

# BOOKS

By DICK MILLER  
Highland School Librarian

SKINNY, by Robert Burch. The Viking Press, 625 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y., 1964. \$3.00.

SKINNY COULD NOT READ. As he put it, "I just ain't never took it up." Naturally enough, Skinny never got around to "taking up" writing, either.

Truth of the matter is, an 11-year-old orphan in Georgia in the 1930s did not have much chance to learn reading and writing. Unless it was in an orphanage--and Skinny wanted no part of that sort of thing. He had "heard" about orphanages.

Skinny and his widower father had sharecropped a small farm. When his father passed away, Skinny put his meager belongings in a paper sack and went off to live with Miss Bessie, proprietress of the local hotel. Miss Bessie treated him well and did her best to take the place of the youngster's dead parents. Skinny showed his appreciation by working hard for his keep. He did everything he could to please Miss Bessie, Peachy, the outspoken Negro cook, and Roman, a Negro handyman whom Miss Bessie had "liberated" from the chain gang.



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ROMAN HAD WOUND UP on the chain gang for stabbing his wife. Soured by such outrageous treatment, Roman had loudly proclaimed himself to be "off" women for good once he was released from the clutches of the white man's law.

However, Skinny notices that Roman has been sashaying off across town toward prayer meeting of a summer's evening and questions the obviously "backsliding" handyman about these surreptitious expeditions. He finally gets Roman to sheepishly admit that "some gal might need me to walk home with her." Skinny feigns astonishment.

"You said your brawling wife cured you from further interest in womankind," Skinny reminds him mischievously. Roman laughs.

"I reckon the cure warn't perm'nent," he replies with evident relish, apparently delighted at being "found out" by his discerning young friend.

Roman, Peachy and Miss Bessie are just about the only friends Skinny can claim--not counting his old mongrel dog, who wanders away one day, but eventually wanders back with the nonchalant air of a born optimist who has merely ambled down to the butcher shop on the off-chance that the garbage containers had not been securely lidded. An inspired "gift" from the postman, the dog is appropriately named "R.F.D."

Mr. Burch sketches the character-building trials, tribulations and triumphs of his young hero with deft strokes of humor and pathos on a broad canvas of suspenseful action.

WHEN A TRAVELING CARNIVAL comes to town, Skinny befriends a youthful member of the troupe named Calvin, whose only aim in life is to become a peach-packer--a not unaccountable aspiration in the state of Georgia.



JO MACKEY DEDICATION--Top photo shows speakers' stand with school chorus in rear at new Jo Mackey School dedication exercises. Speakers and other dignitaries seated on stand are (from left) Mrs. Frances Horrocks, Mrs. Helen Conway, Rancho Attendance Zone Director James Williams, Principal H. P. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Joanne Pughsley, Charles Murphy, PTA President Travis Poole and Kay Furrer. Photo at right shows Mrs. Conway (right) holding photo of Mrs. Jo Mackey, for whom new Ragal Estates school was named, and Mr. Mackey, which she presented to school during exercises. Others (from left) are Mrs. Horrocks, Fitzgerald and Williams. (See story, page 16)

The two boys conspire to run away together. But at the last minute, after agreeing to rendezvous with Skinny in the freight yards, Calvin backs out.

Skinny, himself tortured by strange misgivings as the fateful hour of demarcation approaches, is secretly relieved when the great adventure fails to materialize. He suddenly realizes he doesn't want to leave Miss Bessie and the others--including the sometime less faithful R.F.D. No, siree!

But always lurking around the bend in the road out of town is the unpleasant spectre of the orphan's home. Unless Miss Bessie can get herself married--and soon--thus making it possible for her to legally adopt Skinny, the same law that laid Roman low will take away the boy's "freedom" by sending him off to the orphanage. Things look dark and Skinny is terrified because he cannot see through the darkness. Then along comes Daddy Rabbit!

FRANK J. RABBIT is a construction worker. He appears on the scene with a crew engaged to build a bridge on the outskirts of town. Some of the bridge-builders--including the aptly nicknamed Daddy Rabbit--take lodgings at Miss Bessie's place. Skinny is overwhelmed by the elegance of Daddy Rabbit's "Sunday-go-to-meeting" finery--"patent leather shoes, white pants, a striped coat, and one of those flat-top straw hats."

With mingled awe and admiration, Skinny welcomes Daddy Rabbit with the highest accolade to sartorial splendor at his command. "Them's the finest looking garments I ever saw," says Skinny.

"Thank you kindly," replies Daddy Rabbit, flashing his gold teeth. "You're done up sporty yourself." He refers to the white garment with turned-back sleeves and knee-length coat-tail which Skinny wears when putting forth his carefully rehearsed greeting to new guests--"Howdy! Welcome to this--here hotel!"

Miss Bessie and Daddy Rabbit, who happen (See SKINNY, page 15)



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