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Chapel Hill

The years we lived in Chapel Hill in the late forties and early fifties have provided us with a lifetime of stories. Perhaps that "village" has become more conventional in the years since we were there, but, somehow, I doubt that it has become an orthodox, traditional small town. Academia by itself attracts too much independent thinking and action for any town dominated by a university to become too humdrum and predictable.

We soon began collecting stories to cherish for all time - our own interpretations of the place we lived for an important period of our lives. Paul was beginning his studies for his doctor of philosophy degree, and, because of a fortunate combination of circumstances, I was beginning teaching at the University.

To begin with, Paul had been hired as a teaching assistant by a stalwart individual, Archibald Henderson, the retiring chairman of the Department of Mathematics. His "contract" was a hand-written postcard from Archibald Henderson, who didn't believe in secretaries or records, and, anyway, as of the beginning of the fall quarter he was officially retired. A member of the department, who was acquainted with Archibald Henderson lore, assured Paul that his hiring was real and legal and that his holding a written document with Henderson's signature was perhaps unique, indeed a collectible.



Although I had received no confirmation of my hiring or, even, of the English Department's having received my application, I, too, had been hired sight unseen and even un-notified. When I reported to the English office to inquire about my status, the chairman greeted me joyously and asked where in the world I'd been. I was therewith invited to an English Department meeting that evening, the only one I was ever allowed to attend. The meeting was extremely formal; I was introduced by name followed by the resounding words "sometime instructor of English at Southern Methodist University." The next day I received a desk assignment in a large fishbowl in which eight other young instructors and fledgling professors also had desks. My teaching assignments were routine: freshman composition and a sophomore class in the novel, short story, and drama.

My textbooks constituted all the indication I had of what I was to teach. Fortunately, all my colleagues in room 21 of Saunders Hall were generous in giving me background and tips for teaching the classes.

Several of my Saunders colleagues developed into good friends and I treasure their memory: Jessie Rehder, an unpublished novelist who had the unhappy experience of writing a book about her eccentric father just before the successful publication of *I Remember Father*, followed by her semi-autobiographical account of her days in a state psychiatric institution just months after *Snake Pit* hit the best seller lists. Hugh Holman was a wonderful friend who introduced me to the pleasures of reading whodunits and later became, first, chairman of the department and, later, provost of the University. I was fascinated with Agnes Brooks, an Augustan scholar who remained an assistant professor year after year because she was female. When she, in desperation, submitted her resignation unless she received a promotion to associate professor (a move necessary, she felt, to validate her growing reputation as an outstanding researcher in her academic field), the resignation was accepted. She continued successful publication of her scholarly research remaining in Chapel Hill because her husband was a full professor of French. UNC was thereby deprived of recognition as a sponsor of her internationally known publications. I mustn't forget Lillie Antonicus who introduced herself to me as having been born with her Ph.D.

JESSIE REHDER AND MAX STEELE



Following World War II, Jessie Rehder and Max Steele became UNC's most important writing teachers. A graduate of Randolph Macon College with a masters from Columbia, Rehder began teaching writing at UNC in 1947 and remained on the faculty until her death in 1967. Although she wrote a novel, a play, and poetry, she was best known as a devoted writing teacher and author of the acclaimed textbook *The Young Writer at Work*. Rehder also edited two volumes of writings by Carolina students under the title *The Young Writer at Chapel Hill*. Born in Greenville, S.C., Steele attended Furman and Vanderbilt universities and the Sorbonne. He was first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1944 and graduated from UNC in 1946. He then lived in Paris, where he was a friend and colleague of George Plimpton and a founding editor of the literary magazine *The Paris Review*. Steele returned to UNC to teach in the creative writing program under Rehder, succeeding her as director in 1967.

Hugh Holman '36, class poet

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In preparation for Commencement in 1936, class historian and poet, Hugh Holman wrote a poem that was published in the commemorative Commencement program given to the seniors that year. Hugh Holman went on to become "a versatile South Carolina man of letters," wrote Ben Hay Hammet in 1959.

