

J BLADEN JOURNAL

Bandeaux Creek a fitting sequel to first work

By JEFFERSON WEAVER, Staff Writer

Carolyn Rawls Booth's *Bandeaux Creek* is not another *Between the Rivers*.

Booth's second chapter in the story of Maggie Lorena Ryan, her family, and the southern Bladen area is a much grittier novel. Just as *Between The Rivers* reflected the gentler times of the late Victorian era and the societal changes of turn-of-the-century Carolina, *Bandeaux Creek* captures much of the darker side of the 1920's.

Mrs. Booth's characters-not just Maggie, but the whole Ryan family, as well as the well-crafted men and women based on real people from the Kelly community-struggle with technology, changes in society and the economy, and the first of the waves of emigration from family farms that changed the rural landscape of Bladen County and all the South.

One of the primary characters in the novel-the bootlegging, gold-digging Patty Sue-is one of the least developed. At first this seems confusing, the reader soon realizes that Patty Sue doesn't need deep development.

Like the great flood of 1928, the sagging economy, and other problems, to further develop the anti-heroine of Patty Sue would be to take attention away from the true antagonist of the book-an antagonist that is not a person, but the changing times.

The loss of family heritage, turbulent, changing times, and shifts in values to which people must adapt, or be passed by, all combine to create a darker enemy than any one character could be.

Patty Sue is as undeserving of pity or mercy as any of the other calamities that invade Colly Township. To provide her with too much humanity would be to allow the reader to feel a sympathy for her which would be undeserved.

By keeping Patty Sue somewhat vague, Mrs. Booth allows the reader to better conjure up their own visage of this rather unlikable woman—a brazen round-heels in a community of far-from-perfect, but still ladies of the truest sense.

Mrs. Booth's use of journal entries and newspaper clippings, while considered by some to be a writer's "trick", is key in this novel. The reader is better allowed to see what is happening through both the eyes of society and the members of society.

It is to her credit that Mrs. Booth takes a somewhat clichéd technique and gives it new life.

For the local and regional history buff, there are plenty of references to landmarks known now just to the history books or from family stories. To see these given a personal touch—from dancing at the Lumina at Wrightsville Beach, to a raft trip down the Cape Fear River—is delightful.

Bandeaux Creek is not for everyone; as always happens when someone writes about their home community, there will be occasional grumbles.

It is, in many ways, a stark novel, but that better demonstrates and describes the times of shifting values and changing morals of the 1920's, even in North Carolina.

Davy's description of a closed country store is one of the finest and most symbolic scenes of a dying time that has ever been penned about our area. That partial chapter alone is worthy of reading the book.

And while *Bandeaux Creek* is a sad novel, it is also an uplifting one. Len's adventures whilst being sent to Boston to fetch home his mother provide a grand description of how a common sense, well-valued country boy might react to a big city.

While he might be embarrassed by not fitting in, Len knows he is not the one who should be ashamed. Len's brief, short impressions of Boston capture perfectly the claustrophobia and dinginess all country residents once felt when confronted with a big, bustling city.

All in all, *Bandeaux Creek* is a fitting sequel. While it is not the same book as *Between the Rivers*, it shouldn't be. As times in Maggie's life changed with the onset of the Roaring 20's, so did her surroundings.

Family farms were giving way to jobs in the city. The railroad had sounded the death knell for the steamboats, although it was a slow and painful death.

Children who could once be counted on to stay around the community, and farm a small piece of land were instead leaving. Young men no longer were satisfied to farm as their fathers had done, and their fathers before them. Young women, rather than raising babies and caring for their parents in

their twilight years, were instead going to college, wearing short skirts and makeup, and refusing to learn to cook.

The confusion faced by thousands of parents at that time is aptly portrayed in the McBryde family's migration to Wilmington.

The characters, like real people, have grown, matured (or not), and are confronted with new problems. The times and indeed society are like the characters: confused, earthier, and less well-defined than when Maggie was a young school teacher learning from the philosophical Aunt Mag how to be a mother and housewife, but still be herself.

Mrs. Booth's second novel, while not for everyone, is worthy of a spot on anyone's bookshelf as an example of putting a face on local history.

Bandeaux Creek is available through large bookstores or by contacting the publisher at www.winocapress.com.

Mrs. Booth and her husband Dick live in Cary.