance. It happens here and across the country at other hospitals, too, practically every day...if the truth was really laid on the table.

Cuss the government and the party in control if you wish, but unless someone steps up to the plate and knocks a homerun against this kind of thing, our nation can easily be brought to our economic knees. We are already well on our way.

When the tax paying public is held hostage to a system of care that is abused, used and cast off as "Well, that's just the way it is and you can either live or die with it," then something will surely give. And probably sooner than you think.

Jake, you have asked a good and reasonable question, but I'm afraid I haven't given you a good answer. But someday, for sure, there will be one here at Oconee hospital and all the others, too!

April 21, 1993

## Memories of "Old 97" Revisited

A few weeks past "Old 97," a famous train that once passed through these parts, was mentioned in this column. It was noted by Mrs. Nettie Ables Harbin of Blackjack Road, Westminster. She obligingly sent an interesting story that featured the byline of Randall Holcombe. When it was written, apparently in recent times, the train still held a lot of interest. This is essentially the story reported by writer Holcombe:

The symbols of this southern hill country—a cotton field, a whiskey still, a run-down clapboard farmhouse.

Memories of days that have dispersed in the wind, like smoke billowing from a steel-grinding, earth-trembling, steam-powered locomotive.

One of the most famous trains in railroading history sliced its way through southern Oconee County.

It was the Old 97, a Southern Railroad train that carried mail through the mountain shadows on a 627-mile run from Washington, DC to Atlanta.

Ben Robertson wrote about the Old 97:

It ran faster than anything had ever run in South Carolina, and we would gather from everywhere to watch Old 97 go through.

It hit our county just after daylight, and the Baptist preachers in the small white chapels along the railroad compared 97 to divine things—to God's wrath, and to the terrible swift sword.

The Old 97 made its first Washington to Atlanta run in December, 1902. On Sunday, September 27, 1903, it flew off the tracks at the Stillhouse Trestle near Danville, VA. Everyone except the baggage master was killed.



A constable from nearby Franklin Junction, David George Graves, gave the Old 97 immortality when he penned these words:

They gave him his orders at Monroe, Virginia, saying, "Steve you are way behind time. This is not Thirty-Eight, this is Old 97. You must put her into Spencer on time."

He turned around to his black greasy fireman, saying, "Throw on a little more coal. And when we reach that White Oak Mountain, you just watch Old 97 roll."

It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville, and a line on a three-mile grade. It was on that grade that he lost his air brakes, you can see what a jump he made.

He was going down the hill doin' ninety miles an hour, when his whistle broke into a scream. He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle, scalded to death by the steam.

And now, ladies, you must take this warning from this time now and on. Never speak harsh words to your true lovin' husband, he may leave you and ever be gone.

According to an article published in 1983 in *The Retired Officer* and written by Commander Maxwell Hamilton, USNR-Ret., the song "The Wreck of the Old 97" spread across the country in the years after its writing.

Vernon Dalhart recorded the song for the Victor Talking Machine Company. Constable Graves got credit for writing the song and accumulated the royalties 35 years after the wreck when the U.S. Supreme Court declared him the official author.

You can still hear "The Wreck of the Old 97" performed in bluegrass and traditional music. The song requires a good fiddle player, who can make that whistle blow by the way he handles his fiddle bow.

April 28, 1993

## **Old Fashioned Common Sense is Helpful**

Because it was a story, all major news media focused on Waco, TX and the Branch Davidian Group compound until it went up in flames. Whether or not it should have happened, with so many lives lost, is a question that will probably never be answered. The so-called leader of that cult, David Karesh, apparently had great persuasive power. Many were obviously brainwashed and believed this man with a “messiah complex” was for real. Unfortunately, for many who were drawn to him not unlike moths to a flaming candle, their fate was sealed.

This, of course, it is not the first time, nor perhaps the last that seemingly intelligent, normal people will be “sucked in” and “under” by a hypnotic mind bent on a tangent to a devious end.

While most people rely on pure common sense and experience to stay clear of extremists, there are those who can’t resist the circe call of the sirens.

One need not be a theological scholar to simply understand that there are matters that are controlled by a Higher Power, and things that can be affected by the actions of man. Granted we are all under the influence of Divine providence. To the degree that we have been granted ability to reason, we are expected to respond to stimuli part of that process is the need to separate the “wheat” from the “chaff.” Sometimes that is easier said than done. Our media is loaded with voices that offer everything from modern medical miracles to unlimited economic prosperity. This is especially true of electronic media—TV in particular. But, there is always the requirement that you keep the money coming in to the source of the message.

