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# North Carolina Books

Robert Anthony, Compiler

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Jill McCorkle. *Tending to Virginia*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1987. 312 pp. \$15.95. ISBN 0-912697-65-2.

The complex network of familial relationships in the time-honored, rural South enables most folks with any local roots to claim kinship with most everyone else there. This is especially true for small communities, and the drawbacks for the uninitiated can be disconcerting, if not terribly embarrassing. Any parvenu (resident for less than twenty-five years or so) who casts personal aspersions in front of witnesses will undoubtedly slur the character of someone's cousin—imagined or otherwise—and thus make his own life difficult for the next few years.

McCorkle draws upon this familial ethos in her third book, *Tending to Virginia*, which delves into the interpersonal relationships of several families from Saxapaw, North Carolina, who descend laterally from a common set of great-grandparents. The modern-day protagonist of this matriarchal search for self and family, Virginia Turner (named for the great-grandmother), becomes insecure, lonely, and homesick while in the doldrums of eighth-month pregnancy at age twenty-eight ("You are about the biggest knocked-up girl I've ever seen"). One particular day, when her previously wed husband leaves the house as usual, Virginia's mind and, finally, her swollen body, begin to rove. Having been raised within the boundaries of family tradition and control and greatly attached to her grandmother Emily ("Gram"), Virginia goes "home" for comfort. She even contemplates leaving her husband because he wants to move to Richmond away from her family. Experiencing a bout of toxemia in the heat, however, and later the effects of a violent storm, she stays at Gram's small duplex, surrounded by all sorts of female relations (first cousin once removed, second cousin, mother, grandmother, great-aunt) connected both by blood and love. In this insular environment, one or the other of these likable women always verges on the slightly hysterical and two are half-senile anyway, so conversation never lags.

As the women talk over past family history, secrets emerge, delusions disappear, and important self-concepts grow, alter, and foster each other. Gram advises Virginia to "know when to let go a little, let go and just leave it there behind you and then go make yourself a plate of biscuits and bleach them shirts of your husband's just as white as they can get and then just let go a little." By the end of the book, illness and storm past, constructive changes have taken place in several lives and Virginia's discontent dissipates. Male characters, though important to the women, remain incidental to the story.

While the thought-provoking, personal nature of the narrative, abundance of dialogue, and sparsity of plot as such make this a basically slow-moving presentation, McCorkle as omniscient author/narrator constantly enlivens the atmosphere with perceptive wit and gritty humor. Not all attempts at cuteness prevail, but the comic effects of eccentricity and ingenuousness remain. The women, for instance, greet the senile remarks of their elders with equanimity or wry amusement ("True Confessions in the Twilight Zone"), so their very lack of response adds to the humor. McCorkle also intersperses short, quick incomplete sentences with lengthy, more ponderous run-on sentences, and pairs incisive or off-the-wall remarks with serious thought in order to vary the style. The final achievement, then, demands and rewards close attention.

## Happy New Year

As a well-constructed and imaginatively conceived work by a native North Carolinian recently transplanted to Boston, *Tending to Virginia* belongs in all North Carolina public libraries. Lighter on plot than the "mystery" novel *July 7th* and more introspective than the coming-of-age novel *The Cheerleader*, this serious and realistic work reveals yet another expression of the author's belief in the individual.

Rex E. Klett, Anson County Library

Barbara G. Hollowell, with illustrations by Aline Hansens. *Cabin, A Mountain Adventure*. Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1986. 253 pp. \$9.95. ISBN 0-913239-42-9.

When her husband was transferred, Barbara Hollowell and her family moved from urban New Jersey to rural western North Carolina. To make the move more palatable to the kids, they promised to buy a large old farmhouse with a mountain view. When the real estate market didn't offer such a house, they settled for a comfortable family home in town to be supplemented by a plot of land in the nearby mountains. The forty-acre farm they finally found came with an old log cabin and a family and a history—the memory of the Nelson family.

The cabin had been built by George Nelson, a remarkable craftsman, in the early years of the twentieth century. Gradually, as the Hollowells learned more of the family and the sturdy old cabin, the family and the cabin, rather than the land, became their focus. With untiring energy the Hollowells worked to find an architect or builder who would share their dream of restoring the cabin to its original condition, with minor modifications in deference to housing codes and such "luxuries" as indoor plumbing.

