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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Filming Faulknerland

WILLIAM FAULKNER country—his mythical Yoknapatawpha County, the scene of almost a dozen of his books and innumerable short stories—lies in the environs of Oxford, Mississippi. But Twentieth Century-Fox scouts, searching for suitable locations for "The Long, Hot Summer," an adaptation of Faulkner's "The Hamlet," settled on Clinton, Louisiana, 300 miles to the south. It was smaller and more atmospheric, less changed by time than the towns up around Oxford, they reported. There were people in the area who were willing to make available mansions and clapboard cabins alike for exterior shooting, merchants in the town who—for a certain remuneration, of course—would permit their storefronts to be emblazoned with the mythical name of Varner. Above all, the Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry promised to be entirely cooperative.

For more than two weeks in advance of the main party, Fox people were in the area doing the hundred and one things necessary to permit location shooting to roll smoothly once the high-priced talent and expensive equipment arrived—rounding up transportation, booking rooms in the de luxe motels that line the Airline Highway out of Baton Rouge, finding skilled workmen to supplement the crews coming on from Hollywood, arranging all the many legal details surrounding use of the town and private homes as movie sets. The decorators swarmed in, repainting the storefronts and erecting their signs proclaiming the community to be Frenchman's Bend. Trucks from the West Coast brought cameras, lights, enormous silvered reflectors, and fine-grid scrims, generators, costumes. Huge aluminum trailers were rented locally for star dressing-rooms. Yoknapatawpha was ready.

The first of the stars to turn up in Clinton was Paul Newman, who plays the role of the opportunistic Flem Snopes. (The name has been changed, inscrutably, to Ben Quick in the screen adaptation.) Registered as Ben Snopes, Newman drifted unrecognized for three days through the local pool parlors and bars soaking up the color, the atmosphere, the speech patterns of the area. He drifted until Charles East, an alert young reporter on the *Baton Rouge State-Times* (and apparently one of the few people in that part of Louisiana familiar with

the works of Faulkner), learned that there was a Snopes in the area and decided to investigate. Newman's presence—and each subsequent star arrival—made headline news.

"The Long, Hot Summer" is, to put it mildly, a free adaptation of Faulkner's "The Hamlet." "We changed the name," said director Martin Ritt, "so people wouldn't confuse it with that other 'Hamlet.' But the book too had to be considerably changed before we could even begin to make a film out of it." Actually, Faulkner's novel is little more than a series of loosely connected stories dealing with the weasel-like Snopeses, white-trash *parvenus* who spread like a sickness throughout Yoknapatawpha at the turn of the century. From it screenwriters Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank, Jr. borrowed scenes, incidents, or situations, incorporating them into an overall story-frame of their own devising. In their version, Snopes (or Quick) is transformed into a far more sympathetic character, the domineering Will Varner given a dimension of broad humor, and the time updated to the present. The net result is a sort of Faulkner *cum* Tennessee Williams—with perhaps a pinch of Eudora Welty tossed in for seasoning. Indeed, Orson Welles plays Varner in such roaring high spirits that one keeps expecting the other members of the cast to address him as "Big Daddy."

TO AUTHENTICATE the Southernisms of a company that ranged all the way from Georgia-born Joanne Woodward to New York's Anthony Franciosa, Ohio's Paul Newman, and Hollywood's Sarah Marshall, the crew included Louisiana's Marguerite Lamkin as dialogue coach. Miss Lamkin, the sister of novelist Speed Lamkin, not only stood vigilant watch over the "you all's" and "ye hear's" of the cast, but kept a critical eye on the script as well. She was particularly incensed over a line in which Lee Remick invites Sarah Marshall to "drive into Jefferson for shrimp and a movie." "Shoo," said Miss Larkin with delicately balanced pity and contempt for the authors, "Don't they know that no Southern girl would drive into town for shrimp?"