While there are efforts to expose these who are obviously using a religious pitch to collect big bucks, the fact is this kind of “religion” is further out of control than government spending.

I can’t help recalling the song writer who apparently understood what was happening as he included the words, “Would Jesus wear a Rolex on his television show?”

As far back as 1945, I recall being at a Navy base in San Bruno, CA awaiting assignment to a ship when some “nut” predicted the

world would be coming to an end at a specific time and hour. There were those followers out there who were willing to listen to him, give up all their worldly goods and get ready for the departure. As a young sailor, a long way from home, I thought, "Well, this ain't likely to happen, but if it does, then I won't be having to clean this latrine...so to hell with it...if it does." The prediction probably caused me to ponder this possibility at least 8 or ten seconds before dismissing the idea.

This was the same Navy base where I was introduced, by chance, to my first try at "shooting craps." Beginners luck was with me. I took 50 cents and turned it into \$38, went to San Francisco on liberty, got drunk and wound up in China town. After finally making my way back to the base the next payday—at that time \$36 per month for a seaman—I knew I could make some money real fast in this "crap game" business. I had already proved that with my first experience. My \$36 paycheck lasted about 15 minutes the second time around and cut short my gambling career.

Later I discovered that California probably had more "religious nuts" per square foot than any place in the world. However, in recent years with population growth and shifts, the supply has been spread fairly evenly over the rest of these United States. Perhaps my old friend Walter Duckworth had the answer: "Keep your eyes, ears and bowels open...and watch as well as pray."

May 5, 1993

### **When Your Thoughts Turn...It's Spring!**

It was about this time of year when going to school was the furthest thing from my thoughts. Spring always brought the desire to "skip" school. I sometimes did. Probably, some of the teachers felt relief, too. Certainly, the challenge to try "to learn" somebody something when there wasn't the slightest interest on the part of the student must have been disappointing. Mrs. Peden always corrected the continual "slaughter" of the English language.

"Young man," she would quip, "you absolutely can't 'learn' any-

one anything! You'll be lucky if you can 'teach' a few facts." Or the words to that effect.

A unique teacher whose methods and classroom discipline was a well-known standard, she tried very hard to give all a few basic truths. So did most of the other instructors. It was hard to get attention and hold it when the weather turned warm and the fish began biting.

One beautiful spring day is recalled in particular.

A tragic wreck had taken the lives of four black citizens of the area. The wreck happened on Walhalla highway just beyond the Alexander home just this side of Coneross Creek. A '34 Ford left the road, went airborne for several hundred feet, hit a big granite boulder and took the lives the occupants.

A funeral was scheduled at a church on Dickson Street. It just happened on this day, the trip toward school turned out to be a walk in the clover-filled pasture and pecan grove just in front of the church. At the time, I was not aware the funeral for these unfortunate four was scheduled.

It had not influenced my decision to play hooky. That was a conscious decision and a foregone conclusion. Relaxing in the green clover with birds chirping and making nesting arrangements, it just happened that this funeral service presented itself as I was "layed back" on a slight incline. Sort of like looking down at an amphitheater.

The procedure was not short. The service for these lasted several hours. From about 8:30 in the morning until high noon, activities were in progress. Noon came and thoughts of food kept entering the picture. My dad, a walking mail carrier, usually came home for lunch about 12:00 each day and went back to his delivery duties about 1:00. Gertrude Baker, a black lady who cooked and helped with housework while my mother was trying to "teach 'em," or "learn 'em" at one of the nearby rural schools, prepared the noon meal.

I considered this fact and made a judgement that my dad had probably come home from his route, eaten lunch and returned to work. It didn't happen that way. On this particular day, he was late

getting home to eat.

As I opened the back door to the kitchen, he met me head-on. Of course, he wanted to know why I wasn't in school. I had no reasonable answer, since I had intentionally "layed out." That was a term used for unexcused absence.

Now, for the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey says. It was before "child abuse" had been invented. What my dad did was standard procedure. He warped my rear end until it "roped like okra." It was the last time he ever had to do that. I was about eleven or twelve years old. I was never "caught" again skipping school...springtime or otherwise.

May 12, 1993

### **How 'Bout Them Walls, Colonel?**

Bill Bradford, owner and publisher of *The Fort Mill (SC) Times* for many years, was a character in his own right. He lived in the middle of Colonel Elliott Springs textile empire. While the Colonel and his powerful corporate organization owned most of the newspapers published in the towns where the company had plants, Fort Mill was an exception. Bill Bradford was the man in charge there. There was no doubt about it.

