

Bleeding Pines Of Turpentine

BY RAY OWEN

Southern Pines is a town named for its forest. In its heart is a great surviving remnant of a once 90-million-acre forest of longleaf pines, many of the trees marked with V-shaped cuts made by former slaves or their descendants to let loose the flow of sap collected for turpentine. Hundreds of the trees remain in the Weymouth section, more than in any other town in America.

At the turn of the 20th century, Helen Boyd Dull took a carriage ride up the eastern hill above the train depot in Southern Pines, into the region's last great stand of virgin longleaf pines. Here she encountered turpentiners working in the dying forest. There were scores of trees whose sides were stripped of their bark, their carved faces a ghostly white from dried resin. Moved by what she saw, she asked her father, industrialist James Boyd, to buy the land and spare the trees. As a result, many of the old-growth pines survive today scattered throughout the Weymouth neighborhood and in the adjacent Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve. This tale is the inspiration for the cultural theater performance *Bleeding Pines of Turpentine*, a multi-arts performance I wrote, that tells the story of the trees and the way we have marked this land in a way that marks us as a community.

The performance utilizes dance, music, projected images and poetic monologue in a type of performance art that I call "cultural theater." The thrust of cultural theater comes from the layering of various artistic elements and the inclusion of performers whose roots are represented by the theme.

An early version of the play opened during the Palustris Festival in March, 2011. A pipe band march signaled the start of the performance, which featured dancer Diana Turner-Forte, accompanied by guitarist Ryan Book. At the center was the dramatization of a story I originally wrote for *PineStraw*, titled "The Siren of the Round Timber Tract." (Round timber is the local name for old growth trees.) Rod Brower and Together-N-Unity Choir provided the accompaniment, with their soulful renderings of traditional African-American spirituals. The backdrop was a series of short films and projected images by photographers Brady Beck and Frank Hunter, depicting the natural world and surviving turpentine trees.

Among those attending was a contingent from Southern Pines' sister city, Newry and Mourne in Northern Ireland. Frances Caherty and former Newry/Mourne Mayor Michael Carr were particularly impressed. And they began laying the groundwork for bringing the production to the Maiden of the Mournes International Festival held at Warrenpoint, Northern Ireland.

On August 5 of this year, eleven cast members of *Bleeding Pines of Turpentine* set off for a performance at Warrenpoint Town Hall. Throughout our nine-day tour, members of the troupe were asked to perform numerous times in a variety of venues. The Irish were particularly enchanted by Rod Brower and Together-N-Unity Choir. We learned that there is a great affinity between the people of Northern Ireland and the American struggle for civil rights. I believe this accounts for the powerful affinity they have for *Bleeding Pines*, with its graphic depiction of the turpentiners and the often silent human struggle for something more. Irish filmmaker George Kingsnorth has begun work on a documentary about *Bleeding Pines of Turpentine*, and he hopes to come to the States in November to complete the film.

Looking ahead, a very special performance of *Bleeding Pines of Turpentine* will be offered at 7:30 p.m., on Saturday, November 5, 2011, in Owens Auditorium at Sandhills Community College. Sponsored by The Walthour-Moss Foundation, Sandhills Community College Fine Arts Department and Arts Council of Moore County, the program will be the first time the play has been performed in its entirety, with new scenes, additional dancers, and a cellist and violinist. Joining the cast will be DanceFusion, the resident dance company of the Carolina Performing Arts center, along with photographer Caroline Young and the St. Andrews Presbyterian College Pipe Band.

A panel discussion about the play is being planned for Sunday, November 6, with details pending. The panel will consist of noted scholars who will talk about the turpentine industry in North Carolina, the longleaf pine forest and its decline, and the fate of the remaining turpentine trees. Preceding the panel will be a cameo of *Bleeding Pines of Turpentine*, setting the tone for a dialogue about this remarkable aspect of our community.

Bleeding Pines of Turpentine - A Cultural Theater Production:

Location: Owens Auditorium at Sandhills Community College, 3395 Airport Road, Pinehurst
Admission: Free, but an entry ticket is required. Tickets: Southern Pines: Arts Council of Moore County (Campbell House), Country Bookshop, and Traveling Chic Boutique. Pinehurst: Given Memorial Library and Sandhills Community College Library. And online at www.walthour-moss.org.
Information: 910-692-2787



Inset Photographs By Hannah Sharpe.
Turpentine Tree Photograph By Frank Hunter