Hollowell is the author of a nature handbook and writes a weekly nature column with her husband. Her interests, knowledge and sensibilities show throughout the book. She is constantly concerned about the preservation of small wildflowers and trees and, predictably, loses many of these battles to insensitive front-loader tires, well diggers, septic tank digging backhoes, and bulldozers. She is delighted with skinks and snakes and frogs, but can't keep the workmen from smashing the life out of all the creatures they encounter.

This book is, in part, the story of the conflict of culture. The sensitive, environmentally concerned, hurried easterner is defeated by the attitudes of the mountain people. But Barbara

Hollowell never loses, for she continues to love all the insignificant small creatures and lovely plants in their natural settings; and, as low as she must feel from time to time from her setbacks, she never stops appreciating the sunset, her family, or even the people whose mountain ways she is trying to understand.

The central theme of the book is the cabin and the work that the family, friends, and hired workmen do to clean up the grounds, dismantle the cabin, reduce it to the great handhewed logs that are its basic structure, prepare the foundation, and rebuild it. Woven into this diary of days and weeks of small and major tasks are stories about the way the Nelsons lived in it which the Hollowells learned from many visits with children, grandchildren, and neighbors.

As Barbara and her husband celebrate the finished cabin with the first extended overnight stay, they are alone. The children are now in college and gone. Their project has so infused them with respect for the people who first built and lived in the cabin that they automatically adopt simplicity as the right lifestyle. Their first meal and all subsequent meals during the dark hours are lighted only by the fire in the fireplace and one candle.

The reader who appreciates this book will probably want to read it twice, or three times. There is a lot of wisdom to be gathered here—love of the outdoors, appreciation for simple pleasures, satisfaction in hard work, and, above all, Barbara Hollowell's unfailing optimistic vision.

David C. Taylor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Candace Flynt. *Mother Love*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987. 342 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 0-374-21374-7.

On Christmas Day in a cemetery near Greensboro three sisters gather at their mother's grave. As is their ritual, one sister volunteers to tell a story about Mother. Setting the tone for this story and the ones that follow, Katherine, the oldest, declares:

"We're her daughters. If we're going to spend time remembering, we should remember her for how she was. She was a pain in the ass."

The parent who inspired such strong feeling emerges as a complex woman as the memories of her daughters unfold in Candace Flynt's novel, *Mother Love*. Mother was beautiful, sensual, passionate, on occasion thoughtful and loving, but also manipulative, unpredictable and cruel, an

alcoholic driven to self-destructive behavior. So powerful a force was she in her daughters' lives that her hold on them continues after her death. What had she meant in her last words to her daughters? Had she really loved their father or even her second husband, Max? What made her seem to love and hate her children at the same time?

In her third novel, author Candace Flynt explores this love-hate relationship between a mother and her daughters. The novel is a convincing psychological portrait which delves into the conflicts these women face in their relationships with each other and in their feelings about themselves. The point of view rotates among the three sisters as the narration goes back in time and then moves into the present.

In turn we learn more about all of these women as they reminisce about the past and as they make difficult choices and forge their own identities in the present. Katherine, an older and wiser version of Mother, must deal with her reluctance to have children, fearing that she might smother and eventually destroy them with too much love. Though happily married, she is further confronted with crisis when she finds herself falling in love with her literature professor and considering divorce. Just then, her sister Jude abandons her and moves to Chapel Hill.

Jude, the spunky middle sister, is a teacher coping with life as the divorced mother of two toddlers. Faced with the loss of the secure world she had sought in marriage, she seeks to find her own independence.

Louise, the youngest sister, resents the closeness of her sisters and their interference in her life, yet depends on them to make decisions for her. Without their insistence she never would have stayed in college, studied in Paris, or broken up with Billy, her high school sweetheart. She grows to have the confidence to make her own decisions and to accept responsibility for them.

*Mother Love* is realistic in terms of its setting in modern day Greensboro and Chapel Hill and its character development. Women, especially those with sisters, will identify with these contemporary siblings. Most readers will find themselves sympathetic to the characters and caught up in their struggles. Particularly moving is the affirmation of the sisters' love for their mother and for each other in the final scene. The novel is also funny in parts. One of the most humorous scenes involves a mixer for singles in Chapel Hill known as the "People Sampler."

Candace Flynt is a skillful writer who possesses keen insight into human behavior and rela-

tionships. Her two earlier novels, *Chasing Dad* and *Sins of Omission*, have contributed to recognition of the Greensboro native as one of the talented groups of contemporary North Carolina writers. *Mother Love* further enhances this reputation, and it deserves a place in the collections of public and academic libraries.

