

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
LIBRARY EXTENSION PUBLICATION

Vol. XXII

January, 1957

No. 2

---

O. HENRY IN  
NORTH CAROLINA

By

CATHLEEN PIKE

Edited by Roy C. Moose



---

CHAPEL HILL

MCMLVII

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARY

NORTH CAROLINA BIOGRAPHICAL SERIES  
in Library Extension Publications

- 1949 *John Charles McNeill, North Carolina Poet, 1874-1907, a Biographical Sketch*, by Agatha Boyd Adams.
- 1950 *Thomas Wolfe: Carolina Student, a Brief Biography*, by Agatha Boyd Adams.
- 1951 *Paul Green of Chapel Hill*, by Agatha Boyd Adams, edited by Richard Walser.
- 1952 *Inglis Fletcher of Bandon Plantation*, by Richard Walser.
- 1952 *North Carolina Authors: a Selective Handbook*.
- 1953 *North Carolina Writers, Revised Edition* [a study outline], by Walter Spearman.
- 1954 *Frederick H. Koch: Pioneer Playmaker*, by Samuel Selden and Mary Tom Sphangos.
- 1955 *Bernice Kelly Harris: Storyteller of Eastern Carolina*, by Richard Walser.
- 1956 *North Carolina Musicians: a Selective Handbook*.
- 1957 *O. Henry in North Carolina*, by Cathleen Pike.

# O. Henry in North Carolina

By

CATHLEEN PIKE

Edited by Roy C. Moose

## ERRATA:

- Page 16, line 4. Dr. Pinkney Herbert  
Page 17, line 26. W. T. Bost  
Page 29, line 20. *The Quiet Lodger of Irving Place*

CHAPEL HILL

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARY

1957

*Published four times a year, October, January, April, and July,  
by the University of North Carolina Library. Entered as  
second-class matter February 5, 1926, under  
the act of August 24, 1912.  
Chapel Hill, N. C.*

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword .....	4
Chapter I. O. Henry's Boyhood .....	5
Chapter II. Drug Store Days .....	8
Chapter III. Intervening Years, Marriage and Death .....	12
Chapter IV. O. Henry Still Lives in North Carolina Memorials .....	17
Chapter V. The Stories .....	20
Bibliography .....	29
Library Extension Publications .....	30

## FOREWORD

North Carolinians, proud of the achievements of their native sons, hold especially dear the name of O. Henry, the best known of North Carolina short story writers. Yet not too many North Carolinians know much about the man himself, and fewer still recognize him under his real name of William Sidney Porter.

Although O. Henry spent over half of his life outside the state, the influence of his early years in North Carolina is great, both on the man and on his work. Indeed, his formative years up to the age of twenty were spent in Greensboro, where he was born. After leaving North Carolina as a young man of twenty, he returned several times to his native state. In 1888 he came back from Texas for a short visit to Greensboro; then 1907 he came to Asheville to marry Sara Coleman, and he and his bride spent their honeymoon at Hot Springs, North Carolina. Finally, he spent several months of the last year of his life in and near Asheville. Thus O. Henry's direct connection with North Carolina covered almost half of his life span and qualifies him as one of the state's native sons.

Although O. Henry has been the subject of some seven or eight published biographies, no account has been published of O. Henry in North Carolina, or of his stories dealing with North Carolina, except for the facts concerning him and his family in Greensboro which Dr. C. Alphonso Smith includes in his *O. Henry Biography*.

To remedy this lack of material, the writer offers this brief biography which attempts to present an authentic sketch of O. Henry in North Carolina and to give something of the stories which show the North Carolina influence.

Original research from primary sources in Greensboro and Asheville form the basis of the present study. This research included interviews with contemporaries and relatives of O. Henry who were living in Greensboro in the 1930's. These people freely gave their interesting and authentic information about "Will" Porter as a young boy in his home on West Market Street in Greensboro, as a schoolboy in his Aunt Lina's school, and as a young man working in his Uncle Clark Porter's Drug Store on Elm Street. The writer consulted the extensive collection of O. Henry material in the Greensboro Public Library which includes newspaper articles, unpublished letters, and copies of speeches. Further information was gathered from the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville, from an O. Henry contemporary living there, and from Mrs. William Sidney Porter who lives near Asheville.

Finally, of course, all of O. Henry's approximately three hundred stories were read in gathering information of stories which in any way show the influence of O. Henry's life in North Carolina.

## CHAPTER I

### O. HENRY'S BOYHOOD

The pertinent facts relating to O. Henry's birth, death, and burial as well as to his real name are all well substantiated with conclusive evidence; yet surprisingly enough, those facts have appeared in a variety of forms in various publications. For instance, his middle name is often spelled "Sydney" in many prominent places, and the date of his birth has been recorded all the way from 1862 to 1867.

However, in the Public Library in Greensboro, in the Smith Collection of O. Henry Material, there is an unpublished letter from a first cousin of O. Henry, giving the following entries from the Porter Family Bible:

Shirley Worth Porter, Aug. 6, 1860

William Sidney Porter, Sept. 11, 1862

David Weir Porter, Mar. 26, 1865

Thus the date of O. Henry's birth is definitely 1862, and the original spelling of his middle name is Sidney. Basic research reveals the following pertinent facts about O. Henry: William Sidney Porter, son of Dr. Algernon Sidney Porter and Mary Virginia Swaim Porter, was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, September 11, 1862; he died June 10, 1910, in New York City and was buried in Riverside Cemetery, Asheville, North Carolina.

On the paternal side, O. Henry's grandfather was Sidney Porter of Connecticut, and his grandmother was Ruth Worth Porter, sister of Jonathan Worth who was Governor of North Carolina. His maternal grandparents were William Swaim and Abiah Shirley Swaim of Virginia.

O. Henry's father, Dr. Algernon Sidney Porter, a beloved physician in Greensboro, was known as a kindly, helpful family doctor. He is said to have spent much of his time, during his latter years, working on his idea of perpetual motion.

O. Henry's mother, Mary Virginia Swaim Porter, was a woman with a taste for literature and possessed some talent for writing. After graduating from Greensboro College in 1850, she married Dr. Porter on April 15, 1858, an affair which created great local interest. An account of the marriage is to be found in the Greensboro newspaper, *The Patriot and Flag* of April 23, 1858. When O. Henry was little more than two years old, his mother died, and his younger brother, David Weir Porter, died in infancy.

A letter from Shirley Porter, O. Henry's older brother, written to the author in 1937, gives definite information regarding the family and the home in Greensboro, where O. Henry lived as a child and young man. The family, according to the letter received by this writer, consisted of Dr. Porter; his two sons, Shirley Worth and William Sidney; and Dr. Porter's mother and sister, Mrs. Ruth Worth Porter and Miss Evelina, better known as Miss Lina. It seems a generally accepted fact that the head of the family and the mainstay of the household was Miss Lina, and it was often said that she renounced matrimony in order to mother O. Henry and his older brother. She also conducted a famous private school in a little house that was built in her side yard.

The Porter house was in the four hundred block of West Market Street, opposite the adjoining campuses of Edgeworth Seminary and Greensboro Female College. Sometimes, according to the records of the period, Miss Lina kept one or two of the young ladies from the school as boarders. She seemed to take a special interest in orphans.

This then was the home of young Will Porter, who grew up in a family that was well known and highly respected in the town as well as in other parts of the state. It was a family that was fully aware of the value of education at this early date: his mother was a college graduate, his father a doctor, and his aunt a teacher.

Before getting into Miss Lina's school, perhaps the reader should have a few glimpses of the very youthful O. Henry, or Will Porter, as he was then known. Among the newspaper clippings in the Greensboro Public Library Collection of O. Henry Material is an article, "Recollections of O. Henry," in which the late Tom Tate gives a vivid picture of his boyhood friend:

"My first remembrance of Will Porter," says Mr. Tate, "was of a small freckled boy of five or six—the freckles down to his feet. Our first meeting was on one of those warm days in early spring. In straw hat and rolled up Holland breeches, he was wading barefoot in a cool, willow-shaded little stream in front of our house. I stood there on the bank watching him, envious to my toes. My mother had warned me it was too early to go barefooted. . . .

I grew so fond of the freckled-faced boy I had met wading in the stream that day that, although I was a bit young, I over-persuaded my mother to let me start to school so I could be with him. . . . So Will and I started to school as desk mates and were boon companions until he left for Texas."

Another contemporary of O. Henry, A. W. McAllister of Greensboro, gives his early impression of young Will. Mr. McAllister (in a letter to this writer) says that his acquaintance with O. Henry was as a boy. They were born the same year, and their families were relatives and friends. Mr. McAllister refers to a visit to the Porter family when the boys were about ten years old. Recalling that the personality of Will Porter had made a profound impression on him, he speaks of his young cousin as having been shy, reserved, and different from the average boy. McAllister gives this same impression, or furthers it, perhaps, in an article of his which appeared in the *Greensboro Daily News* on August 2, 1936, in which he says:

"There was something which set him (O. Henry) apart, but did not separate him from others. He possessed something the rest of us did not have. He was shy without being offish; he was self-sufficient without being self-complacent. He seemed to have a world of his own into which he could withdraw, without closing the door. He seemed to have been poured into a finer mould than that of his play-fellows, but all unconscious of any superiority."

