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## GOOD STORIES: DEATH HOUSE LOVE, MURDER AND LAWYER TALK

*JOHN MONK, Editorial Writer*

When I read a good book, I just want to tell people about it.

Lately, I've been browsing in three recently published books written by South Carolinians that illuminate little, not-always-noticed, but always interesting, facets of the state. The first is about politics - *Ol' Strom*, by Jack Bass and Marilyn Thompson. Bass and Thompson are former reporters for *The State* and *The Columbia Record*, respectively. The next is *The Palmetto Press*, by University of South Carolina journalism professor Patricia McNeely. The last is *The Lost Art: An Advocate's Guide to Effective Closing Argument*, by U.S. District Judge Joseph Anderson.

Each of these fields - politics, press and the law -has its own South Carolina lore. Thanks to the writers above, many fascinating tales will live on that might otherwise have been lost.

*Ol' Strom* is one of the most accessible, interesting and readable books about South Carolina ever published.

It's about U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond. But like any good biography, it illuminates the world of its subject. It makes state history come alive. For example, you'll learn, in a chapter about Thurmond's Edgefield County roots, how whites forced 5,000 county blacks to leave the state after the 1876 Red Shirt campaign of racist terror.

"Unless you understand Edgefield from way back, you won't understand Thurmond," says one person in the book. *Ol' Strom* tells how Thurmond overcame those racist roots and became a force for racial moderation.

You'll also learn that Sen. Thurmond, reputedly a great lover, made whoopee with an old girlfriend, convicted killer Sue Logue, in the back seat of a car while Ms. Logue was being transported to the state prison death house in 1943. Ms. Logue was the first woman ever electrocuted in South Carolina.

Many of the hundreds of well-told anecdotes in *Ol' Strom* aren't new. But some are, and, in any event, the writers have put together their book in a way that makes it the best and most comprehensive look at this living legend we've had - or are likely to get.

By the way, I asked Sen. Thurmond if he'd read the book. He chuckled, said he had and wouldn't comment further.

In *The Palmetto Press*, you'll find readable histories of just about every newspaper there ever was in South Carolina. (An oversight - *The Columbia Record*, now folded, had more heart than most papers, but barely gets a mention).

Although some of *The Palmetto Press* is genealogical - who started newspapers and when - there are fascinating tidbits throughout. Here are a few:

- \* In 1749, an irate reader threatened to cut off the ears of Charleston newspaper publisher Peter Timothy after Mr. Timothy criticized the colonial governor.
- \* Before the Civil War, state newspapers routinely censored any news of in-state slave revolts.
- \* In 1929, when South Carolina author Julia Peterkin won the Pulitzer Prize for her book, *Scarlet Sister Mary*, her book was branded obscene and banned at the Gaffney public library. The *Gaffney Ledger* braved the forces of censorship and published the entire book on its news pages.
- \* In 1923, when the first School of Journalism in the state was started at USC, the *Saluda Standard* opposed it, saying most of its graduates would leave the state to get jobs. Its thinking - that few S.C. publishers could pay enough to hire "educated journalists."
- \* On Feb. 18, 1865, the words "Confederate States of America" appeared for the last time in the *Charleston Courier's* dateline. That date, federal troops seized the paper and turned it over to two Union war correspondents.
- \* In 1956, *Florence Morning News* editor **Jack O'Dowd** was chased out of town by the Ku Klux Klan after he supported a U.S. Supreme Court desegregation decision.

The last book, *The Lost Art*, by Judge Anderson, contains excerpts of great trial arguments by lawyers and jurists all over the nation and world. Many, but by no means all, are from South Carolina.

Judge Anderson quotes the late Spot Mozingo, a legendary orator from Darlington County, who blasted the way Ford Motor Co. brought experts together to design a gear shift handle on which his client was impaled.

"There wasn't a safety man in the crowd or anybody that cared, and what they did, they let the interior decorator (design it) because the knob was pretty and because they found out it fit the average person's hand," Mozingo said.

Other compelling arguments by S.C. lawyers include some by Columbians **Jack Swerling** and **Dick Harpootlian** and Charlestonians **Ron Motley** and **Joe Rice** (best known for winning billions in lawsuits against tobacco and asbestos companies).

Sometimes, as these books indicate, the worlds of law, politics and the press collide.

That's what happened when Lt. Gov. James Tillman assassinated State newspaper editor N.G. Gonzales in 1903 and Tillman was tried for murder in Lexington County.

It was clearly murder. There were witnesses. Mr. Gonzales was unarmed. The father of Sen.

Thurmond, J. William Thurmond, a respected lawyer, was the prosecutor. But the jury found the killer "not guilty."

Later, according to The Palmetto Press, a juror explained why they let Tillman go.

"Who ever heard of a jury anywhere convicting anyone of killing a newspaper man?" the juror said.

Stories like that are worth re-telling. These books do that well.

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