Gloria Colvin, Duke University

Peter W. Hairston. *The Cooleemee Plantation and Its People*. Lexington: Davidson County Community College, 1986. 154 pp. \$29.95 plus \$3.00 postage and tax. ISBN 0-89459-246-7.

A prolific writer of articles and reviews, Peter Wilson Hairston, attorney, state representative, and superior court judge, devotes his first book to the subject he surely knows best—his family and Cooleemee Plantation, his Davie County home. Although Judge Hairston traces the history of his family in *The Cooleemee Plantation and Its People* from their origins in America to the present day, the lives of the first Peter Wilson Hairston as builder of the present plantation house and his two wives, Columbia Lafayette Stuart and Fanny McCoy Caldwell, are the heart of this attractive volume. Establishing themselves in piedmont Virginia, the Hairston family expanded their extensive landholdings into Stokes County, North Carolina. In 1817 Peter Hairston bought Cooleemee, a plantation of 2500 acres on the Yadkin River in what later became Davie County, from Gen. Jesse A. Pearson whose father, Richmond Pearson, had built up the plantation by consolidating neighboring tracts of land. The plantation remains in the Hairston family to the present day.

Although the claim that it was piedmont North Carolina's largest plantation is open to debate, Cooleemee is worthy of its designation as a National Historic Landmark. The plantation house is one of the architectural gems of the state. Judge Hairston's sentimental account of the history of the plantation as told by the lives of his ancestors and their servants is an interesting story and generally makes for good reading. To a considerable extent the author allows the protagonists to tell their own story through the inclusion of original letters and the Civil War diary of Peter Wilson Hairston. This is an excellent device, but the author admits in the preface that his selection of original source materials depended largely on what was legible and readily available. Judge Hairston also fails to state and adhere to a consistent editorial method for the transcriptions of these original materials. Diary entries appear

to be literal transcriptions in that spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are preserved as written. This does not appear to be the case with most of the letters. Although a comprehensive bibliography lists original source material from the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill and Hairston family papers in private hands, the author fails to cite in notes any sources for a text liberally seasoned with family traditions or for any of the original letters. These sins of omission damage the credibility of the book as a historical source.

An alphabetical roster of slaves published as an appendix attempts to trace the lives of individual slaves through their appearance on various slave lists. This is an important genealogical tool for blacks having roots at Cooleemee, but the book again neglects to mention the source of these original records. *Cooleemee Plantation* provides valuable information and engaging anecdotes about certain black families with ties to the plantation, but Hairston constricts his focus on blacks to their interaction with the white family. Although Hairston makes the interesting observation that no former Hairston slave owned land in Davie County until 1887, he attempts no analysis of slavery at Cooleemee apart from his assertion that the slaves were well treated.

The volume is amply illustrated with attractive and interesting black and white photographs, and a brief but adequate index provides easy reference. A genealogical chart would have alleviated confusion for readers unfamiliar with the complex network of Hairston family relationships.

School libraries and libraries with genealogical collections will find *The Cooleemee Plantation and Its People* a valuable addition. Copies may be ordered from the Learning Resources Center, Davidson County Community College, Post Office Box 1287, Lexington, N.C. 27293-1287.

James O. Sorrell, North Carolina Division of Archives and History

Clyde Edgerton. *Walking Across Egypt*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1987. 217 pp. \$14.95. ISBN 0-912697-51-2.

Clyde Edgerton has once again created a novel sure to capture the hearts of Southern readers. As surely as his first effort, *Raney*, brought smiles and exclamations of recognition for the characters and comfortable North Carolina speech patterns, *Walking Across Egypt* transports readers to the gentle, slow-moving town of Listre, where Mattie Rigsbee and her

neighbors and kin are folks we all knew back home.

Seventy-eight-year-old Mattie is "slowing down," as she never misses an opportunity to mention, although this is hardly evidenced by her numerous church activities, cleaning efforts, and the lovingly detailed country meals she throws together three times a day. Mattie also finds time for outings with her sister to the funeral parlor, where they are served chocolate cake while they attempt to select appropriate caskets for themselves, and for worrying endlessly about her unmarried son and daughter, who she fears will never produce any grandchildren to continue the Rigsbee line. Mattie's one vice (to her mind) is her daily habit of tuning in to her favorite soap opera before washing her lunch dishes. When disaster strikes one afternoon, as Mattie becomes lodged in a chair with no bottom, she is less concerned with getting herself out of the chair than she is horrified at the thought of her neighbors discovering her dirty dishes in the sink. When the dogcatcher arrives to rescue Mattie from her predicament, life begins to get complicated at Mattie's house. Mattie's determination to help the dogcatcher's nephew Wesley, currently in residence at the juvenile detention center, sets in motion a series of events that appall Mattie's children, shock her fellow parishioners at the Free Will Baptist Church, but never shake Mattie's resolution to minister to "the least of these my brethren." It is little wonder that Wesley hopes fervently that Mattie is his long-lost grandmother.

