
Stalking the Elusive North Carolina Author

by Jan Broadfoot

Are you searching for that elusive North Carolina author who appeals to young adults? Why? Are you simply making a list to have on hand when requests come in? Has the new emphasis on integrated learning prompted your search? Maybe you are looking for an author who speaks and relates well to young adults? Are you trying to identify only novelists or also playwrights, poets, and short story writers? Are your criteria for North Carolina authors broadly or narrowly defined? Must they be natives, or will newcomers satisfy your needs? Does it matter whether the authors are currently active writers or even if they are living authors? Must their material be in print? Before beginning your search, it is important to determine your needs. A number of sources exist to aid in your quest, but each obviously has its limitations.

A historical survey of North Carolina literature, such as that found in Richard Walser and E. T. Malone, Jr.'s, *Literary North Carolina* is an invaluable resource for identifying authors by categories. Early dramatists, poets, novelists, and other writers are discussed, as well as contemporary ones. Chapter XII is devoted to "Writers for Young Readers." Some noteworthy references included in Appendix B of *Literary North Carolina* are: *North Carolina Fiction, 1734-1957*; *North Carolina Fiction, 1958-1971*; *North Carolina Drama*; and *Poets of North Carolina*. Another source identifying writers in the Charlotte area is a book edited by Mary Kratt entitled *The Imaginative Spirit: Literary History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*, published by the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Robert Anthony of the North Carolina Collection at UNC-CH compiles a categorical list of books by a broadly defined group of North Carolina authors acquired each year by the North Carolina Collection. It is published in the April issue of the quarterly *North Carolina Historical Review* and is extremely comprehensive, although it provides no age appropriate designations or descriptions. The public may visit the Collection and request copies of individual titles. From back issues of these yearly lists, one is able to compile a large list of authors, their works and publishers. Book reviews and biographical information are also available at the North Carolina Collection. It takes time to examine these materials, since they are kept in stacks not open to the public and must be retrieved by the collection staff.

If one wishes personally to contact a particular author, the North Carolina Writers' Network is an excellent resource. Its membership, which exceeds one thousand, is composed predominantly of writers in different stages of development who reside in North Carolina. The Network maintains an authors' file and a mailing list. For twenty-five dollars a year, members receive a twenty page bi-monthly newsletter, announcements of readings and writers' workshops, and the opportunity to attend the annual writers' conference. Through the Writers' Network, it is possible to contact authors regarding their most recent publications, as well as works in progress. The North Carolina Writers' Conference, with membership by invitation, is a more loosely organized body

having no by-laws. Under its auspices, for two days every summer since 1950, writers from across the state have met and shared ideas and experiences.

Throughout the state, there are university professors who are excellent resources because they are vitally concerned with preserving and promoting North Carolina authors. Anthony Abbott, president-elect of the North Carolina Writers' Network and professor of English at Davidson College, suggests that literature provides a sociological insight into the mores of a particular time and place which cannot be captured in historical accounts. Doris Betts, creative writing professor at UNC-Chapel Hill, believes social change as well as geography are reflected in literature. She speaks animatedly about the emergence of North Carolina's women writers during the past twenty years and the present flowering of black authors. Keats Sparrow at East Carolina University promotes and encourages North Carolina writers, particularly from the eastern part of the state. Sally Buckner, English professor at Peace College, authored the recent book *Our Words, Our Ways: Reading and Writing in North Carolina*. Written with the eighth grade reader in mind, it presents North Carolina's history and culture through literature and includes biographical sketches of the authors. (See this issue's "North Carolina Books" for a review.)

Beth Craddock Smith, a teacher at Neal Middle School in Durham, received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to research adolescent North Carolina novels which are appropriate for classroom reading. The criteria which she developed required that each novel be

Relevant: have a North Carolina setting and author and relate to North Carolina history or culture.

Readable: show literary merit within young adult reading and interest levels.

Readily available: exist in print for under fifteen dollars.

Rated "G": with regard to language, sexual content, themes, and values.

Titles which satisfied these requirements comprise the "Teachables" list. A second list includes "Readables" which, for one reason or another, do not satisfy the criteria, but which would be quite appropriate supplementary reading. Smith is most willing to share the results of her research.

A visit to Media and Technology Services, a branch of the Department of Public Instruction in Raleigh, is worthwhile for two reasons. First, this center maintains a permanent North Carolina collection. Titles may be easily perused, and they are usually appropriate for students K-12. In addition, every year or so, current North Carolina fiction and non-fiction are reviewed. Recommended titles appear on an advisory list with descriptions, interest and reading level designations, and sources for the books. However, only fiction with a North Carolina setting appears on these lists, and back issues of these lists are, unfortunately, difficult to find. Public librarians may wish to contact school media personnel in hopes of securing copies.

Literary awards are made each year by a number of different organizations. Every year since 1953, the American Association of

University Women has recognized the outstanding North Carolina contribution to juvenile (or young adult) literature. Appendix "A" in *Literary North Carolina* lists the titles and their authors. The year's winning title is also indicated in the annual bibliography in the *North Carolina Historical Review*.

The most laborious but often the most fruitful means of identifying North Carolina authors is by culling the numerous publishers' catalogs. The larger publishing houses often put out separate catalog listings of titles appropriate for young readers. Usually each title is accompanied by a description and thumbnail sketch of the author and illustrator. Many North Carolina authors whose books do not have a North Carolina setting would be missed if these catalogs were not searched.

Broadfoot's of Wendell, North Carolina catalogs provide descriptions and age appropriate designations for fiction and non-fiction titles. However, media specialists across the state appealed to Broadfoot's for information about North Carolina authors and their books. As a result, an open ended publication entitled *Contemporary North Carolina Authors* was created. To date, four packets of information about twenty-five authors each are available. A conscientious effort has been made to include living authors representing the state's diverse geographical regions, and writing in many different forms and styles. This material ranges in readership appeal from juvenile to adult. The *Contemporary North Carolina Authors* format includes a photograph; responses to a questionnaire; listing of published material, both in and out of print; previous appearances; and, in most cases, a means by which the author can be contacted. Novelists, poets, playwrights, journalists, folklorists, and other writers, both native and adopted, are represented. Neither academic nor strictly regional authors are included since the project is geared to the general public. Most of the authors live in North Carolina, but a sprinkling are natives who now reside outside the state. By spring 1992 the project will contain 150 authors. Thereafter, the packets will be published

yearly and will include new authors, plus updates on the first 150.

And finally, libraries themselves are a rich source of information. Many public libraries maintain wonderful North Carolina collections, as well as files on North Carolina authors. Each library, however, displays its North Carolina literature in different ways. Asking questions and acquainting oneself with each library and its resources is essential. Quite frequently, juvenile and young adult titles are not recognized as part of a library's collection of North Carolina books.

Having determined your needs and the resources most necessary to meet them, you are ready to "stalk" North Carolina's authors for young adults. Keep in mind that new books by previously unknown authors appear each year. Happy Hunting!

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