

North Carolina Environmental Writing

Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

Considering that the first *NCLR* featured the nature writing of one of North Carolina's earliest travel writers, John Lawson, it is appropriate that *NCLR*'s twentieth issue returns to Environmental Writing in North Carolina for its special feature section. With additional funding from the ECU Division of Research and Graduate Studies, we bring you this special feature section enhanced by color. We thank Dr. Deirdre Mageean, Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies at ECU, for her continued support. *NCLR*'s staff and graphic designers were simply ecstatic when Dr. Mageean responded so quickly (and affirmatively) to my request for additional funding so that we might feature the art and photography, selected by Art Editor Diane Rodman, in its original color. I know that the artists, photographers, and writers will share our gratitude when they see these pages.

I must confess that after the splash of the 2010 "Appalachian" issue, I felt a twinge of concern about the appeal of an environmental issue to a general audience. But then, last summer on the news, I watched as tar balls rolled up the coast of my native Louisiana, and pelicans emerged from the Gulf covered with oil. I listened to the voices of shrimpers, speaking in the accents that call me home as they lamented the destruction. And I knew that we needed to do an environmental issue.

Then, also last summer, *NCLR*'s Founding Editor Alex Albright and I attended the North Carolina Writers Conference, which celebrated the career of Bland Simpson. By the end of the weekend, Alex asked me if this issue was now complete. "Pretty much," I told him, for after hearing and talking with Bland, David Cecelski, Jan DeBlieu, and Janet Lembke, I knew I certainly had a good start on an issue featuring environmental writing in North Carolina. The topic was also popular with North Carolina's poets: both icons like James Applewhite and Gerald Barrax and several new voices, as you'll find in these pages – over twenty filled with poetry, in addition to which we have articles on another icon of poetry, Fred Chappell, and on an icon-in-the-making, Ron Rash.

Speaking of Ron Rash, he will be the keynote speaker of ECU's 2011 Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, which, starting this year, will feature writers from across North Carolina (rather than just eastern North Carolina-related writers) and will have the same topic as that year's issue, and the event's guest writers will be included in the issue. For example, while researching the issue's topic and planning this year's homecoming, we discovered UNC-Wilmington's David Gessner, who was interviewed by *NCLR* Assistant Editor

Dominique Marshall for this issue. Read the interview and then join us in Greenville in September to meet David in person and hear more about his trip to the Gulf region. To find out more about the writers coming to the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming and the various related events, check out the new website (created by our Art Director Dana Gay; see the link to it from *NCLR*'s website News & Events page).

As with every issue, as I work with the writers, I make new friends in addition to learning another chapter of North Carolina's literary history. Two of this year's new friends are George and Elizabeth Ellison. Long-time *NCLR* supporter (and former North Carolina Poet Laureate) Kathryn Stripling Byer called my attention to George's work and offered to interview him for this issue. George's frequent phone calls as we were working on this interview were always a lift to my day. I enjoyed talking with him about Horace Kephart, another North Carolina literary chapter I've "read" piecemeal while editing the past few issues, so meeting the Kephart expert has been a pleasure. Also, George's wife, watercolorist Elizabeth Ellison, generously provided her art, as well as most of the photographs within the layout of that interview. I thank them both, as well as Kay Byer.

Thanks also to Jim Clark at Barton College for connecting *NCLR* with Scott Hicks, who recently taught a new class on North Carolina environmental literature at UNC-Pembroke – and thanks to Scott for the article on the experience, which includes many of the writers featured in these pages.

As always, I thank the numerous artists and photographers who so generously allow us to publish their art to complement the writing in our pages – which brings me to a very special note of appreciation for *NCLR* Art Editor Diane Rodman, who spends hours of her time (working around a heavy teaching load with lots of grading) reviewing the work of so many talented artists and photographers to select just the right piece for each writer's work. ■