Clyde Edgerton's novels are not full of action; nor are they teeming with emotion and drama. The appeal of these small treasures lies in the unaffected goodness, the wide-eyed innocence and trust, the earnest, sincere day-to-day faith displayed by characters so true and unexaggerated that one never for a moment feels that these people are fictional. *Walking Across Egypt* is impossible to read without a few quiet chuckles. Don't try to explain it to someone who has never experienced Clyde Edgerton—but mention it to another devotee, and enjoy sharing the delight.

Julie Coleman, Forsyth County Public Library

Charles G. Zug III. *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*. (The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. 450 pp. \$39.95. ISBN 0-8078-1704-X.

Charles G. (Terry) Zug III, associate professor of folklore and English at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill, whose interest in North Carolina pottery began in 1969, has been documenting pottery traditions and their survival since 1974. His publications include *Five North Carolina Folk Artists* and *The Traditional Pottery of North Carolina*.

For his most recent book, *Turners and Burners*, Zug employed the highly rewarding interdisciplinary research methodology typical of a folklorist. He utilized not only numerous published and manuscript sources, including genealogical and census records, but also traveled across the state locating sites of early potteries and recording both extant wares and shards in waste dumps and old, discarded equipment. Zug's most valuable and interesting contribution, which chronicle the traditions and fortunes of North Carolina's potteries, are some eighty tape-recorded interviews with the individual potters, their families, and their descendants.

The accumulated material is divided into three chapters dealing with history, technology, and culture. In the first, Zug focuses on the early highly decorated earthenware of the Moravians in the Salem area, the salt-glazed stoneware of the English potters in the eastern Piedmont, and the tradition of alkaline glazes typical of the potters of German origin, who settled in the western Piedmont in Catawba County.

The chapter includes a list and genealogies of families whose potteries remained active for many decades. Two of the families, the Cravens and the Coles, have sustained the family tradition for nine generations. The key to the survival of the traditional potter was his ability to adapt to changing technology, taste, and marketing techniques. Potteries operated by the Auman, Cole, Owens, Teague, and Brown families still flourish in the region, along with Burlon Craig, whom Zug considers the last folk potter in the state.

The second chapter, on technology, concerns materials and techniques—clays, turning, glazes, and burning. The text is illustrated with diagrams and photographs of shops, mills and kilns, wheels and tools, and pots in glazing, firing, or finished state. The variations in clay mixtures, equipment used, and procedures seem unlimited. Burlon Craig explains: "There is [sic] no set rules. If you come to think about it, there's no set rules to none of this stuff when it comes to pottery . . . You just about have to work it out to your conditions the way you want, the way it'll work best."

In the last chapter, Zug brings together several other aspects of the craft: education of the folk potter, pottery as business, the various types of pots and other wares produced. He explains

the forces that caused the decline of the folk tradition after 1900, as well as the influences responsible for its subsequent revival during the 1920s and 1930s. Zug notes that while the folklorists may lament the passing of old ways, the potters had to develop a new tradition in order to survive. In North Carolina, the pottery industry is alive and successful because product, technology, and marketing are deeply rooted in the old folk pottery and have adjusted to contemporary American tastes and needs.

*Turners and Burners* will be an important addition to the literature on North Carolina pottery in academic and public libraries. Well organized and well researched, it is a lively and eminently readable account of the craft and the craftsmen. While there are no set rules for writing a book on pottery, Terry Zug worked it out, like Burlon Craig, turning and burning, the way it worked best.

Anna Dvorak, North Carolina Museum of Art

Earl Black and Merle Black. *Politics and Society in the South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987. 363 pp. \$25.00. ISBN 0-674-68958-5.