Clarence Hugh Holman was born in Cross Anchor, South Carolina in 1914. His family moved to Goldville, now known as Joanna, South Carolina where he spent most of his youth. He graduated from Presbyterian College in 1936 with honors, earning a B.S. in Chemistry and an A.B. in English. Participating in a variety of extra-curricular activities, Holman worked on the staff of three PC student publications during his college years: *The Blue Stocking* newspaper all four years, serving as editor his senior year, and *The Collegian* and the *Pac Sac* yearbook staffs during his last two years. Majoring in English and Chemistry, he also served as a student assistant in both departments. Upon his graduation, he was hired to direct public relations at Presbyterian College between 1936 and 1939, a position later filled by Ben Hay Hammet in 1949. Holman later served as director of the radio department on campus, writing and editing over 100 educational radio scripts for the college. One such script, an adaptation of the story, "Mr. Charles" by Donald Hough, was sold to and heard over the Columbia Broadcasting System. [PC Archives, Jane Sturgeon scrapbook, c. 1940-41]



Hugh Holman

Outside the English Department there were other phenomena to intrigue us. For instance, there was a married graduate students' dormitory on campus, a two-story affair with highly iffy central heating. There was constant turmoil about the temperature, with some residents holding ice cubes on the sole second floor thermostat to bring the temperature up while others used matches on the first-floor thermostat to raise the temperature.

Among the interesting places where Paul and I lived was our first residence on Purefoy Road, a two-bedroom unfurnished pre-fabricated house whose telephone was forever listed in the name of the original resident of the house. "Call us at the Richard Highfills house!" was our phone number. Next door was an authentic log cabin that dated back to slave days.

Then we lived in the Carolina Inn for a time, a lovely building with two spacious rooms but no kitchen. Impoverished graduate students and new faculty members could not afford to dine out all the time, so we all maintained fairly efficient kitchens in one end of our roomy bedrooms. Paul and I built a wall of apple crates which served for storage, counter, and housing for a hotplate and an electric roaster oven, flanked by our fifty-dollar refrigerator from Purefoy Road. (We always wondered what the last student to leave Chapel Hill would do with his "Chapel Hill" furniture.) It was enough kitchen for us to be able to feed ourselves and frequent visitors seated around the coffee table in the living room. If we had music while I cooked the meal, Paul had to stand in the living room closet, holding down the circuit breaker. The Inn management decided that all kitchens had to be abandoned - I'm sure they were a fire hazard with the inadequate wiring - causing a number of graduate students to abandon the Inn.

We then moved to Victory Village, a University-operated pre-fab housing development. We had a middle apartment in a long barracks. That was a fun place to live with other student families. Football Saturdays were interesting, for out-of-town visitors parked on our street and knocked on our door for permission to walk through the one-room-deep apartment to the stadium close by our back yard. The length of the building made a short-cut through our apartment look desirable. Occasionally, the fans would request the use of our bathroom, too. We always managed to be at the game late when it was over to cut down on the traffic of the return visitors.



Charlie "Choo Choo" Justice

I think of it more as an artifact of graduate school life than of the peculiarity of Chapel Hill, but we frequently had an unexpected visitor for dinner, or sometimes an unplanned trip to Durham or Hillsborough for a bite to eat at one of the inexpensive but good restaurants we found there. Those trips of course were entirely dependent upon their nearness to the first of the month. Some of the best times were the planned parties to celebrate someone's passing his or her orals or, sometimes, just the joy of reaching the end of the week. One evening Cloyd Goodrum remarked, as several of us lounged on the floor at the Caldwells', that he knew of a nearby U.S. highway that was unique in that it had several blocks of the only outhouses backing up to any U.S. highway. After our loud doubting of the truth of that contention, Cloyd stormed off into the night to confirm his statement, failing to take along a corroborating witness. The next day, he met only horse laughs when he loudly confirmed his information.

Some of the students were lucky enough to live in UK houses. Those were un-insulated pre-fabricated houses which the U.S. had built to send to Great Britain. The UK's had been refused by Britain and were used, instead, for student housing at universities about the country. A great many of those Saturday night parties were held at the UK house of Henny and George Caldwell, the only one of our crowd with children. Henny, who had been born in Holland, was not only frugal but cannily inventive. On their thirty-dollar-a-month GI income, she was able to serve the crowd a delectable angel food cake every other week. She accomplished this marvel by taking a teaspoon of egg white from each of the four eggs she fed her family for breakfast. At the end of two weeks, she had sufficient egg whites to make a lovely cake. The rest of us tried to keep the Caldwells supplied with coffee so that we could enjoy that drink with our cake.

Our four years in Chapel Hill were busy, interesting, and even romantic and nostalgic. Memoirs like this can only skim the surface of our memories of that wonderful town.