Mr. Tate, who has been mentioned as over-persuading his mother to allow him to begin his studies "a bit young" so that he might be with young Will Porter at his Aunt Lina's private school, has recorded interesting reminiscences of their school days. Although he testifies that Miss

Lina's was the only form of education that O. Henry received, Mr. Tate avers that more was taught in the little one-room school than merely the three R's. Among the activities related by Mr. Tate and other members of the group is Miss Lina's custom of reading aloud to her students during any spare moments, often at recess, with the children crowded around, listening. He recalls that Miss Lina always selected good books for this introduction to literature and that her reading made a lasting impression on her young pupils.

Another significant feature of Miss Lina's school recorded by former students is that of story telling. Mr. Tate and others can recall a social gathering held by their teacher on Friday nights for a special game in which each member of the group took part. One person began a story; then each, in turn, was called upon to add his part to the end. Always, in these accounts, young Will Porter's gift at story telling is observed, the group agreeing that Miss Lina's and Will's parts were always the most interesting. It was there, perhaps, that O. Henry got the inspiration for the famous surprise endings for his stories of later years. In any event, young Will Porter was steeped in the oral tradition of learning and story-telling that is the characteristic background of so many Southern writers.

O. Henry's early talent and his interest in drawing are also mentioned by his school mates. Some said that it was predicted of Will Porter that he would follow in the footsteps of his kinsman, Tom Worth, who was at that time a cartoonist for *Harper's Weekly*. Although Will pursued this talent and interest through his drug store days in Greensboro, he afterwards seemed to give no further thought to drawing. However, his friends of those early days say that young Will showed a keen interest in both drawing and literature. Mr. Tate recalls that "even then the literary instinct was there too; and the same quiet, dry humor and keen insight into the peculiarities of human nature."

Although the exact course of study is not given, much is said in comments by Will Porter's school mates about the books read, in school and out. Dime novels were very popular at that time, and it is noted that O. Henry and some of his friends possessed the biggest collection ever seen outside of a cigar stand. Following the dime novels in popularity were the stories of the supernatural, and Will's speciality became ghost stories and tales of horror, Poe being the only author mentioned. Yet none of the stories that O. Henry wrote were ever of the horror type.

Among the favorite books of O. Henry and his boyhood friends were many classics; and the works of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Dumas, and others were read by these young boys before they were fifteen. Also mentioned as favorites are *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Brown's School Days*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, and *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Some less familiar books include those by Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins, Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*, and Speilhagen's *Hammer and Anvil*. Among O. Henry's particular favorites were Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Dickens' *Bleak House*. It was a youthful ambition of O. Henry's to complete Dickens' unfinished novel, *Edwin Drood*; and although he was never satisfied with the results, he made several efforts to do so.

The effect of this reading on impressionable Will Porter and his friends is reflected in some of their youthful activities, based on stories

they read. At one time they had a club called the "Brick Bats," the idea of which came from one of their stories. Thus it was not all work and no play for the young boys—even back in the 1800's.

An amusing incident in which O. Henry was involved in school, recorded by one of his friends, Mr. Clem Wright, shows that the writer's first recognized talent was for drawing. One day Miss Lina had sent Will to the blackboard while she was busy at other tasks. Although Will was supposed to be working his arithmetic, the young artist, while Miss Lina's back was turned, was amusing the other pupils by drawing on the board likenesses of people they knew. Each time, the boy made his drawing swiftly, then as quickly erased it with his left hand, while working arithmetic with his right. Once, however, he was not quick enough. This time he had drawn with skill the unmistakable likeness of the teacher, which everyone readily recognized. So pleased was Will with his own efforts that he had begun to add finishing touches to the drawing when Miss Lina turned and recognized her own portrait on the board, a caricature by her own nephew. The following punishment was swift and sure. Without hesitation and without warning, she collared the artist and, according to Mr. Wright's memory of the incident, gave him the kind of switching for which she was famed. So Will Porter's name was included in the distinguished group for whom the rod was not spared in that early school.

Thus from the reminiscences of O. Henry's boyhood associates emerges Will Porter, the school boy: shy, yet friendly; not brilliant, but clever at drawing and story telling; living the pleasant life of a normal boy in a small Southern town, receiving an education which stimulated his interest in reading and in life.

## CHAPTER II DRUG STORE DAYS

After the brief school days in his Aunt Lina's private school, where young Will worked and played and quietly made lasting friends with his playmates and with those silent companions in his beloved books, he went to work, at the age of fifteen, in his Uncle Clark Porter's drug store on Elm Street. Here, for five years he worked with drugs and learned pharmacy; here also he worked with men and learned much of human nature.

From records left by contemporaries, from local newspaper articles, from interviews and letters of friends and relatives emerges a lifelike picture of O. Henry during one of the happiest periods of his life. Personal friends, some of them the same associates of his early school days, and others regarded him as a desirable companion—a companion who was quiet and inclined to be reticent, but possessed of a keen sense of humor and always friendly. Will Porter was still a favorite with his associates. They describe him as a man of medium height with broad shoulders, blue eyes and dark wavy hair. Someone once remarked that he had a "quiet smile that lit up his whole face."

The late John Michaux, speaking of Will Porter during his drugstore days, mentioned his appearance. He attributes Porter's attractiveness to the keen interest in life which shone from his blue eyes, his ready smile,

and his neatness of dress. In reminiscence Mr. Michaux recalls O. Henry as being always immaculately dressed, and always friendly and courteous.

Another Greensboro man who knew Will Porter at this time was Dr. W. P. Beall, who said he knew the young drug clerk when he was about seventeen years old. Dr. Beall, besides noting the personal appearance and quiet manner of the young man, was also impressed by young O. Henry's talent for drawing and by his faculty of getting acquainted easily with all sorts of people so that he could call by name nearly every citizen of Greensboro, white or black.

All O. Henry's acquaintances of this period, speak of the young druggist's talent for drawing. There is a story repeated by many people, with many variations, of his tendency to draw likenesses of the people who came into the pharmacy to pay bills. Often, when a friendly customer came to settle his account and probably to talk of his family ills, if Mr. Clark Porter was not in and if Young Will Porter did not know the name of the customer, Will hesitated to embarrass the man by asking his name. Instead, the young clerk made swift pencil sketches which identified the person to the complete satisfaction of the proprietor.

Any discussion of O. Henry's pharmacy days, naturally, must center on O. Henry himself as the subject of greatest interest. However, in order to understand this period in the writer's life and the elements which entered into the moulding of his character during this time, the reader needs some knowledge of the background of his activities and some knowledge of the people who entered into his daily life.

Indeed, the drug store itself must come in for a certain amount of recognition because of its importance in the social life of Greensboro. At this time, it was a one-story building on the east side of Elm Street, between the Post Office and the Greensboro National Bank, a most strategic place. During O. Henry's years there, Greensboro was a town of some five thousand inhabitants, a small town in which the Porter Drug Store was a gathering place for the men of the town. In one of his accounts of the times Mr. Michaux says that "It was, in fact, the social, political, and anecdotal clearing house of the town." Usually a game of chess or checkers was in progress in a back room of the store. Here was the rendezvous for all classes of Greensboro's citizens. It was in this room that the judge, the doctor, the colonel, and others gathered to discuss any subjects of interest. Sometimes they discussed perpetual motion, led by Dr. Porter who was working on that theory. Often they talked about the flying machine, an invention being worked on at that time by W. B. Farrar of Greensboro. And, as was the custom in small Southern towns, they told stories of the Civil War, of slaves, bushwhackers, and carpetbaggers. The talk about carpetbaggers always centered around the activities of Albion Tourgee, a well known and thoroughly disliked carpetbagger in Greensboro from 1865 to 1879. The group also discussed the merits of Pritchett's Mineral Spring, discovered about this time on Asheboro Street. Of course, there were also humorous stories, jokes, and good-natured gibes. All of this was grist for O. Henry's mill, to be used in after years in many of his stories.

The proprietor of the drug store must also come in for his share of recognition. He is sometimes referred to as W. C. Porter or William

Clarkson Porter, but usually as just Clark Porter. This uncle of O. Henry's was the "presiding genius" of the place. From the accounts of those who knew him, he emerges as a gentle, quiet man who attended to his business, granted credit to many, and showed kindness to everyone. He won the respect of all who knew him and through his gentleness he made a name for himself—a name still loved long after his death.