While *The Times* was a small weekly paper, it did not go unnoticed. Nearly everyone read the paper. Bill's front page column "No Foolin'" usually had some comment that would elicit thought and comment. Either "fer or agin," it really made no difference to Bill. He would advance his own ideas and you had the same privilege. Maybe not quite as much paper and ink, but nevertheless the same privilege.

In the 1940's or early 50's, textile expansion in the South was moving rapidly. Rebuilding and refurbishing plants all across the South was in progress. Colonel Springs was a leader on a national and perhaps international basis. He was different. He advanced many ideas that "shocked" more conservative and timid souls. By today's standards, he would have hardly been innovative, but back then, his ideas in merchandising and advertising were revolution-

ary. For example, some may recall the famous advertisement that pictured an illustration of an Indian sleeping serenely on a sheet suspended between two trees. Standing in back of the exhausted looking Indian Buck was a shapely Indian Maiden. The headline caption on the ad read, "A Buck Well-Spent On A Springmaid Sheet."

More conservative publishers of that era refused to carry the ad, but those with daring—such as *Esquire*—feasted on this lucrative account. Springs made them. The Colonel wrote many of his own ads and had a strong hand in merchandising. The company just "grew like Topsy." While the Colonel has long since departed this earthly scene, he was impressive while he was here.

As it happened, Colonel Springs employed the famed architect, Frank Lloyd Wright to design an office building. It was ordered built and perhaps remains today. Bill Bradford, observed this construction in his community, and wrote a small comment in his "No Foolin'" column in *The Times*. Words to this effect were printed: "It's a strange thing to see Colonel Springs spending some four million dollars (a lot of money at that time) with a high faluting architect and they're putting the walls up crooked!"

This did not go unnoticed by Colonel Springs. He immediately dispatched an engineer to the newspaper office where he invited Bill to come examine the building. Bill accepted the invitation and learned that while the suspended walls did in fact appear to be crooked, it was all a planned illusion. The walls were actually straight and in keeping with the design.

Another unique feature of the building was the fact that Colonel Springs had his office built entirely on an elevator. The building which featured some four or five levels of corporate offices were easily accessible. To reach any of his executives on any level, he simply had a control on his desk which allowed his office to ascend or descend to the desired point to which time wall panels would open up and the business at hand could be conducted.

It was quite an experience working with Bill Bradford at *The Times* in Fort Mill for a few months.

May 19, 1993

## **“Send Them A Message” Saturday!**

Periodically, voters of Oconee County are faced with decisions in the form of referendum. There’s another one coming at you this week—Saturday, May 22nd—when voters are being asked whether or not to empower the county school board to issue some 53 million dollars in general obligation bonds to finance a number of projects. The payback on this amount of money is reputed to be about 101 million dollars.

As the late Senator Ev. Dirksen once remarked as he characterized government spending— “a few million here and a few million there, and pretty soon, you’re talking about real money!”

The time is at hand for citizens who vote to take stock. If all the recommendations of all the boards and committees who have studied the educational needs of Oconee County were placed end to end, it appears the main conclusion they would reach would be a mandate for “more money.”

Strangely enough, if money and more buildings would solve our problems technically we shouldn’t have any right now! Not so, according to the “experts.” More consolidation, more new, costly buildings and more transportation to get students there for training. Adequate facilities are a necessity. No one questions that, but going off on this “building and consolidating binge” to the tune of 53 million dollars with a 101 million payback is on the absurd side, to say the least. This county has many reasonable citizens who understand power structure, how the “system” works, and more especially, who gets the tax bill and pays the cost!

Another idea that has been brought to light in recent weeks is the problem of maintaining school buildings that we now have. A film supposedly illustrating the “need” for more buildings has been shown in various parts of the county. At least one person who viewed it said it is more of indictment of the present system of maintaining our buildings. New or old buildings must be maintained properly or they will deteriorate. Apparently Oconee County needs attention in this area. More costly buildings will only add to an already existing problem in maintenance. It doesn’t take a genius

or an “expert” from out of the county to understand the premise that if you can’t take care of it you probably don’t need it. Or won’t have it for very long.

