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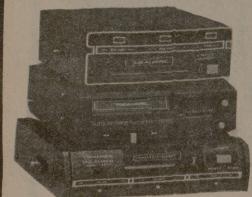
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A&M mystery writer alive and well

Professor 'murders' with typewriter C

By JAMES HAMILTON **Battalion Reporter**

An English professor at Texas A&M University has murdered more than 50 people during the last 20 years. The murder scene: his fifth-floor office in the Harrington Education Center. The murder

weapon: his typewriter.

James Franklin Peirce, or J. F. Peirce as he is known by his readers, proudly confesses to the murders that have filled his mystery short stories and helped earn him the status of being Texas' foremost adult mystery short story writer.

"I've probably murdered more people than anyone else in Texas,' he said during a recent interview.
"All on paper, of course."
Peirce, 60, has taught at Texas

A&M for 33 years, using his free time to write mystery stories. For the last 18 years, he has taught creative writ-

Peirce has had more than 40 stories published in Ellery Queen and Mike Shayne mystery magazines. The Bicentennial Collection of Texas Short Stories and other

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Peirce was born in Edwardsville, Ill. While a young boy, his interest in writing was aroused by a retired English teacher, Mrs. Handlon, who lived across the street from his home. She took Peirce and other neighborhood children to the local library about once a week and often read to them, he said.

She had a dramatic flair for reading," Peirce said. "In many respects, she fostered my interest in writing."
Peirce wrote for his junior high

reacher wrote for his junior high school newspaper and was a voracious reader. He especially enjoyed reading the works of Dorothy Parker, Noel Coward and Arthur Schnitzler, writers, he said, who were to influence his own writing.

After graduating from high school, Peirce attended the University of Illinois and obtained a bachelor's degree in speech. He followed with a master's degree in theater arts from the University of Iowa at Iowa City in

Peirce taught one semester of high school speech and drama in his hometown before joining the army

and serving in the medical department for more than three years. He spent 10 months doing administrative clerical work in a general hospital in England.

Peirce began teaching at Texas A&M in February, 1946, two weeks after his discharge. After one year of teaching, he met and married Billie Jo Lochridge, who was the head reference librarian at the Texas A&M

Although Peirce wrote a great deal during his early years teaching, his stories didn't sell well until 1956 when he sold three stories to three national magazines in three months. Thinking he had found the secret of being a successful writer, Peirce faced an important decision.

'I asked myself if I wanted to be a full-time writer or if I wanted to be a teacher who wrote," Peirce said. "At that time, I decided that there was no question about it; I wanted to be a

"That was a good decision since I didn't sell anything else for another two and a half years."

Peirce said he didn't consider himself a professional writer until a few years later when he had sold several more stories and was invited for the third time to join the Mystery Writers of America, an organization that fosters fellowship among mystery writers.

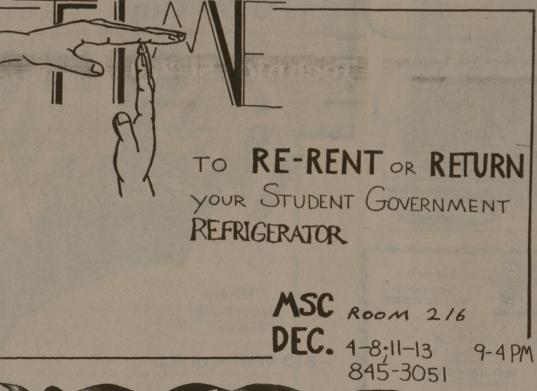
Since then, Peirce said, he has enjoyed a successful life as a mystery writer. Two of his stories appeared in Mystery Writers of America anthologies. And his short story, "The Final Portrait," appeared in Best Detective Stories of the Year 1972. Peirce's latest achievements in-

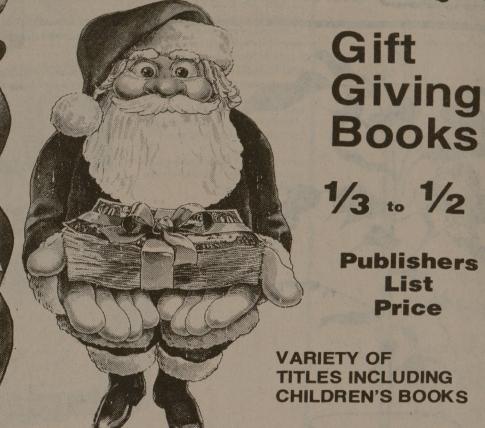
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I've probably murdered more people than anyone election Texas," said Texas A&M University English Professor, Peirce in a recent interview. "All on paper, of course." Best At the star teaching, Peirce has been writing mystery short stories for the colonidate of the past 20 years.

Kill," which appeared in the April 1978 edition of the Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine; "The Day of the Dead," which was selected last month for the MWA's honor roll for best detective stories, and "The Caterpillar Hunter," which is scheduled to appear next month in a book entitled Texas Stories and

Peirce, who has also won the top award at Southwest Writers Confnces on three occasions, spends between two and four hours writing each day

Peirce said he gets ideas for his mystery stories from many sources, including dreams, newspaper columns and quotations. Sometimes he browses through books of pictures and photographs for ideas.

"I've written two stories by trying to relate the characters that I've seen in a number of pictures and he situations that the pictures suggest,' Peirce said.

He wrote the short story "A Promise of Spring" using this technique, basig the story on seven characters he saw in four different photographs.

"But I have no one way of getting ideas," Peirce added. "Mostly, I try to see relationships between things or two people, and then I ask myself questions and give myself answers to them in trying to develop a plot.

Peirce writes down his story ideas and stores them in manilla folders, which clutter his desk. Occasionally, he tries to develop ides immediately

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after conceiving the, but he for.
files tham away and think a fanybody

them later.

His short story, "The new "They he may be complete.

"With other stories, I get a Wail and the and I can't wait to write beliefing Asp Peirce said.

Peirce explained that it is the ware about the stories of the complete.

Peirce explained that it is leass, are char ing increasingly difficult to stiful-day, al tery stories. tery stories.

"About 13 or 14 years a multistador said," there were over a his Utah ski pi mystery stories publishedin da City and ountain. Ja magazines. Three years ago were less than 500. Because vision, in all probability, then ng is chargin as this year short story form is declining see the situation getting any bearted the a the near future.

Peirce added it would be made about ble to support himself soleh at hikes to swriting. He said the myster bust of them relatively poor-paying and a His bill, papercent of the full-time for 17 and 19 relatively poor-paying and a percent of the full-time free writers manage to earn a deces use, would

I make more money as collarea applie professor than a vast majonh mulikely the lance writers," he said.

A good portion

lance writers," he said. Lin next year A good portion of the steated in the Peirce earns goes toward trace If an area a major hobby other than writerfully a rum and I love to baid jim There Peirce said. "We take one mistant. "We trips except year."

trips every year."

During the summer, he wife went on two cruises, one Baltic Sea and one throughts unsportation and canals of the Netherland riging also previous trips, they have benefitive the ir British Isles, southern Equit of busine South America, Canada and Mitchell the Peirce, who will be retiring the another

than five years, said he is the if ski are forward to that day "I suspect that retiren give me more time to travid Mitchell more enjoyed teaching, the more like tion with young people, with

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