Here, then, in the Porter Drug Store, from 1877 to 1882, O. Henry worked with his uncle and learned many things. Dr. Beall, in his memoirs, says that Will learned to fill prescriptions. However, in none of these reminiscences about the drug store and the druggists is there any reference to registered pharmacists. When, in more recent years, the question was raised as to whether O. Henry was registered, there was a difference of opinion since there was no definite information among his associates. This question, however, was finally settled by letters from the North Carolina Board of Pharmacy and the North Carolina School of Pharmacy of the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill. These letters, in response to an inquiry by this writer, confirm the fact that O. Henry was a registered pharmacist. One letter, from the Secretary-Treasurer of the North Carolina Board of Pharmacy, states that the pharmacy law which went into effect in North Carolina on June 1, 1881, provided that all pharmacists in the state should be registered within ninety days, and that among those registered in August 1881 were W. C. Porter (Clark Porter) and W. S. Porter (O. Henry) of Greensboro.

Further information from the School of Pharmacy, includes the facts that William Sidney Porter joined the State Pharmaceutical Association in August 1881, and paid his dues through 1885. Of course, O. Henry left the drug store and North Carolina in 1882, but either he or his family kept up his dues for three more years. According to official records, O. Henry's name was not dropped from the North Carolina Pharmaceutical Association until 1888, six years after he went to Texas. Thus the question of O. Henry's professional status is definitely and officially settled.

Another question of interest, associated with the drug store, is that of the pen name, O. Henry. Although no one certain answer has ever been given to the question of its origin, among the most feasible answers is the one suggested here. When young Will, under the direction of his uncle Clark, was studying pharmacy, he often referred to the *United States Dispensatory* where he found "O. Henry" used as an abbreviation for Etienne-Ossian Henry, a distinguished French chemist. The repeated appearance of this abbreviated name in print is supposed to have made an indelible impression on the mind of the young pharmacist. So, although a number of different opinions have been given concerning the origin of the pen name and although O. Henry himself is credited with having given various strange and humorous explanations, his Greensboro friends generally believe that in later years the name familiar to the young drug clerk in Greensboro emerged as the pen name of the short story writer, O. Henry.

In addition to the above descriptions of young Will Porter the druggist, the accounts of the Old Porter Drug Store, its proprietor and its

customers, there are several stories about O. Henry of that period which give some of his personal experiences and portray some of his individual characteristics.

One of these stories concerns Pink Lindsey, the old Negro who worked in the pharmacy. He was in the habit, it was discovered, of resorting too frequently to the alcohol which was kept in the basement and which was supposed to be used only for prescriptions. O. Henry suspected Pink of taking the whiskey, and when he found two long straws hidden under some rubbish in the cellar and a hole bored in the barrel, he felt that his suspicions were confirmed. The young druggist put capsicum—pure red pepper—in the straws, and the next time Pink used them, he gave an Indian war-whoop and rushed for the pump as fast as he could go, declaring that he had been “pizened.” Will ran to the rescue, pumped water for his victim until he could talk, and then pumped the truth out of Pink. Pink admitted that he had been taking an occasional drink, but now that he was “pizened” and on fire, he promised never to use the straws “that away” again. All the while, Will was sober as a judge, and Pink is said not to have suspected him at all.

Another story, often told around Greensboro years ago, shows another side of O. Henry. This story is about Charlie Hill, an eccentric old Negro, well known about town, who claimed that he had snakes in his legs. With great emphasis and many groans Charlie was in the habit of telling his story over and over again. Although his white friends often listened with interest and, no doubt, with amusement, the young Negroes only laughed at and ridiculed Uncle Charlie. Naturally, the young drug clerk did not believe in the snakes, but he was sympathetic, and not wanting the old man to be a laughing stock for the young Negroes, he decided to turn the tables on the scoffers. Procuring a small snake, Will Porter put it in a bottle of alcohol and placed it in the drug store window with the statement that this snake was one of several taken from the legs of Uncle Charlie Hill by Dr. W. P. Beall. Both black and white came to view the specimen, and the young Negroes, accepting the exhibit as proof, allowed Uncle Charlie, now vindicated, to moan and groan in peace. (This story of Charlie Hill, procured from authentic sources and written by Cecile Lendau appeared in *Homespun*, Senior High School Magazine, 1925.)

The late John Michaux, for many years a prominent attorney in Greensboro, through personal interviews, radio speeches, and newspaper articles, recounted many interesting observations and personal experiences of young Will Porter from his school days through his drug store days, until O. Henry left Greensboro in 1882. At the time that O. Henry was working as a clerk for his uncle, John Michaux and his brother Ed (later Dr. Michaux) were working at their father's printing office near by. After closing hours a group of young men often got together for pleasure and diversion, and one of their favorite pastimes was serenading college girls. Recalling the amusing experiences of the group, Mr. Michaux listed the serenaders and their instruments as follows: Charlie Collins, first violin; Dr. E. R. Michaux (Ed), second violin; Will Porter, second violin; Captain Ellison L. Gilmer, guitar; Tom Collum, guitar; and John Michaux, triangle.

Commenting on the serenaders, Mr. Michaux said that Will was one of the most "inveterate tuners" he ever saw. He recorded this impression of the serenaders:

"I can see Will Porter, now, as with tilted head and twinkling eye, he used to approach one of the guitar players, put his foot on a stump, or some other elevation. Then would follow the tunk of the guitar and the saw of the violin 'til he was in tune, or thought he was; and then he would saw against my brother, who had the other second violin; and then there would be a general sawing all around to see if everything was in readiness for assault upon the unsuspecting victims."

The young men evidently thoroughly enjoyed this type of diversion during some of the happy years of their youth.

Another interesting experience of these young men was a trip to Pilot Mountain and Mt. Airy. The method of travel was not mentioned, but much was said of their gay spirits, the jokes played on each other, their novel experiences, and keen enjoyment. Although his friends said later that Will was the life of the party, they also remarked that the young man was much impressed by the loneliness of some of the isolated sections. This impression of the loneliness of the people, especially of the women, was brought out later in some of O. Henry's mountain stories. Mr. Michaux, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith and other contemporaries recalled with pleasure these days of O. Henry, the young Will Porter of the eighties.

For five years, Will Porter worked hard in his uncle's store, a period in which this attractive young man gained a reputation as a quiet, friendly person who was meticulous in dress, faithful to his duties, and keenly observant of all that surrounded him. It was a period in which, as a pharmacist, he had ample opportunity to study human nature, to listen to stories of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to hear tall tales on a variety of subjects, and sometimes to put his impressions on paper either in words or in pencil sketches. But most important of all, the impressions of this very important formative stage in his life were undoubtedly firmly imprinted on the mind of the young man and were used in later years in many of his short stories.

### CHAPTER III

#### INTERVENING YEARS, MARRIAGE, AND DEATH

In 1882 Will Porter left home to go to Texas, and except for a few letters to his friends and relatives and one visit back to Greensboro in 1888, there was little connection between him and his native North Carolina for many years.

According to contemporaries, Dr. and Mrs. J. K. Hall invited the young drug clerk to go with them to visit their sons, Richard, Frank, and Lee, who were Texas Rangers. Dr. Hall knew that Will, at times, had a "hacking cough," and that there were several active cases of tuberculosis in the city. When the Halls were planning to visit their sons, the doctor said a few days before starting on the long trip, "Will, I want you to go with us. You need the change, and ranch life will build you up." O. Henry welcomed the invitation because it offered an oppor-

tunity for life in the open country in place of the close confinement of the store, and perhaps adventure in seeing a new world.

A few of the letters written from Texas have been preserved in the O. Henry Collection of the Greensboro Public Library. In these letters, written to Mrs. Hall, mother of the boys to whose ranch young Will had gone, and to Dr. W. P. Beall, a young physician associated with Dr. Hall and a personal friend of O. Henry, Will told of little incidents of his life on the ranch. He spoke frequently of the loneliness of the plains, of the lack of conveniences, and of the hard manual labor. Often he made amusingly exaggerated statements about the vastness of the country in which he found himself.

Dr. Beall's account of O. Henry's leaving North Carolina and of their correspondence, which appeared in the *Greensboro Daily News* in 1919, is of great interest:

"In the spring of 1882, Dr. James K. Hall, at that time one of the leading physicians of Greensboro, went with his wife to Southwest Texas, to visit their sons, and persuaded Will Porter to go with them. When Dr. Hall returned, Will stayed as a sort of utility man on a sheep and cattle ranch. I had a letter from him occasionally, always bright and cheerful, but between the lines one could read dislike for the hardships and discomforts of frontier life. In one of his letters, he wrote, 'We have built a little pasture of 50,000 acres in one corner of the ranch for our resting stock. This is a great convenience, for we can now catch a horse in half a day, instead of taking a week, as we had to do before.'

"On another occasion he sent me several little pencil sketches of various Greensboro people with a limerick on the back of each. One representing himself looking over the broad prairie had the following limerick:

'A Western explorer named Bill  
Of the wide rolling plains, got his fill,  
As he gazed all about  
He could see no way out  
For the railroads charge passengers still.'

"Another letter asking for a carload of cooks stipulated they should all have rheumatism or wooden legs so they would be unable to escape."

Once O. Henry sent Dr. Beall a little play in which the characters were all Greensboro people. In this play, O. Henry called himself Bill Slax. He said in his letter that he thought the characters were disguised so that they would not be recognized. Dr. Beall, however, in discussing the play with other people, said the characters were easily identified.

