

New North Carolina Books

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THAD STEM, JR. *Thad Stem's First Reader*. (Durham: Moore Publishing Company, 1976). 326 pp. \$7.95.

Thad Stem, Jr. needs no introduction to the readers of this journal. He is the author of more than a dozen books and the winner of the 1974 N. C. Gold Medal for Literature. Hidden away up in Oxford with his books and the "home folks," Stem gazes out on the world with the perception of a scholar and the mind of an honest man who refuses to be taken in by the pap, pedantry, and sheer foolishness of the world we live in today. He speaks with a barbed tongue and records his observations and opinions, both in prose and poetry, with a deft pen.

Stem knows that man cannot live in two worlds. But he is able to escape the cant of our world by writing about Oxford and small town America as it once was. How absolutely refreshing it is, even if you remember only a small part of those times. Stem's characters are too

many and varied to identify here, but any reader with a taste for character will delight in most of the entries here. Some readers will respond warmly to Stem's poetry; most all, I think, will nod in agreement with the philosophy that permeates the entire book. His tribute to Sidney Lanier is appreciated; however, I think he might give another thought to his criticism of the musical qualities of Lanier's poetry. Stem's comment on the attitude of local North Carolina folks toward education deserves to be quoted here:

I doubt that any society has ever talked so much about education as ours, but I am sure no society has ever made so much fun of the educated person. In a monstrosly cruel manner, that grisly ambivalence is a whole shelf of local history.

This book is the work of one of North Carolina's most civilized writers. No collection is complete without it, and no student of North Carolina life and literature has finished his course until he has read it.

CHARLEEN WHISNANT and JO HASSETT.

Word Magic: How To Encourage Children To Write and Speak Creatively. (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1974). 166 pp. \$6.95.

More and more attention is being given these days to that elusive human quality known as "creativity." Psychologists get most of the grants in this area and, along with specialists in business management, receive professional acclaim for defining creativity and discovering ways to encourage it in employees. Thus, if you watch where the money is being spent, you would conclude that creativity is mainly to be found on the assembly line or in psychology laboratories. The lesson has not been lost on the technicians who control our school systems and colleges; give them a choice of spending money for new ideas in career education or the arts and you won't have to wait long for an answer. To put the matter even more bluntly, ask for funds to establish a program in poetry in order to study creativity in students. Don't get your hopes up.

Charleen Whisnant and Jo Hassett, one a poet and the other a teacher, have combined their talents to produce a gem of a book. It argues that the key to creativity in children is *language*. More specifically, they argue that poetry—the most noble use of language—is an effective tool for teaching children how to know themselves, express themselves, and come to understand the world in which they live. In short, poetry can be the key to the creative life if language is given a chance before technology and numbers consume it. Whisnant and Hassett focus on the school age child, and suggest effective ways to involve young people in the art of poetry. Mainly they call for full and free self-examination as a stimulant to creativity in the school age child. They think it works, and I agree; many of the

examples included here (poetry written by children) reflect a more genuine feel for life and language than the poems we are asked to accept by certain professional journals.

This volume is a noble effort; it should be read by every public school teacher in North Carolina. They should do a second volume designed to teach school children how to read poetry. I think the authors would agree, as I do, with the scholar who once said that, "a person who does not read poetry is probably not intelligent, certainly not educated."

CLARINDA A. BRITT and JAMES E. BRITT,
Eds. *So Proudly We Taught: Retired Tar Heel Teachers.* Published by the N. C. Association of Educators, Retired School Personnel Division. (Charlotte: Heritage Printers, Inc. 1976).

This book is one of a series published in every state by the retired teachers of America as a Bicentennial project. It is the combined work of over 600 retired public school teachers in North Carolina. It is a compilation of their labors and recollections through the years in the state's public schools. It is not really one book, but many; the nature of the project precludes the kind of continuity that one might prefer. But the editors have organized and arranged the material reasonably well, and readers who have a genuine interest in the subject can follow the story with interest and profit.

Though none of the book's various parts is by any means complete, each does contain valuable information about the history of the North Carolina public school system. But its value is not that of a historical record; its value concerns what it says about those noble people who spend their lives trying to educate the young. Libraries that maintain collections on North Carolina education should obtain copies.

ROSCOE BROWN, Fisher, Ed. *Michael Braun Of The Old Stone House: His Influence and Descendants*. Published in cooperation with the Michael Brown Family Historical Committee. (Charlotte: Delmar Publishers and Printers, 1975). Order from the editor, 748 Springdale Road, Statesville, N. C. 28677.

Family histories usually have only a limited appeal. This volume is perhaps more valuable than many others because it gives a partial picture of a broader subject: the settlement of German immigrants in the area around Salisbury and Rowan County and the growth and development of that part of North Carolina. The editor calls special attention to the original stone house built near Salisbury by Michael Braun in 1776, now restored and maintained by the Rowan Museum, Inc. The essays were written by members and friends of the Braun (Brown) family and much of the information seems to be mainly of genealogical interest. Family histories such as this, however, are important because they add pages to the historical record of the people of North Carolina.

CURT MARTIN, Ed. *North Carolina Legislators: For The Record*. (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1976). \$7.95. Order from N. C. Legislative Project, Southern Regional Council, 52 Fairlie Street, N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30303.

This is a valuable reference book dealing with the last session of the North Carolina General Assembly. Though it is filled with much information about the state government in general, its main focus is on profiles of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives. In sections devoted to each individual member, it contains information on constitutencies, campaign expenditures, policy interests and, most importantly, voting records. The kind of information contained here is difficult to obtain and even more difficult to organize and present in any readable form. The editor has done a competent job in both areas. Students planning to use the volume should consult instructions given at the beginning before starting their work. This book is an indispensable source for anyone doing research on North Carolina politics. Every public, school, and college library should include it in its collection.

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