Miss Lamkin's fey banter helped pass the long, hot hours as grips wrestled cameras, lights, and reflectors into position on country roads or rolling lawns. Ritt appreciated it as a valuable substitute for

the eternal card games and crossword puzzles that customarily while away the waiting time on movie sets. "The best reason for location shooting," he declared one morning when overcast skies were holding up production, "is not the money you can save. A couple of days like this one and you could lose your shirt. Studio shooting is really much easier on everybody. You just walk onto the set, and everything is ready to go. And yet I prefer to do as much of my pictures as I can on location. The sense of atmosphere, the feeling of contact with the real thing, helps the actors in their roles—and helps me too. Just look at that old house," he said, pointing to the two-storey white mansion, a wide gallery surrounding it on three sides, that is being used as Varner's home. "Do you think they could ever reproduce that in the studio?"

Two stuffed moose-heads on the front verandah of the old Merrick house were the sole contribution of the studio prop department in effecting the transformation. Built before the Civil War, the house has a graceful sloping roof surmounted by a New England style "widow's walk" and faces False River, an amputated arm of the Mississippi. For the "neighboring" Stewart (*née* Sartoris) home, the location crew selected one of the showplaces of that part of the country, Asphodel—some forty miles away. Built in 1835 in the Greek Revival

style, the house is flanked by giant red cedars, some of them over 200 years old, while its winding driveway and spacious lawns are shaded by tall pines and poplars, all heavy with Spanish moss. Thirty miles in yet another direction a sharecropper's abandoned property was requisitioned for Ben's decrepit shack—a four-room cabin of unpainted, sun-splintered wood, its single central fireplace filled with refuse, its walls still decorated with faded Bible pictures and scraps of old calendars. But if the interior was squalid, the view from its broken porch presented all the plain, stark beauty of that part of the country that Faulkner so well describes.

IF 1957 was Hemingway's year on the screen, it seems safe to predict that 1958 will be the year the movies discover William Faulkner. Indeed, they have already begun to do so. Universal has scheduled "Tarnished Angels," based on Faulkner's "Pylon," for release sometime in January; and "The Long, Hot Summer" should be ready by February—at least, if the crew can make up in the studio some of the thirteen days lost in Louisiana waiting for the sun to shine. Meanwhile, Jerry Wald, its producer, is already planning to do "The Sound and the Fury" with Ritt again directing. And in all probability the country just north of Baton Rouge will once more serve as stand-in for Yoknapatawpha.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

ON THE HOUSE



Since most people live in houses, and since most novels, stories, and plays are about people, the word house frequently occurs in titles. An anonymous reader in Monticello, Mississippi, submits twenty such and asks you to assign the examples listed to the correct authors. Mortgage payments may be made on page 64.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. "Alison's House" | () Gertrude Atherton |
| 2. "Bleak House" | () Pearl Buck |
| 3. "The Country House" | () James Branch Cabell |
| 4. "The Fall of the House of Usher" | () Erskine Caldwell |
| 5. "The House at Pooh Corner" | () Truman Capote |
| 6. "The House by the Medlar Tree" | () Willa Cather |
| 7. "A House Divided" | () Geoffrey Chaucer |
| 8. "A House in the Uplands" | () Charles Dickens |
| 9. "The House of Breath" | () John Galsworthy |
| 10. "The House of Connelly" | () Susan Glaspell |
| 11. "The House of Fame" | () William Goyen |
| 12. "The House of Flowers" | () Paul Green |
| 13. "The House of Lee" | () Nathaniel Hawthorne |
| 14. "The House of Life" | () A. A. Milne |
| 15. "The House of Mirth" | () Edgar Allan Poe |
| 16. "The House of the Seven Gables" | () Dante Gabriel Rossetti |
| 17. "The King Was in His Counting House" | () John Patrick |
| 18. "The Professor's House" | () Giovanni Verga |
| 19. "River House" | () Edith Wharton |
| 20. "The Teahouse of the August Moon" | () Stark Young |

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