In none of these letters did O. Henry write anything of his life in Texas, except for the time spent on the Hall Ranch in La Salle County, a period covering two years, according to Dr. Smith. On March 13, 1884, O. Henry wrote from La Salle County to Mrs. Hall in Greensboro that he expected to leave the ranch and that his next letter to her would come from him in the "busy marts of commerce and trade." However, no letters are to be found from the "busy marts," although later records of O. Henry's life show that he went to Austin in 1884 and was in Houston for a short time in 1885. During these years there were few points of contact between O. Henry and his native state, but his relatives in Greensboro did know of his marriage to Athol Estes in 1887. They told of a visit back to Greensboro in 1888.

In a letter from the late Shirley Porter of Ayden, N. C., to this writer in 1937, Mr. Porter said that his brother (O. Henry) returned only once after he went to Texas. He wrote that O. Henry's first wife, Athol, and their infant daughter came for a visit to "Aunt Lina" in 1888, and that O. Henry came for them and spent a week or ten days visiting relatives and old friends.

The late John Michaux told with keen interest of seeing his old friend Will Porter with his young wife and infant daughter, Margaret Worth. Mr. Michaux said that he had vivid recollections of seeing Will pushing the baby carriage with its precious cargo along the old familiar streets.

As far as can be ascertained, O. Henry did not come again to the state of North Carolina until 1907. In the meantime, as later records show, his wife had died in 1898; O. Henry had served three years in a Federal prison for embezzlement; and later, in New York, had achieved success as a short story writer.

Gradually, however, the news got out in Greensboro that O. Henry the great short story writer in New York, was Greensboro's own William Sidney Porter. Apparently, during those years of growing fame in New York, while O. Henry was trying hard to keep his real identity hidden, he shunned friends from North Carolina when they attempted to seek him out in New York. Mr. Michaux said that he felt sure this was true since he had talked to several people who had experienced this reaction. Michaux shared with Will Porter's other friends the feeling that, because of the humiliation of his prison experience, his natural shyness, and his happy, intimate association with the friends of his boyhood, O. Henry shrank from contact with people of those early days. Only one of O. Henry's old friends, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, so Mr. Michaux said, succeeded in finding O. Henry in New York and talking to him during those days of increasing popularity as a short story writer.

A letter written by O. Henry to Dr. Smith expresses the writer's regret at missing his friend on one occasion, and his hope of seeing him later. O. Henry speaks of the affair at which he missed meeting his friend as a "society feed." (It was well known by acquaintances of O. Henry in New York that he avoided social functions, public affairs, and interviews.) In this letter to Dr. Smith, O. Henry talks of his undiminished regard for "Phon and the gang," and insists on seeing his old friend either at Dr. Smith's hotel apartment at the Astor, at O. Henry's "office apartment," at 28 West 26th Street, or at any place convenient. This letter, it would seem, proves that O. Henry's apparent hiding from his friends was not due to lack of friendly feeling toward them.

A further link between O. Henry and his native state was effected by his second marriage, at Asheville in 1907. It was in the spring of 1905 that Miss Sara Coleman learned the identity of O. Henry. Her mother, returning to Asheville from a visit in Greensboro, told Sara that she had learned on her visit that her daughter's old friend Will Porter was the famous short story writer of New York "writing under the name of O. Henry."

Miss Coleman was startled into remembrance by this statement—remembrance of a childhood romance in Greensboro, "with a slender

lad with nice eyes," who climbed fences in the moonlight to get magnolias for her—and by the recollection of a story, then lying on her desk, a story torn from *Ainslee's Magazine* entitled "Madam Bo-Peep of the Ranches" by an unknown author, O. Henry. Impulsively, and at once, she wrote to the author, telling him that if he were not Will Porter, not to bother to answer. O. Henry did answer, a correspondence ensued, and they met in New York where the old romance was renewed.

An article from the *Greensboro Record* of November 14, 1907, gives a short account of the marriage. The groom is spoken of as Mr. Porter, a native of Greensboro, who had left his home town a number of years before and who had devoted his time to magazine writing under the name of O. Henry. He is referred to as the son of Dr. A. S. Porter and nephew of Mr. Clark Porter. The bride, Miss Sara Coleman, is also spoken of as being a native of Greensboro, the daughter of Colonel Thad Coleman, "one of the brainiest men of his day—who served with distinction during the Civil War." Her mother, it was noted, was the daughter of the late James Sloan, with many relatives in Greensboro. The account ends:

"The match evidently is one of unadulterated love, for as children, they were sweethearts and played together on the streets of Greensboro. *The Record* wishes them great joy."

Although a number of newspaper accounts of O. Henry's marriage have been preserved, the above article is the only one that appeared in a Greensboro paper.

Dr. J. F. Campbell of Asheville in an unpublished letter to Dr. Smith gives an interesting incident of O. Henry's wedding. After mentioning that he had officiated at O. Henry's marriage, Dr. Campbell says:

"There is a characteristic story told of his wedding. I sent him instructions through Mr. Gilman Hall, his best man, as to the manipulation of the ring, as to which pocket to put it in, etc. O. Henry's reply to Hall was, 'Look here, Gilman, you and that preacher needn't try to rattle me. I have a ring in every pocket.'"

Dr. Pinckney Herbert, an Asheville physician told (to this writer) interesting details of O. Henry's wedding. According to Dr. Herbert, it was an elaborate affair with musicians sent down from New York and refreshments from Delmonico's. Mrs. Porter in a letter to this writer said briefly that she was married in Asheville by Dr. J. F. Campbell and that she and O. Henry spent their honeymoon at Hot Springs, North Carolina, in a little hotel deep in the mountains.

After his marriage in 1907, O. Henry lived only three more years, most of the time being spent in New York. However, he spent several months of the last year of his life in Asheville. His health was poor, and on a doctor's advice, O. Henry came to the mountains in October of 1909, remaining there until some time in April 1910, when he returned to New York.

Since O. Henry was ill during these months in Asheville, there was little activity on his part. Most of his time he spent at the home of his wife near Weaverville, which O. Henry describes in his story, "Let Me Feel Your Pulse," as "a big neighborless cottage on a hill surrounded by a hundred mountains." According to Dr. Herbert, O. Henry at that time

also had an office over a store on Patton Avenue in Asheville where he spent some time; but he was able to work only a little, as several letters written at the time testify.

His physician, Dr. Pinckney Herbert, remembered O. Henry very vividly and said that he and the short story writer came to be good friends. The doctor recalled that his famous patient was one of the most reticent, one of the wittiest, and one of the kindest men he ever knew. O. Henry made friends constantly with taxi drivers, hotel porters, vaudeville actors, janitors, and street car conductors, his physician said. Dr. Herbert also commented on the fact that O. Henry was a good listener; and that when the doctor talked to him about diseases, symptoms, and remedies, the patient listened with absorbed interest. O. Henry also spent hours poring over medical books, familiarizing himself with the terminology. Although he did little writing during this time of illness, O. Henry did produce one story called "Let Me Feel Your Pulse," or as the author called it, "Adventures in Neurasthenia," which is obviously autobiographical. In reference to the setting, O. Henry speaks of the place as being in the Blue Ridge Mountains "in a state too dignified to be dragged into this controversy." Mrs. Porter, in a list of her favorite stories by her husband, speaks of this one as being first in her heart since it is reminiscent of O. Henry's last year of life and since it was his last story.

So, in Asheville we find the O. Henry of mature years—the O. Henry who had become famous, but who was still quiet, reserved, unaffected, gentle, and possessed of a keen sense of humor and a deep sympathy for all sorts and conditions of people.

O. Henry left Asheville for New York in the spring of 1910 where he lived only until June fifth. He died rather suddenly in a New York hospital where he was taken after he had collapsed in his rooms at the Caledonia. His body was brought to Asheville where he was buried in Riverside Cemetery.

Accounts of the death and the funeral of O. Henry appeared in the newspapers of Greensboro and Asheville of that period. In fact, there were two services: one in New York at the Little Church Around the Corner and one in Asheville.

In an unpublished letter to Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, Walter Hines Page tells of attending O. Henry's funeral in New York. He writes, in part:

"At the Little Church Around the Corner, where his funeral was held, there was quite a large gathering of the story-writing people and publishers, and the literary folk of the town, and others whom I didn't know. It was all very simple and very sad."

There is very little information to be found about the funeral in Asheville. Perhaps there was not much to say of the sad occasion. Mrs. Porter says simply that O. Henry was buried there. Dr. Campbell remarked quite briefly that he officiated both at O. Henry's wedding and at his funeral. Dr. Herbert said that he was a pall bearer and that the service was very simple and very short. Today, O. Henry's body rests in Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, his grave marked by a plain slab with the bare inscription, "1862 William Sydney Porter 1910."

