

## PEN NOTES: BOOK REVIEWS

## North Carolina Authors: A Selective Handbook

Seldom does a Who's Who type of reference book need to justify its existence to a librarian, and certainly this new book will be one of the most useful of its type. Prepared by a Joint Committee of the North Carolina English Teachers Association and the North Carolina Library Association, it is published as a University of North Carolina Library Extension Publication. (Price, paper \$1.50, cloth \$3.00).

The volume was planned to include "writers who have been most significant in the North Carolina literary scene, whether or not they were native born." To achieve this aim, the Committee first excluded two groups of writers: writers of articles, textbooks and works of a technical subject; and writers of ephemera. They included all well-known juvenile authors. Even after all the rules were made, many authors had to be considered on their individual merits. As a last point of judgment, the Committee included "those authors about whom it is likely information will be most often sought."

There is no assignment more difficult than attempting to define a local author or a "significant" writer. Therefore, it is purposeless to quibble about the selections, though some of them certainly should be "sharply questioned," as the Committee admits in its preface they will be.

Chronologically subjects range from John White of the Roanoke Colony to current authors, but contemporary writers are favored over writers of the past "no longer read," since the book is planned basically for teachers and librarians.

The entry for each author includes a sketch of his life, a list of his books or writings, and a few references. Autobiographical sketches are set in quotation marks; all others are signed.

It is probably the generous response from the living authors, who wrote their own sketches at the Committee's request, that makes the *Handbook* excel the usual volume of its type. Here successful professional writers are exercising their craft, changing the usual stylized catalog of bare biographical facts into brief essays of human interest. Customary statistics have been given a clarity and grace of expression, a sparkle and bit of humor which make this reference book one to be read for pleasure. Many of the authors have voiced their credo for writing, be it one of "simple honesty" or the belief that writing is something torn out of the writer's "moral passion and heart's roots." A few have been digressionary, contributing text of little reference use, but still delightful reading. In general, the Committee printed whatever the author sent in.

The mark of librarians-as-compilers is on the book, for it contains the bibliographical details a librarian looks for: a complete list of the series of which it is a part, the names of members of the Joint Committee, a table of abbreviations, a key to contributors' initials, and two valuable appendices: a very short bit about early printers of the state, and lists of the winners of the Patterson Memorial Cup and the Mayflower Society Cup.

The type page is well designed for ready reference. The format of the bound edition is satisfactory, but poor imposition, folding, and stapling instead of sewing give the paper bound edition such narrow and uneven gutters that it is very difficult to use. North Carolina libraries will find the bound edition indispensable and North Carolina librarians may be justly proud of their part in this project.

—GENEVIEVE Y. SCHEER  
*Serials Librarian*

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