All of the arguing and discussion of this nebulous thing called “education” probably won’t mean much to you until you understand that you are the one—taxpayer—who will get the bill for this program if it is approved. Not only will you get the bill, your children and probably some of your grandchildren will be paying “through the nose” for this building boondoggle that probably wouldn’t raise the SAT scores by a single percentage point. Many of you can remember when the late T.V. Derrick ran the school system in Oconee County with the help of about six or eight good assistants. He had more students to care for and train and had many who graduated from school and high academic achievement. It was not buildings that did the job—it was teachers and students wanting to get the job done. Now, with all the administrative offices and their assistants, the main thrust is for more new facilities. What about the needs of teachers and students? Are more buildings really an answer? If so, why aren’t we doing better now?

Personally, I have a lot of faith in the voters of Oconee County. If a majority of those eligible to vote go to the polls Saturday, there is little doubt the message will be loud and clear. If you don’t care what happens and it matters not what makes your tax bill increase, then so be it. This matter is in your hands. Granted, the school board can do some bond issuing without a referendum—but, that, thank God, has at least some limitations.

As George Wallace once coined a campaign slogan, “Send Them A Message!” You can do it if you are willing to take a few minutes and vote Saturday, May 22nd. The pocketbook you save may be your own. It’s worth a try.



May 26, 1993

## **“Have That Bull Arrested”—Foggy**

Albert “Ab” Barnett, retired former Fire Chief in Westminster, recalled an interesting story concerning our legendary friend, Herman W. “Foggy” Dickson.

According to “Ab,” “Foggy” got into a trading mood and somehow, in a deal with Molgro England, secured an unusual bull. He thoroughly loved animals and kept a menagerie at his farm down at the “Rinky-Dink” club a few miles below town just off Greenfield Road.

This bull was different from others in that his parentage included a buffalo. Half buffalo and half bull with a disposition that was unmistakable was the description “Ab” gave.

Tough and not accustomed to listening to commands, the animal definitely had a mind of his own that virtually defied domesticating. The buffalo-bull joined in with several other animals “Foggy” kept down at the ranch. There was a mule, jackass, turkey, game chickens, ducks, geese, and at one time an alligator that Volly “Sea-Daddy” Hanks had brought to “Foggy” that he desired. One day while serving friends and customers at his restaurant-grocery store on East Main, in a building next door to the Shell Station, “Foggy” decided something had to be done. His dad, S.W. Dickson, Sr., more widely known as “Sugar Babe” was in the store and tried to convince “Foggy” to leave the bull alone.

However, this challenge was set in “Foggy’s” mind. He had no plans to be out-done by a buffalo-bull. He asked “Ab” if he would drive him down to the “Rinky-Dink” club ranch.

“Ab” said that “Sugar Babe” pleaded with him not to take him down there for fear that the animal would be too much for “Foggy” to handle. Nothing would do, however, so “Ab” relented and proceeded to take “Foggy” to the ranch where he was determined to rope and ride this buffalo-bull.

“I’m going to teach this bull a lesson,” was the attitude “Foggy” carried into the pasture. However, it didn’t seem to work out exactly as planned.

First of all there was no roping of the buffalo-bull. He was too wild for that, so they finally wound up chasing him into an open-door stall at the barn.

Not to be outdone, "Foggy" decided that it was time to begin the training program in earnest. He went into the stall with the animal and was promptly butted from one side of the barn stall to the other. This, in itself was no small item, for "Foggy" was not a light-weight man. He tipped the scales around 400 or so, but the buffalo-bull payed little or no attention to the weight advantage.

"Ab" said that this bull simply charged and when he missed his opponent and hit the stall walls it simply knocked boards loose in several directions.

Again and again "Foggy" made an approach, but each time he was rebuffed soundly. Boards just kept falling off as the charging buffalo-bull hit him.

Finally, in exhausted desperation, "Foggy" yelled out some instructions to "Ab" who was observing this match:

"Ab, get in your truck, go to town and find the Chief of Police Gary Brock, take out a peace warrant for this bull and come back as soon as possible; we're going to have to arrest him. And if you think we'll need him, tell him to bring "Smokey" Smith with him, for this bull is definitely disturbing the peace."

"Smokey" was a police officer who along with Gary Brock served the town well for many years.

"Ab" said it was a memorable event—this has long stuck in his experience with men and animals.

June 2, 1993

## **Necessity -- Mother of Invention**

Sometimes you do what you have to do. It's kind of like the story Walter Duckworth told about the black tenant farmer who was having a really tough time during the big depression. Things had gone from bad to worse. Food was scarce. In fact, for some, there just wasn't any. This fellow was chasing a rabbit on foot. No dog. No gun. No nothing except his speed verses the rabbit. He passed one