## CHAPTER IV

## O. HENRY STILL LIVES IN NORTH CAROLINA MEMORIALS

Although O. Henry did little writing in his native state, North Carolina claims him as a beloved son and has perpetuated his memory in many ways. The first memorial dedicated to O. Henry was the tablet, which under the auspices of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association was unveiled in Raleigh, December 2, 1914, in the Supreme Court Building. Designed by Lorado Taft, the tablet is a bronze plaque which contains a profile of the writer and a quotation, under the inscription, "O. Henry, 1862-1910," from his story, "Brickdust Row": "He no longer saw a rabble, but his brothers seeking the ideal." Across the bottom of the plaque, in large letters, is the full name, William Sidney Porter.

Accounts of the dedication appeared in newspapers all over the country; and the *Greensboro Daily News* for December 2, 1914, featured the ceremony with large headlines that read:

"LARGE ASSEMBLY GATHERED FROM ALL OVER NORTH CAROLINA TO WITNESS DEDICATION OF THE O. HENRY MEMORIAL"

These headlines are followed by the lead: "DR. SMITH PRESENTS TABLET AND REVIEWS LIFE OF MR. PORTER.

"MEMORY OF GREENSBORO BOY IS FITTINGLY HONORED GREAT STORY WRITER, DR. SMITH, SKETCHES BOYHOOD LIFE OF WILL PORTER: HIS HUMOR, HIS SMILE, HIS GENIUS.

"MET DEATH WITH A SMILE. HE SMILED IN THE OLD WAY WHEN HE KNEW THE END WAS NEAR AND MET IT WITH A CHEER. GOVERNOR RECEIVES TABLET."

The article, written by W. J. Bost, contains interesting information about the event, listing among the audience, Mrs. William Sidney Porter and Miss Margaret Porter (daughter of O. Henry by his first marriage).

The reporter summarizes the address by Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, who gave a brief outline of the life of William Sidney Porter and brought out his connection with the Worth family, a noted one in the history of the state. Dr. Smith ended his address with an expression of appreciation of the art of the short story writer. At the conclusion of Dr. Smith's speech, the bronze tablet was unveiled by Miss Margaret Porter, presented by Dr. Archibald Henderson of the University of North Carolina, and received by Governor Craig in behalf of the State.

John Michaux attended the dedication and considered it a most impressive ceremony in which friends and relatives of O. Henry, as well as hundreds of admiring readers, came together. A number of people in Greensboro who had known O. Henry were in the group that witnessed the celebration.

Five years after the presentation of the bronze memorial in Raleigh, a new hotel was opened in Greensboro, named for and dedicated to the famous short story writer. The reaction to this honor in the newspapers across the country varied from satirical comments to words of highest praise for Greensboro's recognition of her favorite son. From the accounts in the local papers the dedication was most impressive. The

*Greensboro Daily News* put out a special edition honoring O. Henry with many stories and articles contributed by his contemporaries, as well as accounts of local traditions and tales connected with his life there. A copy of the printed program, preserved in the O. Henry Collection of the Greensboro Public Library gives the following information about the ceremony:

### O. HENRY OPENING JULY 2, 1919

#### Program

#### PRESIDENT H. R. BUSH, PRESIDING

OUR MONUMENT .....	Mr. A. M. Scales
PRESENTATION BY MRS. WILLIAM SIDNEY PORTER	
BOYHOOD DAYS WITH WILL .....	Mr. Tom Tate
WILL PORTER AND THE DOCTORS .....	Dr. W. P. Beall
THE DRUG STORE .....	Mr. Frank Dalton
O. HENRY'S INTERNATIONAL FAME .....	Dr. Archibald Henderson
RAMBLINGS .....	Dr. Howard Rondthaler
ADDRESS, O. HENRY .....	Dr. C. Alphonso Smith

Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, in behalf of the stockholders, dedicated the hotel with these fitting words:

"In your name . . . and speaking for you, I dedicate this hotel. I dedicate it to the comfort and happiness of all those who in after years may find shelter and harborage here. I dedicate it in pride and gratitude to the memory of him whom we loved and whom we honor dead. May his spirit in all the plenitude of its kindness and sympathy and fellowship abide forever here. And may this hostelry, mindful of its dowry, be worthy of its heritage."

In February 1922 the O. Henry Drug Store was opened in the building in which O. Henry had worked as a boy. Although a pharmacy had operated in this same place for most of the time since Will Porter had worked there, the store had had various names during those years. However, in 1922 the name was changed to the O. Henry Drug Store; and on the wall outside the building was placed a bronze tablet with the following inscription:

"IN THIS STORE O. HENRY (WILLIAM SIDNEY PORTER) WAS EMPLOYED BY HIS UNCLE AS CLERK FOR FIVE YEARS. HERE HE WAS LOVED BY OLD AND YOUNG, WHITE AND BLACK, RICH AND POOR."

Two years after the opening of the pharmacy in honor of O. Henry, a marker showing O. Henry's birth place was unveiled with appropriate ceremony in March, 1924. The *Greensboro Daily News* for March 28, 1924, contained an article with the headlines:

"Tablet of Bronze and Granite Unveiled with Fitting Ceremony to Mark the Birthplace of O. Henry."

The article gives the details of the ceremony at which Mr. R. D. Douglas presided. Dr. W. P. Beall, for many years an intimate friend of young Will Porter, delivered an address for the occasion. The opening sentences of the article give the important features of the event:

"O. Henry's home town paid belated tribute to his memory yesterday at 2:30 o'clock, when a tablet of bronze and granite was unveiled to mark the site of O. Henry's birth place, on the north side of West Market

Street, between Edgeworth and Eugene Streets. Charlotte Harris Porter, cousin of O. Henry, unveiled the tablet which bears the inscription,

'At this site O. Henry, Will Porter, was born September 11, 1862.'

In 1927 another memorial was erected to the memory of O. Henry, this time at Fletcher, near Asheville. Julian A. Woodcock of Asheville, a great admirer of O. Henry, gave a memorial which is a bronze and granite tablet on a granite boulder. The plaque bears the following inscription:

"IN LOVING MEMORY  
WILLIAM SIDNEY PORTER, O. HENRY  
AMERICAN SHORT STORY WRITER  
BORN IN GREENSBORO, N. C.  
SEPTEMBER 11, 1862  
DIED IN NEW YORK CITY  
JUNE 5, 1910  
A VISITOR IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA  
HIS BODY IS INTERRED IN RIVERSIDE CEMETERY  
ASHEVILLE, N. C.  
'HE SAW NO LONGER THE RABBLE, BUT HIS  
BROTHERS SEEKING THE IDEAL' "

Besides the formal memorials to O. Henry, there are a great many other ways in which his memory has been perpetuated.

One of the most valuable reminders of Will Porter and O. Henry is the O. Henry Collection of Materials given by Mrs. C. Alphonso Smith to the Greensboro Public Library. Dr. Smith was a boyhood friend of Will Porter and one of the few of his old friends who kept his contacts with Will Porter after he became the short story writer known as O. Henry. As long as Dr. Smith lived, he and Dr. Archibald Henderson did much to keep alive O. Henry's memory in this state. Dr. Smith became O. Henry's first biographer, and since he was interested, careful, and tireless, he gathered bountiful authentic materials. Published in 1916, Dr. Smith's *O. Henry Biography* was welcomed by numberless readers and was applauded for its interest and authenticity.

When Dr. Smith died in 1924, Mrs. Smith turned over his entire collection of O. Henry material to the Public Library of the town in which Dr. Smith and O. Henry had lived as boys. In a letter written by Mrs. Smith in January 1925 to Mr. E. P. Wharton, President of the Board of Directors of the Greensboro Public Library, Mrs. Smith says:

"It gives me genuine pleasure to present to the Public Library of Greensboro, in memory of my husband, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, the material about O. Henry and his work, which my husband has been collecting for years. The friendship and mutual admiration of these two sons of Greensboro make it most fitting, it seems to me, that their names should be linked, together in this material; and I trust this Collection may become the nucleus of much more, so that their home town may become the headquarters for students who wish to specialize on the short story writer of whom we are justly proud."

Since this gift comprises Dr. Smith's entire collection of O. Henry material and much of the original manuscript used in compiling the O. Henry biography, it is considered the most valuable of O. Henry collections.

This collection, combined with clippings from local papers and from magazines for years back, and the pictures, letters, and reminiscences of friends of Will Porter preserved by Mrs. Nellie Rowe Jones and other members of the staff for many years, gave Greensboro Public Library an invaluable fund of material concerning O. Henry and his times, gathered from original sources.

Since 1924 the Greensboro Historical Museum Society has been active in collecting and preserving historical material. The Museum has a most interesting and valuable O. Henry Exhibit, an outstanding item being a reproduction of the front of the Porter Drug Store in which Will Porter worked. In addition there is a drug counter, as drawn by O. Henry himself while working there, and some of the original fixtures of the old Porter Drug Store.

Besides the memorials listed in his native city and state, the memory and the name of O. Henry have been preserved in many other ways. Greensboro has a Porter Street and an O. Henry Boulevard, while Asheville has an O. Henry Avenue and O. Henry shelves in both of its libraries and numbers of literary societies in schools and cities, books, clubs, and study clubs in the state bear the O. Henry name.

