

# BOOKS

## BOOKMARKS

### Book explores mothers in fiction



**BEN STEELMAN**

In 2007, Janet Ellerby, a professor of English at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, published "Following Tambourine Man," a memoir of her experience as a teenage unwed mother in the 1960s.

Shipped to a Florence Crittenden Home hundreds of miles from where her parents lived, Ellerby gave birth and, as expected, gave her baby up for adoption — a move that left her emotionally scarred for decades. Only later, after marrying and raising other children was she able to contact and to reconcile with her now-grown daughter.

Now, Ellerby has published "Embroidering the Scarlet A: Unwed Mothers and Illegitimate Children in American Fiction and Film" (University of Michigan Press, \$34.50). The study analyzes how literature and pop culture treat the "fallen woman."

The title, of course refers to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," and to its heroine, Hester Prynne, who delivers a child while her husband is away and is sentenced by Puritan magistrates to wear a bright red "A" sewn to her clothing as a sign of her adultery. "Hester finds ways to keep her dignity," Ellerby said. "I wish I'd been as brave as her, but I wasn't."

Yet Hester got off relatively easy. In early American novels, in more modern classics such as Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" or Theodore Dreiser's "Jenny Gearhardt," and even in contemporary movies, the wages of sin, of breaking the code, are death or ostracism.

By the 21st century, Ellerby finds, the taint of illegitimate birth has largely faded away. Unwed mothers, on the other hand, are still required to suffer.

"Even look at a movie, like 'Juno,'" Ellerby said. In the hit 2007 hit film comedy, a pregnant high school student gives her baby up for adoption; in the ending, she's seen some months later, apparently happily reconciled with the baby's father.

"Everyone's saying, 'Omigosh, she's fine,'" Ellerby said, "but that's just six months on. She's not even aware yet of the enormity of what she's done."

Ellerby hopes for novels and films that would better portray the complexities of adolescent girls coping with unplanned pregnancies. "The real stories are out there," she said. Still, she thinks even a modern story of an unwed mother will always hold an element of tragedy, of suffering and sorrow.

—Contact Ben Steelman at 910-343-2208 or Ben.Steelman@StarNewsOnline.com.

## 'THE SOONG DYNASTY'

# Soong bio unveils new information

He was an important figure in Chinese as well as N.C. history

By Ben Steelman  
StarNews Staff

It may be as close as Wilmington ever comes to a fairy tale. In the summer of 1880, a young Chinese sailor, speaking broken English, almost literally washes into the Port City. He accepts Christ at a revival meeting and is baptized.

Then, local Methodists (with the help from a real-life Daddy Warbucks) arrange to send him off to college. He goes home, becomes a successful businessman, gets into politics and finds himself at the right hand of China's first president. His children and grandchildren become the equivalent of princes and princesses.

That young man was Charles Jones Soong. Wilmingtonians were reminded of his story in August when one of Soong's great-grandsons traveled here to be baptized at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church, the same church where Soong was baptized.

Now E.A. Haag of Greensboro has produced the first full-length biography of Soong since Sterling Seagrave's "The Soong Dynasty" (1985). By combing local archives (including back clippings of the StarNews) and sources in China, Haag has pinned down a number of facts in this remarkable story that Seagrave didn't know.

Haag, for example, has pinned down a birthdate, Oct. 17, 1861, and an original name, Han Jiano Zhun. Born on the island of Hainan of China's Haaka people, he was the younger son of a poor family. When a childless uncle, who ran a tea and silk shop in faraway Boston, offered to adopt the boy, he was sent, no questions asked, adopting the uncle's family name, Soong.

