

Jennett, Norman Ethre ^[1]

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by H. G. Jones, 1988

10 Mar. 1877–17 Jan. 1970



Norman Ethre Jennett. Image courtesy of the Digital North Carolina Collection

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^[2]Norman Ethre Jennett, artist, illustrator, cartoonist, and author, was born in the Grantham community of Wayne County ^[3], the son of Elijah Stanton and Clarissa King Jennett. The boy was only a year old when his father died, and for several years he lived with his mother and grandmother at Grantham and attended Bethany Friends Meeting. Later his mother married William Rufus King, and young Jennett moved with them to Sampson County ^[4].

His education was limited to a few years in the common schools, but the youngster exhibited a particular talent for drawing. He whittled likenesses of people on blocks of wood, and at age fifteen he took one of his wood sketches to Marion Butler ^[5], then editor of the Clinton Caucasian ^[6]. Butler inked the block and ran it with Jack Bennett's poem, "Summer's Comin'." The sketch of the jaunty black man attracted considerable notice, and Butler paid Jennett a dollar a week to work around the office and occasionally carve out other wood blocks. Soon, however, the competing newspaper, the Sampson Democrat ^[7], hired him away from the *Caucasian*. Some of his cartoons began to take on a political tone; and Butler, by then the leader of the newly organized Populist ^[8] party in North Carolina, became his favorite subject for caricature. One cartoon showed Butler selling out to the Republicans ^[9]; another pictured him as a giraffe reaching for a "senatorial plum."

Jennett's satirical characterization of the Populist leader attracted the attention of Governor Elias Carr ^[10] who recommended the young man to Josephus Daniels ^[11], editor of the partisan Raleigh News and Observer ^[12]. Daniels, the unofficial press agent for the Democrats in their political campaigns against the Populists and Republicans, hired Jennett as an office boy, and caricatures began to appear in the *News and Observer* in August 1895.

Having formerly worked with wood blocks, Jennett now perfected a technique of drawing a picture with a pencil, cutting it on a chalk plate, then making the cut from molten metal. Crude though it was, it introduced a new weapon into the political campaigns of the 1890s. Jennett's cartoons against the Fusionists ^[13] became a popular feature in the *News and Observer* and won him the attention of many leading Democrats. His colleagues called him the "Sampson Huckleberry."

With loans from Julian S. Carr ^[14] of Durham, Jennett in 1897 was able to accept a scholarship from the National Academy of Design ^[15] in New York. The following year he attended the William M. Chase School of Art. Meanwhile, he sold many of his drawings to such publications as Life ^[16], Southern Tobacco Journal, and American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record ^[17], and to such New York newspapers as the *World*, *Herald*, and *Journal*.

In the bitter off-year election of 1898, Jennett was persuaded to return to Raleigh for several months to draw cartoons for the Democrats. Daniels wrote, "I do not know how we could have gotten along in the campaigns of 1896 and 1898 without Jennett's cartoons," and in the fall grateful Democrats raised sixty-three dollars for a gift in appreciation for his "services in

assisting in redeeming the state."

Jennett continued to draw for various national publications, and for several months in 1899 he worked for the *St. Louis Star* [18]. He returned to New York, however, and for two years was an artist for the *Brooklyn Eagle* [19]. In 1900 he painted six scenes that were exhibited at the Paris Exposition by the *Mutual Life Insurance Company* [20]. The same year he spent several weeks in Raleigh drawing cartoons during the campaign for passage of the suffrage amendment.

From 1901 to 1917 Jennett was artist for the *New York Herald* [21], simultaneously working on the *Evening Telegram* [22] in which one of his popular features was the colored comic strip, "The Monkey Shines of Marseleen." In 1906 McLoughlin Brothers published a selection of the strips in a book, *The Monkey Shines of Marseleen*, and three years later Cupples and Leon published an entirely new edition under the same title. Among Jennett's other activities during the period of his association with the *Herald* were the creation of the Pathe Freres' rooster, and of a comic strip called "The Arrow-Plane Girlies" for *McCall's* in 1912.

Jennett was art editor of both *Aerial Age* and *Flying* from 1917 to 1922, and from 1923 to 1939 he was assistant art director of the McFadden Publications. In 1948, he sold his Cedar Grove, N.J., home and moved to California. In his retirement he devoted himself to oils and watercolors, some of which were exhibited in New York, New Jersey, and California.

On 9 July 1901 Jennett married Helen Mary MacGinness, a native of Ireland. Their children, Norman Ethre, Jr., and Charlotte Clara, both lived in California. Helen Jennett died in 1967; she and her husband were buried in the Santa Barbara Cemetery.

References:

Book Notes (October 1899), for Jennett's first few years in New York.

Josephus Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, for a discussion of Jennett (with several factual errors).

Raleigh News and Observer, especially for 1896, 1898, and 1900, for Jennett's cartoons. Unpublished sources in University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill: Papers of Norman Ethre Jennett (including scrapbooks of clippings and drawings), Southern Historical Collection.

photographs of Jennett, North Carolina Collection.

Additional Resources:

Norman Ethre Jennett Papers, 1896-1977 (collection no. 04132). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/j/Jennett,Norman_Ethre.html [23] (accessed June 18, 2013).

"He Doesn't Like to Let Go," *Raleigh News and Observer*, May 26, 1900. Civil War Era NC. Political Cartoons. North Carolina State University: <http://history.ncsu.edu/projects/cwnc/items/show/332> [24]

The North Carolina Election of 1898, UNC Libraries: <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/1898/sources/cartoon.html> [25]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. [31]

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<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/carr-julian-shakespeare> [15] <http://www.nationalacademy.org/> [16] <http://life.time.com/> [17]
<https://archive.org/details/americanruggis13unkngoog> [18] <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88086131/> [19]
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83031151/> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/north-carolina-mutual-life-insuranc> [21]
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/> [22] <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030194/> [23]
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