In 1928 the Annual of Greensboro College, *The Echo*, was dedicated to Greensboro, "the Mother City of their College and of O. Henry." Near the front of the book, one page was devoted to Mary Swaim Porter, the mother of O. Henry and graduate of Greensboro College in 1850. All these and many others in the state not specifically identified here bespeak the loyalty and regard with which O. Henry is remembered in his native state. While North Carolina lives in stories of O. Henry, the memory of Will Porter and O. Henry still lives throughout North Carolina.

## CHAPTER V THE STORIES

Will Porter, school boy and young clerk in his uncle's drug store, was known by relatives and a comparatively small group of intimate friends, in his native Greensboro, during the years 1862 to 1882. For several years following, in Texas, he was acquainted with a somewhat larger group. In New York, from 1902 till 1910, the reticent O. Henry circulated with a limited number of acquaintances—mostly literary people and publishers. Since the early 1900's, however, through his stories, O. Henry has become famous to the reading public throughout the United States and, to a great extent, around the world.

Approximately three hundred of O. Henry's stories were published in the periodicals of his day; and practically all of these were collected and published in volumes, of which millions of copies have been sold throughout the world—five million copies in the United States alone. The settings of the stories vary, although the New York stories are the most numerous and best known. However, there is one volume of stories of the West, *Heart of the West*, and another volume of stories with a Latin American background, *Cabbages and Kings*. Also, scattered through the ten volumes of O. Henry's collected works are thirty or

more stories which reflect the influence of his early years. Since these stories are not collected separately, few people are aware of their special flavor.

However, in none of these stories does O. Henry state specifically that the setting is North Carolina. In some instances the North Carolina influence is very marked, while in others there are only suggestions or allusions; but to one familiar with the author's early background—North Carolina at the close of the Civil War, with its traditions and its atmosphere, the evidence is revealing and unmistakable.

The boyhood friend of O. Henry, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, born in Greensboro in 1864, says that without the background of the "somnolent little Southern town" of his childhood, William Sidney Porter would hardly have developed into the O. Henry that the world knew. Dr. Smith speaks of this home of Will Porter not only as the place which nurtured him and his forebears, but also as the place which released his constructive powers and held a place in his dreams until the end.

Among O. Henry's short stories are several that deal with the old South. Not all of these stories have their settings in the South, but they all deal with Southerners and their peculiar foibles and virtues.

One of the best known of these stories is "A Municipal Report," with its setting in Nashville, Tennessee. Although a number of elements enter into the charm of this story, the concern here is not with the intriguing plot, but with pointing out evidence of the influence of the old South.

The story is told from the point of view of a "young Southerner gone North" who, as a representative of a Northern magazine, had come to Nashville to interview Azalea Adair, a contributor, and to offer her a contract.

First, the reader is given the young man's impression of the quiet Southern city in contrast with the busy thoroughfares of Northern cities. The characters presented here are of the Old South. There is Major Caswell, at whom O. Henry pokes sly fun for his ne'er-do-well tendencies, his insatiable interest in genealogy, and in Southern tradition, as well as for his pride in Confederate leaders. Contrasted with him is the young man from the North who says he is a Southerner, but not one by profession, who "eschews the string tie and the slouch hat."

Another character introduced early in the story is "Uncle Caesar," the old Negro ex-slave and faithful servant and coachman of Azalea Adair. O. Henry presents Uncle Caesar as comical in appearance, clever in some ways, most understanding in his loyalty to "Mis' Zalea" whom he serves in many ways and protects always. Azalea Adair Caswell is the character upon whom much of the interest in the story is centered, and she is one of the Southern women whom O. Henry touches with gentleness and reverence. His depiction of her has been pointed out by early readers of the story as a delineation of his Aunt Lina, who mothered him and taught him in her school. O. Henry says of Azalea Adair that "She was a product of the old South, gently nurtured in the sheltered life" and that "her learning was not broad but deep."

Other stories by O. Henry contain characters of the old South, especially the story "The Duplicity of the Hargraves," in which the

action takes place in Washington, D. C., and the main character is from the "old, old South," as O. Henry says. Here again Southern pride is portrayed: Major Pendleton Talbot and his daughter are pictured as "boarders" in an old fashioned boarding house of "Southern style and aspect," with the large portico upheld by tall white columns and with a wide shaded lawn, back from one of the quietest streets of the city.

Again, as in "A Municipal Report," there is the problem of dwindling finances and wounded Southern pride, brought out here by an incident with a young actor who had often visited the Major in his rooms and listened to his reminiscences of the past. When, after impersonating the Southerner on the stage, he offers to pay Major Talbot for the "loan of his personality," the Major is so insulted that the harm is remedied only by the actor's so successfully impersonating an old Negro Servant "Uncle Mose" that he is able, in this guise, to render financial aid to the impoverished, but proud Major. Again, in this story O. Henry in depicting the characters of the old South recognizes in them the "enviable vices" and "lovable weaknesses" of his native section.

The loyalty of the old Negro servant, usually an ex-slave, is brought out in a number of O. Henry stories in addition to the two already cited. In the story, "The Guardian of the Accolade," Uncle Bushrod is another faithful servant who expresses his loyalty and devotion to his master. While trying to guard "Marse Robert" from the real danger of drink and the imagined one of taking bank funds, "Uncle Bushrod" confuses some of the issues, but not his devotion to his master.

With no less intense loyalty speaks Jeff, or as he calls himself, "Thomas Jefferson Pemberton," when he gives his "approval unmixed with alloy" of his young master's appointment to a Federal Judgeship. The old Negro expresses the opinion that "dem Yankees" not only recognize the worth of "Marse William," but that they are "doin' somepin to make up for dey rascality endurin de war." This instance comes from "The Emancipation of Billy," a story in which a young lawyer in a Southern town finally succeeds in establishing his identity as an individual, not just as "the son of Governor Pemberton."

Another instance of the relationship between the Negro and those he served is given by O. Henry in the story, "Thimble, Thimble." Here, "Uncle Jake" is appreciated by his mistress for his devotion and faithful service to the family. Always treasured is the memory of Uncle Jake's pride in having served to the end "Marster" Blanford Carteret. Uncle Jake had been the body servant of his master during the Civil War and was with him to his death. At his own insistence Uncle Jake is permitted to take a treasured heirloom, a gold watch which was once the property of his "old Marster," to young "Marster" Blanford Carteret, a trip that takes him from Virginia to New York.

Once again, O. Henry gives a humorous slant to his contrast between the North and the South. Two young men, one a native Southerner, the other a scion of the Northern branch of the Carteret family, are working together in a New York office. The young Carteret from the South has been away from his home for sometime. The story shows Uncle Jake in the New York office with the watch, faced with the problem of which one of the young Carterets is the one to whom he is to present it. Since

the cousins take pleasure in "stringing" Uncle Jake along, the story gives details of their technique and, of course, of how Uncle Jakes comes out on top by recognizing the gentleman from the South.

This idea of contrast between the two sections comes out in a number of O. Henry's stories. Sometimes the characters themselves voice their opinions on the subject; at other times the story as a whole brings out the contrast. In all cases the subject is handled by O. Henry without any bitterness, with gentle satire, and with a penetrating understanding of both sides. C. Alphonso Smith says that during O. Henry's youth the difference between the North and the South was often a question for discussion and that the idea persisted with O. Henry during his later years in New York. Dr. Smith further expresses the opinion that in O. Henry's writing, "Art and heart are so blended in their contrasts . . . that the reader hardly realizes . . . the sureness of the author's footing." It is a question, he says, not of prejudice but of genial "give and take" in O. Henry's contrast between the "Rebs and the Yanks."

One of the stories in which the contrast is brought out in a striking manner is in "Two Renegades," perhaps one of the least familiar of O. Henry's stories. The opening lines will probably strike a native note for North Carolina readers: "In the Gate City of the South the Confederate Veterans were reuniting." This story, which is in the class of "tall tales," concerns a young Yankee, Barnard O'Keefe, and a Southern doctor, Dr. Millikin, in Panama. Young O'Keefe is suffering from a tropical fever when he meets the Doc who, O'Keefe asserts, saved his life. The old doctor, recognizing the young patient as a Yankee, hails him as such, but insists that O'Keefe's "Yankeeeness" is not "pizen," merely geographical. However, O'Keefe sees the old Doc as the "red-hottest Southerner that ever smelled mint, so red hot that he made Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee look like Abolitionists." Besides the theme of the contrast of the North and the South, there are other reminiscences in this story that recall O. Henry's early connection with his native state, such as "Gate City," which has often been used to refer to Greensboro, and Millikin, a well-known family name in Greensboro.

In the story, "Best Seller," the contrast is between the South and the West, a story that brings out the characteristics of the Southern aristocrat living in a Virginia mansion. O. Henry's ancestors on his mother's side, the Shirleys, were from Virginia, giving him a natural inheritance of Virginia pride and tradition. In this story as in one or two others in which Southern traditions are pictured, O. Henry may have had in mind either Virginia or North Carolina.