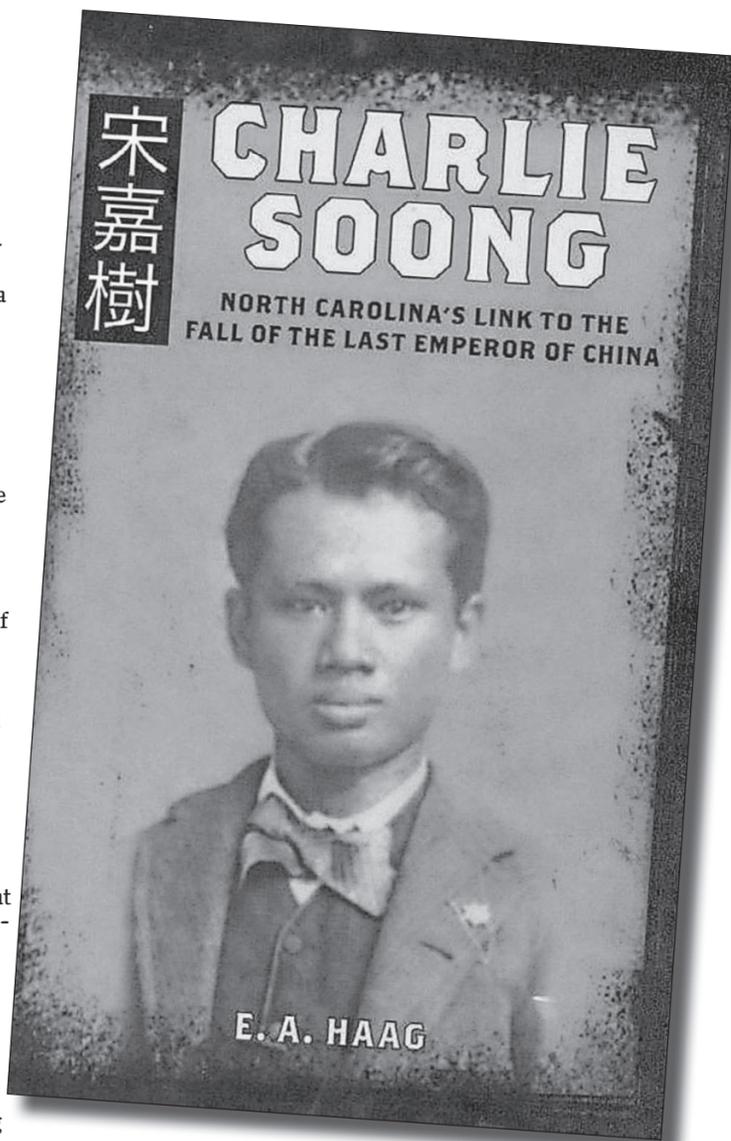
The boy soon tired of a clerk's life, though. Perhaps he listened to other Chinese youths attending nearby American schools. So he sneaked away and enlisted on the USS Albert Gallatin, a cutter in the U.S. Revenue Marine, a forerunner of the Coast Guard.

Haag quickly dispenses with the myth that Charlie was a stowaway; his way was paid to Boston, and Coast Guard records indicate he signed on voluntarily. (As Haag notes, a cutter would have been a very small vessel, with not many places for a stowaway to hide.)

Nor was Soong a "cabin boy," as many sources put it. Coast Guard records indicate he was a regular hand with an honorable record, joining the rest of the crew in tricky rescues at sea.

Soong seems to have forged a bond with Eric Gabrielson, a devout Methodist immigrant who was the Gallatin's skipper. When Gabrielson was transferred in 1880 to take command of the cutter USS Schuyler Colfax in Wilmington, Soong arranged to follow him.

Haag finds evidence that the young man stepped forward at a revival at Trinity Methodist Church in Southport. Soon afterward, he was formally baptized "Charles Jones Soong" at what was then Fifth Street Methodist Episcopal Church — the first



### CHARLIE SOONG:

North Carolina's Link to the Fall of the Last Emperor of China  
By E.A. Haag  
Greensboro: Jaan Publishing,  
\$12.95 paperback

"Celestial," as the newspaper somewhat crassly noted, that many in Wilmington had ever seen. (In the 1800s, China was often referred to as "the Celestial Empire" and "Celestial" was one of the kinder epithets applied to Chinese immigrants.)

Haag suggests the "Charles" came from an English mispronunciation of one of Soong's Chinese nicknames. The middle name, Jones, long a bit of a mystery, appears to be linked to the boatswain on the Schuyler Colfax, who'd become a good friend to the young man.

Through a number of locals — Roger Moore and Fifth Street pastor Thomas Paige Ricaud, among others — young Charlie was introduced to Julian Shakespeare Carr, a Confederate veteran who went on to become a tobacco and textile magnate, a sort of honorary "general" and a force in Tar Heel Methodist affairs. Carr arranged for Charlie to attend Trinity College, a small but up-and-coming Methodist college that would eventually morph into Duke University. From there, the young Chinese Christian was hustled to Vanderbilt University for training as a missionary.

Haag points out young Charlie's remarkable luck. At a time when anti-Chinese sentiment was festering in California and much of the American West, Soong landed in one of the few parts of America where Asians were a rare novelty, facing virtually no racial prejudice. (As Haag also makes clear, though, he didn't escape it entirely.)

Soong returned to China in 1885 but didn't last long as

a missionary. (Haag quotes letters suggesting that some of his superiors condescended to him and didn't think much of his talents.) Instead, he became a publisher, turning out Bibles and other books.

