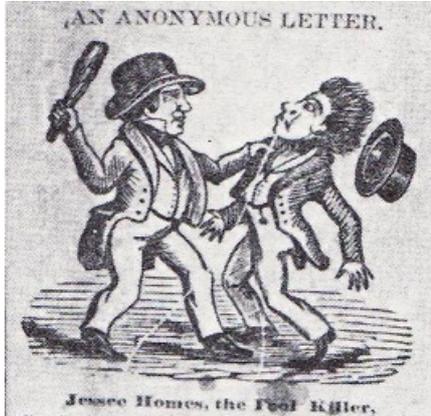


## **Fool-Killer** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **"Fool-Killer"**

by Thomas C. Parramore, 2006; Revised October 2022.



Woodcut of Jesse Holmes, the Fool-Killer with his club. Image from the North Carolina Folklore Journal.

"Jesse Holmes, the Fool-Killer," was the name given by journalist Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans to a fictional character well known to Piedmont North Carolinians in the mid-nineteenth century. Evans, editor of the *Milton Chronicle* from 1841 to 1883, created the Fool-Killer as an expression of his own style of folksy humor and social views. A Whig <sup>[2]</sup> early in his career, Evans shifted to the Democratic Party <sup>[3]</sup> in the 1850s. But he remained a progressive <sup>[4]</sup> in politics, a booster of rail and plank roads, agricultural fairs <sup>[5]</sup>, steamboat lines <sup>[6]</sup>, and other improvements. He opposed secession <sup>[7]</sup> until the fact and then became a stalwart advocate of the Confederacy.

The Fool-Killer appeared as the ostensible author of letters to the *Chronicle* discussing the rambles of Jesse Holmes in counties of the northern Piedmont and characters and situations he encountered along the way. Published about once a month, the columns were accompanied by a woodcut of a feisty little character in long-tailed coat and floppy hat carrying a club. The club was for the Fool-Killer's use in bashing various kinds of fools he came across in his journeys. These included overbearing parents, harsh re-enslavers (slave patrolers), hard drinkers, faithless lovers, and a variety of others. Not infrequently, the state legislature and other institutions came in for a share of cudgeling. The flavor of a society in the process of moral decay informed the Fool-Killer's letters.

The *Chronicle* reached only a few hundred subscribers, but Fool-Killer columns were often reprinted in other newspapers <sup>[8]</sup> and enjoyed a wide popularity. Their brand of humor was similar to that of Hamilton C. Jones's "Cousin Sally Dilliard" and Johnson Jones Hooper's "Simon Suggs." A quarter century after Evans's death, the Fool-Killer was resurrected in a story <sup>[9]</sup> by William Sydney Porter <sup>[10]</sup> (O. Henry) and in later fiction such as Helen Eustis's 1954 novel of the same title.

#### **References:**

Thomas C. Parramore. "Discovered: A Sixth Fool-Killer Letter." *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 23, no. 3 (August 1975): 70-74. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-journal-1975-23.3-august-1975/67111?item=67910> <sup>[11]</sup> (access January 28, 2019).

Durward T. Stokes, "Five Letters from Jesse Holmes, the Fool Killer, to the Editor of the *Milton Chronicle*," *NCHR* 50 (Summer 1963).

#### **Additional Resources:**

Leisy, Ernest E. "Jesse Holmes, the 'Fool-Killer'" *Man, Bird and Beast*. Texas Folklore Society. University of North Texas Press (1930).

Hubbell, Jay Broadus. "Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans: Creator of Jesse Holmes the Fool-killer." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October 1937).

Patterson, Daniel Watkins, "A Letter from the Fool Killer," *North Carolina Folklore* 8, no.2 (December 1960): 22-25. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-1960-december-8.2/68396?item=78470> <sup>[12]</sup> (accessed January 28, 2019).

Stokes, Durward T. "A Newly Discovered Letter from the Fool Killer" *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 17, no. 1 (May 1969): 3-8. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-1969-may-17.1/68495?item=79606> <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed

January 28, 2019).

Stokes, Durward T. "The Fool Killer Rides Again in the Seventh Letter Found." *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 26, no. 3 (November 1978):171-172. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-journal-1978-november-v.26.3/67180?item=68627> [14] (accessed January 28, 2019).

Bevington, Helen. "The Fool Killer." *The Georgia Review* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 91. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41397432> [15] (accessed August 28, 2012, access may be restricted to users with accounts).

**Image Credit:**

"Jessee Homes [sic], the Fool Killer," from Stokes, Durward T. "The Fool Killer Rides Again in the Seventh Letter Found." *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 26, no. 3 (November 1978):171-172. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-journal-1978-november-v.26.3/67180?item=68627> [14] (accessed January 28, 2019).

**Subjects:**

[Literature](#) [16]

**Authors:**

[Parramore, Thomas C.](#) [17]

**Origin - location:**

[Caswell County](#) [18]

**From:**

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [19]

**User Tags:**

[favorite](#) [20]

1 January 2006 | Parramore, Thomas C.

---

**Source URL:** <https://ncpedia.org/fool-killer>

**Links**

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/fool-killer> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/whig-party> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/democratic-party> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/progressivism> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/county-fairs> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/steamboats> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/secession-movement> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/newspapers> [9] <https://americanliterature.com/author/o-henry/short-story/the-fool-killer> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/porter-william-sidney> [11] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-journal-1975-23.3-august-1975/67111?item=67910> [12] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-1960-december-8.2/68396?item=78470> [13] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-1969-may-17.1/68495?item=79606> [14] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-folklore-journal-1978-november-v.26.3/67180?item=68627> [15] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41397432> [16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/literature> [17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/parramore-thomas-c> [18] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/c> [19] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia-> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/user-tags/favorite>