Twin brothers Earl and Merle Black both teach political science, Earl at the University of South Carolina at Columbia and Merle at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. With their important new study of forces shaping contemporary politics in the American South, they rightfully can be seen as the leading scholars in their specialty. V. O. Key's *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, since its publication in 1949, has been widely recognized as the authoritative study of the subject. The Blacks's volume stands to take its place as the standard guide to politics in the South, much changed two generations post-Key.

Like Key, the present authors define the South as the eleven former Confederate states. Key's South was the "old politics," basically one-party, Democratic rule with racism accepted as one of its conventions. Since mid-century, the region has undergone a transformation with a resurgent Republican party and a whole body of newly enfranchised black voters. Yet, just as things change, they stay the same. Both parties, to have any hope of success, by necessity must maintain roots in the South's conservative bedrock. Statewide elections, on the whole, still serve to determine which segment of the white middle class will rule.

The authors write of "altered race relations,

rapid socioeconomic and demographic change, and expansion of the electorate," and conclude that the South today is "more similar to the rest of the nation than ever before in its history." On the other hand, they recognize that the effects of northernization have not been complete. While the migration of white northerners to the region has been strong in a few counties, most areas have remained resistant to the trend. This fact is strikingly demonstrated in a detailed map showing percentage breakdowns by county. The maps, based on census figures, polling results, and analyses of election returns, are one of the book's most attractive and useful features.

The chief problems with the study are style and readability. In concocting their broad synthesis, the authors too often overlooked the telling detail or anecdote. Southerners have always had an affinity for a good story. Practitioners of the "old politics" recognized this and played to their audiences with "vivid, picturesque, boisterous" speeches and campaigns. The modern style is "tepid stuff indeed," according to the authors, who might well be subject to the same charge. Nonetheless, as a resource and reference, their book is unlikely to be surpassed, and academic and larger public libraries will want to add it to their collections.

Michael Hill, North Carolina Division of Archives and History

### Other Publications of Interest

Fans of "The Andy Griffith Show," the enormously popular CBS-TV series that appeared from 1960 to 1968 and which continues to draw a large audience when rebroadcast, will be delighted with *Mayberry, My Hometown: The Ultimate Guidebook to America's Favorite TV Small Town*. Author Stephen J. Spignesi offers a 4,000-entry encyclopedia of the show, identifying characters, places, songs, episode titles, slang terms, and other trivia relating to this fictional Tar Heel town. Photographs, maps, a Mayberry quiz, and the author's personal picks as the ten best episodes are several of the other features included. Public libraries in particular will want to consider adding this title to their collections. (Pierian Press, P.O. Box 1808, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. \$29.50. ISBN 0-87650-211-7).

Public libraries and libraries with North Caroliniana collections will also find useful *A Directory to North Carolina's Natural Areas* by Charles E. Roe. Information on 108 natural areas in the state is provided, with location, size, physical description, property owner, access routes,

and current management given. The areas, divided by region (mountain, piedmont, coastal plain, and barrier islands and sounds), include state parks, wildlife refuges, forests, wetlands, islands, mountains, and other notable natural habitats and ecosystems. (North Carolina Natural Heritage Foundation, P.O. Box 11105, Raleigh, N.C. 27604. \$5.00).

The Society of North Carolina Archivists has recently released *Archival and Manuscript Repositories in North Carolina: A Directory*, a helpful guide to 125 institutions involved in the preservation and use of archival and manuscripts resources. Institutions surveyed include academic, public, and special libraries; public and private manuscript repositories; local historical societies and museums; and various miscellaneous agencies. For each institution, address, telephone number, hours of operation, summary of holdings, copying service availability, staff size, and other data are given. Such information is useful to patrons planning visits or correspondence inquiries and makes the directory especially appropriate for academic and public libraries. (Society of North Carolina Archivists, P.O. Box 20448, Raleigh, N.C. 27619. \$10.00 for SNCA members, \$12.00 for non-members, plus \$2.00 postage and handling).

Two new titles in America's Four Hundredth Anniversary Committee's outstanding publication series are *Backgrounds and Preparations for the Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590* by John L. Humber and *Spain and the Roanoke Voyages* by Paul E. Hoffman. Both are attractive, well-written accounts of special aspects of England's first significant attempt to colonize North America and would be appropriate in school, public, and academic libraries with North Carolina collections. They can be ordered from the Historical Publications Section, Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, N.C. 27611. (*Backgrounds*: \$6.00, plus \$1.50 postage and handling. ISBN 0-86526-208-6; *Spain*: \$5.00, plus \$1.00 postage and handling. ISBN 0-86526-209-8).

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