Musical hobby paying rewards

By JUDY AUSLEY
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RUTHERFORDTON — Charles Nanney's music started as a hobby, but for area nursing homes and civic organizations it is a treat when he pays them a visit.

Nanney, better known as the Rev. Charles Nanney, was a Baptist preacher for years prior to retirement. Now entertaining folks confined to rest homes is a way of spreading tranquility through his gospel music.

Nanney gives regular storytelling and musical programs at Carolina House and at White Oak Manor. He plays several musical instruments, including the guitar and autoharp, and when he is not playing he plows through old music in research to gain more knowledge of the traditional and folk ballads prominent in the foothills and mountain counties.

"It is really rewarding searching out some of this old music and for me it gives me more understanding of early days in this area," the Rutherford County native said.

Life now is not how Nanney started out. His father and mother were Albert and Harriett Nanney of Union Mills. He was one of 18 children in the family.

After N.C. State where he studied textile management, he served in World War II as a U.S. Air Force flyer during which time he flew the plane that delivered the 27-foot Higgins airborne lifeboat used in rescue efforts to survivors when planes went down.

"When you are up there in the air with that kind of responsibility you see life in a different way," Nanney said.

"Those of us who served in World War II learned many, many lessons and much wisdom through our experiences that has stayed with us forever," Nanney said.

It wasn't until later in 1952 that he attended seminary in Kentucky and became an ordained Baptist minister.

He spent most of his years in the ministry with Baptist churches in South Carolina and retired in Newberry in 1981. He continues to fill in when needed at area churches.

He says music for him is a "constant gnaw to write something down even if it hits him at 4 a.m."

Some of his original music has been performed in the area by other musicians who through their music hold onto the early folk and gospel songs that paint pictures of how live as it was in an earlier day through the music of the region.

One local musician, Dot Lane said, "Charles truly holds onto grassroots music and that touches my heart."

"Preachers often make some of our best mountain storytellers and Charles has a talent for that as well," Lane added.

One such song "The Dark Riders" Nanney wrote in 1990 tells the story that depicts an incident that happened in the 1800s in Rutherford County.

An excerpt Nanney wrote reads, "High on the top of a green hill tucked away under the crest of the dark Blue Ridge Mountains there is an old family cemetery with only initials to mark the graves of Govan and Columbus Adair."

The story is these two men with an accomplice Martin Maynard were riding with the Ku Klux Klan out of Charlotte and were accused in 1870 of the murders of the Silas Weston family in Union Mills. Motive for the killings, according to Nanney, was over a stolen bottle of homemade brandy.

The men were later hanged for their crimes. Nanney says it is a bit of folklore that has been written about many times.

And legend goes that local children believe the ghosts of the men still ride the dark skies of the midnight.

Nanney wrote: "Their crime was so awful that when the lightning flashes across the sky, it the flash of the hooves of their horses, and when the thunder rolls from the dark still mountains in the distance, it is the thunder of the hoof beats of the Dark Riders."

The ballad was written by Nanney in 1990. He said he remembers hearing the story from his parents when he was a boy.

But, although the log houses that once stood in Union Mills and held the history of that tale are no longer standing, the old cemetery is still perched on a hill not too far off the highway in northwest Rutherford County.

"Although it has been so many years since that happened, I bet you there are some old-timers still living around here that remember hearing that story as I did when I was a young boy," Nanney added.

"It is the stories that I know that make me want to write them down and share them with folks like I do at the nursing homes. It gives me peace when I see the faces light up with glee or notice someone rocking and tapping their toes in time with my tunes," Nanney said.
Green Hill Elects New Pastor

The Rev. C. C. Nanney of Union Mills was elected pastor Sunday at Green Hill Baptist Church after serving as interim pastor since June, 1967.

Rev. Nanney will move into the pastorium at a later date. His last pastorate was in Maryland. He has also served in churches in South Carolina.
Rev. Nanney Resigns Pastorate

On the second Sunday in September, the Rev. C. C. Nanney resigned as pastor of the Green Hill Baptist Church. He is retiring for the second time. He retired from the Rehoboth Baptist Church, in Maryland, in early 1968 and moved back to his home at Union Mills. In June 1968 he went as supply pastor of the Green Hill Baptist Church, later he became interim pastor and later pastor and has been with the Green Hill Church for the past seven years. The old church building burned in February 1969, so a new church had to be built. So the church built and paid for this building in three years. Services were held first in the new building in November 1969.

Rev. Nanney has been in the ministry for almost 37 years, and has held pastor in two churches in Maryland, two in South Carolina, and now back for seven years in North Carolina. He and his wife were employed by the Alexander Schools at Union Mills before going into the ministry.

He will still supply for the Green Hill Church until they call a pastor and the pastor is on the field.

He now lives at his home at Union Mills.
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