A cherished Virginia tradition is presented in a most unusual manner in O. Henry's story, "Compliments of the Season," which has as its setting New York on Christmas Eve in the early 1900's. The main characters in the story had come from the South, the central one, Fuzzy, "a soldier of misfortune." Fuzzy returns a lost doll to the home of a millionaire; and after receiving a most welcome reward of a hundred dollars, he steps into the hall of the beautiful house where his memory begins to "decorate his confused mind." Something about the surroundings—the decorations, the Christmas music, the atmosphere—bring back "out of some impossible, vanished, and irrevocable past a little pure white transient forgotten ghost," the spirit of Christmas past. Then

O. Henry writes, "Time so disobliging to most of us turned backward to accommodate Fuzzy." He recalls the wainscoted halls, the guests, the punch bowls, and an ancient toast of old Virginia. When the lady of the house appears, Fuzzy tells her that he could not leave without exchanging with her "compliments of the season." As she looks at Fuzzy—shabby, unkempt, and haggard—her condescending smile fades, her eyes turn serious, and she recognizes something about him—what was it? At the lady's request they sit down, and Fuzzy begins the ancient toast, "The blessings of another year . . ." "Be upon this house . . ." the lady prompts. Together they give most of the toast, at one time so familiar to both. The story ends with the lady's ordering her chauffeur to take the "gentleman" wherever he wishes to go; but the unanswered question was still in her mind: "I wonder—but there were so many who came." Although she fails to identify the man, she feels certain that there is a common past, and she wonders if the memory of that past is a blessing or a curse to one who has fallen so low as Fuzzy.

While reading these stories one does not have to seek for traces of the writer's early life; they are there—memories, reminiscences that are warp and woof of the material. The settings and characters of the South; the old time darkies; Southern pride, arrogant, gallant, or ridiculous; loyalty of the men and women—all speak of the life in the South before the twentieth century.

In addition to the stories in which O. Henry explicitly uses the South as a background or in which he presents characters as typical Southerners, there are some stories that have occasional references to the South, which to O. Henry usually, if not always, meant his native North Carolina. One of these stories in which reference is made to a North Carolina saying is "The Fool Killer," which begins: "Down South whenever anyone perpetrates some particularly monumental piece of foolishness, everybody says, 'Send for Jesse Holmes.'" Then O. Henry explains that Jesse Holmes the Fool-Killer is a myth like Santa Claus or Jack Frost, a myth that he uses to advantage in the story. Dr. Smith and other contemporaries of O. Henry say that people around Greensboro for many years were familiar with the expression "Jesse Holmes, the Fool-Killer." All agree that the saying, or the creation of the local version of the character, doubtless came from a cousin of O. Henry's mother, Napoleon Bonaparte Evans, who for some time, back in the 1800's, had a column in a Greensboro paper composed of letters signed by Jesse Holmes, the Fool-Killer.

In reminiscences of O. Henry's youth by people who knew him, his favorite diversions of serenading and drawing are often mentioned. O. Henry makes casual reference to these youthful interests in a few stories, especially in "The Moment of Victory," where, in recounting the accomplishments of Willie, a friend says, "He played the triangle in our serenading and quartet crowd that used to ring the welkin three nights a week in town."

Contemporaries of young Will also remembered quite clearly his singing a song that begins:

"If you don't stop fooling with my Lula girl  
I'll tell you what I'll do."

O. Henry makes use of this song in the story, "The Caballero's Way," in which the Cisco Kid is accredited with knowing but one tune; and "when he chose to sing his song, he sang it," beginning something like this:

"Don't monkey with my Lulu girl  
Or I'll tell you what I'll do."

As has been mentioned previously in this sketch, O. Henry's first promise of genius was in his drawing. More than once his Greensboro contemporaries have mentioned that in his drawings of people young Will Porter had the faculty of bringing out strongly the personal characteristics. So well did he do this that his friends said that the person, although sometimes caricatured, was easily recognized even years later. Although in O. Henry's stories one finds little reference to the early practice of this talent, in "A Madison Square Arabian Knight," a story from the collection *The Trimmed Lamp*, the reader will find a recognizable allusion to this early trait. In the story an artist says that when people came to look at his portraits, they would whisper and look queerly at each other. Puzzled at first, the artist learns the cause of the reaction. It was that he had a way of bringing out in the face of the one he painted, strong personal characteristics—sometimes good, sometimes bad. The artist was unable to determine how he did it; he only painted what he saw. Apparently the artist had the talent that was attributed to O. Henry, but lacked the latter's sense of humor; as a result he had trouble sometimes with his subjects.

### DRUG STORE STORIES

Since Will Porter worked in his uncle's drug store in Greensboro during the impressionable age of fifteen to twenty, it is to be expected that such an experience would be reflected in his writings. In addition to the social contacts and whatever contributions these associations may have made to O. Henry's subsequent art the knowledge of drugs and drug stores furnished materials also for some of his stories in the years to come.

One of the stories in which O. Henry uses his knowledge of drugs to good effect is "A Ramble in Aphasia." Although the chief interest of the story centers around an experience in aphasia—or amnesia—the setting is a druggist's convention; as a result, references to druggists, names of medicines, and customs practiced in drug stores abound in the story. At one point one boasts that old time druggists percolated their own paregoric and rolled their own pills, but they weren't "above handling a few garden seeds in the spring and carrying a sideline of confectionary and shoes."

In "The Love Philtre of Ikey Schoenstein" the reader finds many references to drug stores, the responsibilities of druggists, the names of drugs, etc. In this story Ikey is the night clerk of the Blue Light Drug Store in "downtown" New York. He rooms and gets his breakfast at a boarding house nearby, where lives Rosy, whom he shyly and silently adores. Ikey's rival for Rosy, Chunk McGowan, is neither shy nor silent. Since Chunk is friendly with the druggist and knows nothing of Ikey's feeling for Rosy, he calls on Ikey for help in planning an elopement

with Rosy, calling on his druggist friend for some "powders, a drug of some kind, that'll make a girl like you better if you give 'em to her."

Ikey agrees to furnish the love potion and, as solemnly goes behind the prescription desk, crushes tablets of morphia, adds a little sugar of milk and folds the mixture neatly in a white paper. Handing this to Chunk, Ikey tells him to administer it in a liquid. What he does not tell Chunk is that the powder, when taken by an adult, would insure several hours of heavy slumber without danger to the sleeper. The next morning the young druggist learns from the happy bridegroom that the elopement took place the night before, according to schedule, except that the love potion was given to Rosy's father rather than to her.

O. Henry uses his association with drugs and diseases in a rather unusual manner in the story "Makes the Whole World Kin." One night a burglar, after entering a bed room, is halted in his attempt to rob his victim of his watch when both the burglar and the victim are seized with paroxysms of pain from a common ailment—rheumatism. As the burglar sits down, they discuss their symptoms and remedies with unassuming naturalness. The remedies, suggested and tried by one or the other, constitute a rather ludicrous list. In this story O. Henry refers to drugs and drug stores only incidentally, as is also the case in "At Arms with Morpheus," "The Enchanted Kiss," and "Assessor of Success."

Whether Edward Pinkhammer glibly talks of pharmacy, or Ikey mixes a sleeping potion to foil his rival, or Tom Hopkins mistakes "Morphia for Quinia," or Sam Tansey watches the clock to see when he'll be released from his duties at the Cut Rate Drug Store, or Beauchamp Morley parades his knowledge of prescriptions—one recognizes that the author of these stories knows not only the names of the drugs, but also the characteristics of drug stores and of their clerks and customers.

### MOUNTAIN STORIES

In addition to O. Henry's stories about the old South, those with some reference to the South, and his drug store stories, there is still another group which we may term the mountain stories, that hark back to his life in his native state. In some of these tales the setting, in neutral tints, is only an inconspicuous background against which the action takes place; it neither makes nor mars the picture; in others, the beauty of the mountains and the characteristics of the people and places stand out with startling vividness. For according to O. Henry's family and friends, the Southern mountains to him meant the North Carolina mountains.

As has been pointed out before in this sketch, Will Porter, while on a trip to Pilot Mountain with a group of his young friends, was greatly impressed by the vastness of the mountain area and the loneliness, especially of women, in the remote rural sections. During the last year of his life, O. Henry was very conscious of the beauty and majesty of the mountains around Asheville. In "Let Me Feel Your Pulse," his last written story, he gives more than once his impressions of the beauty of the scenery, perhaps most effectively at the end:

"What rest more remedial than to sit with Amaryllis in the shade, and with a sixth sense, read the wordless Theocritan idyll of the gold-bannered blue mountains marching orderly into the dormitories of the night?"

"Out of Nazareth" is a story with a touch of the old South, even though the setting is in the mountains during a more-or-less modern real-estate boom. Although the author does not call the place North Carolina, he does use some local place names such as Skyland, Switzerland of the South, Queen City, and Holly Springs.