Along the way, at a Methodist meeting, Soong ran into another Christian convert, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, who would eventually lead China's republican revolutionaries and become China's first president. Soong was one of his closest confidantes and financial backers.

Soong died in 1918 of kidney disease and did not see the heights to which his children would rise. One daughter, Ailing, would marry the banker and future finance minister H.H. Kung. Another daughter, Ching-ling would marry Sun Yat-Sen. (Her father opposed the match since Sun was divorced; it led to a breach between the two old friends.) A third daughter, May-ling, would marry the general Chiang Kai-shek and become de facto first lady of China. One son, T.V. Soong, became a prime minister and foreign minister in the Nationalist government; other sons became financiers.

In "The Soong Dynasty," Seagrave made clear that he regarded the Soong family, especially Madae Chiang, as a corrupt and malign influence on China and on U.S. foreign policy. Haag, who lived and worked in Taiwan from 1996 to 2002, tends to take a more positive view of the clan.

Haag reports that Charlie Soong's image is on the rise in China, now that entrepreneurs can be heroes there. His tomb in Shanghai, which was vandalized in the Maoist "Cultural Revolution," has been restored. Memorials have been raised to Soong in his native Hainan and he's now the focus of scholarly conferences.

—Contact Ben Steelman at 910-343-2208 or Ben.Steelman@StarNewsOnline.com.

## BOOK EVENTS

Fall used book sale by the New Hanover Friends of the Library, 1-5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 4, at Northeast Regional Library, 1241 Military Cutoff Road. Last day — all books 10 cents. Details: 910-798-6301.

Music Discovery time with N.C. Symphony bass player Erik Dyke, 2-3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 4, at New Hanover County Public Library, 201 Chestnut St. Story time and demonstration of double bass. Details: 910-798-6303.

Going Green/Environmental Book Club discusses "World Peace Diet" by Will Tuttle, 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 6, at Old Books on Front Street, 249 N. Front St. Details: 910-762-6657.

Ilario Pantano discusses his book "Grand Theft History," 6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8, at Barnes & Noble, 850 Inspiration Drive in Mayfaire Town Center. Details: 910-509-1880.

Second Saturday used book sale by the Friends of the Leland Library, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10, in "Magnolia House II," just before the new Town Hall parking lot. Details: 910-833-2322.

Reading and reception with local National Book Award nominees Karen Bender and Michael White, 6 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10, at Old Books on Front Street, 249 N. Front St. Details: 910-762-6657.

Star Wars Reads Day, 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, Oct. 10, at Northeast Regional Library, 1241 Military Cutoff Road. Stories and "Star Wars"-related activities, including a fighter navigation course. Details: 910-798-6372.

— Ben Steelman

## BEST SELLERS

### Print and e-editions

The Associated Press

USA Today's best-selling books as of Sept. 27 reported from a variety of outlets: bookstore chains, independent bookstores, mass merchandisers and online retailers.

1. "Devoted in Death" by J.D. Robb (G.P. Putnam's Sons)
2. "The Martian" by Andy Weir (Crown)
3. "Make Me" by Lee Child (Delacorte)
4. "Why Not Me?" by Mindy Kaling (Crown Archetype)
5. "The Girl in the Spider's Web" by David Lagercrantz (Knopf)
6. "Hard Love" by Meredith Wild (Forever)
7. "The End Game" by Catherine Coulter and J.T. Ellison (G.P. Putnam's Sons)
8. "The Scam" by Janet Evanovich and Lee Goldberg (Bantam)
9. "The Girl on the Train" by Paula Hawkins (Riverhead)
10. "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" by Marie Kondo (Ten Speed)
11. "Gray Mountain" by John Grisham (Dell)
12. "Fates and Furies" by Lauren Groff (Riverhead)
13. "Go Set a Watchman" by Harper Lee (Harper)
14. "Michael Vey 5: Storm of Lightning" by Richard Paul Evans (Simon Pulse/Mercury Ink)
15. "All the Light We Cannot See" by Anthony Doerr (Scribner)
16. "X" by Sue Grafton (Marion Wood Books/Putnam)
17. "Fatal Frenzy" by Marie Force (Carina Press)
18. "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee (Harper)
19. "Grey" by E.L. James (Vintage)
20. "Trim Healthy Mama Cookbook" by Pearl Barrett and Serene Allison (Harmony)
21. "Memory Man" by David Baldacci (Grand Central Life & Style)
22. "Eve" by William Paul Young (Howard Books)
23. "One Year After" by William R. Forstchen (Forge)
24. "Dark Wild Night" by Christina Lauren (Gallery Books)
25. "Trim Health Mama Plan" by Pearl Barrett and Serene Allison (Harmony)

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