The plot of this story centers around the activities of a real-estate promoter from the North named J. Pinkney Bloom, who is also known as a grafter, or just a "Yank." Although many schemes of the promoter are mentioned, his main interest for the time is in two investors, Colonel and Mrs. Blaylock. Their appearance and manners so impress J. Pinkney that he develops, as he says, a kindly feeling toward these "unsophisticated representatives of by-gone days of the South" who were so "simple, impractical, and unsuspecting." Their tolerance and kindness prevail, transforming Pinkney Bloom, the "Yank," into a generous and kindly man.

The setting of two of O. Henry's kidnapping stories is in the Southern Mountains—the familiar "Ransom of the Red Chief" and the less well-known "Hostages to Momus." Although the locale is not particularly emphasized, it plays its part in the stories.

In "The Ransom of the Red Chief" the author presents a kidnapper who was "down South" in a little town called Summit: "About two miles from Summit was a little mountain. . . . On the rear elevation of this mountain was a cave. There we stored provisions." This setting serves adequately for the action of two desperate men in their kidnapping of the "forty pound chunk of freckled wild cat" who leads them such a hard life that they pay his father two hundred and fifty dollars to take him back.

The other kidnapping story, "Hostages to Momus," is set in a "bunch of mountains" in the South where the kidnappers select "an upright slice of topography" as a place to store their "provisions" and to take their victim for a short time. Although the place is not named, these are the Southern Mountains, which to O. Henry really meant the North Carolina Mountains. Moreover, the story contains some typical North Carolina names that were familiar to O. Henry: Tucker, Harris, Patterson, and Coble.

Two gentle grafters use the Southern mountains as their retreat in the story, "The Midsummer Masquerade." The setting is announced early in the narrative:

"Me and Andy . . . packs our trunks and takes the six o'clock Tortoise Flyer to Crow Knob, a kind of dernier of resorts in the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina."

Although one can find little of the real South in this rather fantastic story of summer boarders in Woodchuck Inn, and although one can see in it little that reflects O. Henry's early life, there is a brief vivid picture of the Southern mountains, as well as names of North Carolina towns: Asheville, Charlotte, Haw River, and Murfreesboro.

The loneliness of women in remote places is the theme of two or three of these Southern mountain stories. One of them, "The Blackjack Burgainer," has a definite North Carolina setting: "Bethel revealed the foothills of the Blue Ridge. Above it the mountains were piled to the sky. Far below it, the turbid Catawba gleamed yellow along its disconsolate valley." Many of the people in the story are reminiscent not only of O. Henry's state, but also of the county and town in which he lived as a boy. Local names such as Rankin, Boyd, Settle, and Coletrane appear; other North Carolina names include Siler, Goforth, and Gallo-way.

The story, which deals with mountain feuds, vividly pictures the loneliness of the people in isolated rural sections in the early 1900's, a time before automobiles, telephones, radios, and television had invaded the "remote fastnesses." Martella Garvey and her husband sell out to "a party of bespectacled, knicker-bockered and altogether absurd prospectors" and move to a less lonely section. Although Martella rejoices in the pleasures of her new life, "Blackjack had done his work . . . He had imbued her with the . . . reserve of his hushed interiors. She always seemed to hear, whatever her surroundings were, the scaly-barks falling and pattering down the Mountainside. She could always hear the awful silence of Blackjack sounding through the stillest of nights."

Richard Walser uses this story of O. Henry in his book, *North Carolina in the Short Story*.

In another of O. Henry's stories "The Whirligig of Life," the setting is placed "Half way to the Zenith, The Cumberland Range rose blue gray in the afternoon haze." The plot is concerned with the incidents of one five dollar bill which, in turn, pays for divorce, alimony, and remarriage of Ransie Bilbro and his wife Ariela Bilbro:

"Ransie was a narrow six feet . . . The imperturbability of the mountains hung upon him like a suit of armor. The woman was calicoed, angled, snuff-brushed and weary with unknown desires. Through it all gleamed a faint protest of cheated youth unconscious of its loss."

Once more, one is reminded of O. Henry's early interest in the remote small villages and lonely homes of people in the North Carolina Mountains and of another statement by his biographer, Dr. Smith: "O. Henry found his usable material in things seen rather than in things heard, or if heard, they were heard first hand."

The setting of the story "The Church with an over-shot-wheel" is given as Lakelands, "a contented little village," on a low spur of a mountain. The descriptions of the old mill and the contented little village in a secluded spot are seemingly identical with a mill and a neighborhood that are less than a dozen miles from Greensboro. Contiguous to such mills, of course, were "mill ponds" and some of these ponds were favorite haunts of O. Henry during his boyhood.

If the reader examines the seven stories mentioned, he will perceive the stamp of the mountains on some of the characters, and he perhaps will feel again the beauty of the mountain vistas and experience a pleasant surprise as he meets familiar North Carolina names.

BIBLIOGRAPHY  
BOOKS BY O. HENRY

1. *Complete Works of O. Henry*; Doubleday Doran and Company, Garden City, New York, 1934

BOOKS ABOUT O. HENRY

1. *Founders and Builders of Greensboro, 1808-1908* by Betty Caldwell, 1925. Jos. J. Stone and Company, Greensboro.
2. *The Caliph of Bagdad*, O. Henry, by Robert Davis and Arthur Maurice, D. Appleton and Company, 1931, New York.
3. *The Heart of O. Henry* by Dale Kramer, Rinehart & Company, 1954, New York.
4. *Through the Shadows with O. Henry* by Al Jennings, 1921 A. L. Burt Company, New York.
5. *O. Henry, The Man and His Work*, by Hudson Long, 1949. University of Penn. Press.
6. *O. Henry, The Story of William Sidney Porter*, by Jeanette Covert Nolan, 1943; Julian Messner, Inc., New York
7. *O. Henry Biography* by Dr. C. Alphonso Smith; 1916. Doubleday, Page, and Company, New York.
8. *The Quit Lodger of Irvin Place*, by William Wash Williams, 1936; E. P. Dutton and Company, New York.

MAGAZINE ARTICLES

1. "O. Henry As I Knew Him," By Sara Coleman Porter, *The Red Book*, March 1937
2. "O. Henry and North Carolina" by Archibald Henderson *The Nation*, January 1915

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

FROM

1. *The Patriot and the Flag*, Greensboro, April 23, 1808
2. *The Greensboro Daily News*, Dec. 2, 1914; Dec. 4, 1914; July 3, 1919; July 9, 1922; March 28, 1924; Oct. 4, 1925; Aug. 2, 1936.
3. *The Greensboro Record*, Nov. 14, 1907; Apr. 28, 1928; Apr. 29, 1928.







LIBRARY EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

VOLUME XVIII

- North Carolina Authors: A Selective Handbook.* October 1952. No. 1  
Cloth, \$3.00; paper, \$1.50
- The Great West: in Fact and Fiction.* Emily Bridgers. January 1953. No. 2
- The World of Wonderful Books: Adventures in Reading, 27th Series.* Mary  
Cutler Hopkins. April 1953. No. 3
- Other People's Lives, 13th Series.* Cornelia S. Love. July 1953. No. 4

VOLUME XIX

- North Carolina Writers. Revised.* Walter Spearman. October 1953. No. 1
- Adventures in Reading, 28th Series.* Marion Brown. January 1954. No. 2
- Plays of Today: 1950-1954.* Cornelia S. Love. April 1954. No. 3
- Frederick H. Koch: Pioneer Playmaker.* Samuel Selden and Mary T.  
Sphangos. July 1954. No. 4 Cloth, \$3.00; paper \$1.50

VOLUME XX

- The Ageless and Eternal Sea.* Emily Bridgers. October 1954. No. 1
- Bernice Kelly Harris.* Richard Walser. January 1955. No. 2 Cloth, \$2.50;  
paper, \$1.00
- Adventures in Reading, 29th Series.* Jessica Valentine. April 1955. No. 3
- Plays for Schools and Little Theatres.* H. A. Whetstone, Jr. July 1955.  
No. 4. \$1.00

VOLUME XXI

- Africa: South of the Sahara.* Emily Bridgers. October 1955. No. 1
- Other People's Lives, 14th Series.* Rosalie Massengale. January 1956. No. 2
- Adventures in Reading, 30th Series: Books As Windows To Your World.*  
Helen B. Hogan. April 1956. No. 3
- North Carolina Musicians.* N.C. Federation of Music Clubs. July 1956. No.  
4. Cloth, \$3.00; paper, \$1.50

VOLUME XXII

- Studies in the American Short Story.* Mary Jane Wing. October 1956.  
No. 1
- O. Henry in North Carolina.* Cathleen Pike. January 1957. No. 2 Cloth  
\$2.50
- Adventures in Reading, 31st Series.* Jane Bahnsen. April 1957. No. 3
- English History through Historical Novels.* Emily Bridgers. July 1957.  
No. 4

Subscription per volume, \$3.00; to residents of North Carolina, \$2.00  
Single copies, \$0.75; to residents of North Carolina, \$0.50 each.

Exceptions: *Thomas Wolfe, Paul Green, Inglis Fletcher,* and *North  
Carolina Authors,* etc. as noted above.

