
New North Carolina Books

Alice R. Cotten, Compiler

Ann Deagon. *The Pentekontaetia (The Great Fifty Years)*. Huntington, L.I.: Watermark Press, 1985. [15] pp. \$6.00 (handmade paper cover); \$25.00 (special edition).

Contemporary literature abounds in headlines and quotations from the media. As electronic journalism has challenged print, news messages have proliferated and become as much a part of life as clocks and daily routines. Events reported from near and far crowd into personal recollections, and writers call on that common memory bank to set time and place, to establish mood and motif. It is a method used often but seldom well because it looks much easier than it is. Ann Deagon, an experienced writer of poetry and fiction, did not turn to the newspaper as a quick fix for scene setting when she wrote this piece. Whatever her method of selecting excerpts, those she uses give the impression that she had been saving them since they first appeared.

In *The Pentekontaetia (The Great Fifty Years)*, she quotes from stories ranging around the globe and over boundaries of race and class, but they all share a single date—January 19, which is Ms. Deagon's birthday. She begins with January 19, 1980, when she turned fifty. Each succeeding article is dated five years earlier than its predecessor, and the last is for January 19, 1930, when she first breathed "the edged sword of air." To each excerpt she appends a brief personal recollection that is vivid, poignant, and without evident link to the quotation. Together they strike a chord. Themes from the newspaper pieces echo earlier personal experiences and the personal gives life to the journalistic. The result is densely worked, and her birthday memorials reward rereading, from fiftieth to birth and back again, with the discovery of thematic and structural relationships that elude a first examination. But the second time they yield a sense of vicarious hindsight.

Along with this contemporary journalistic technique, Ms. Deagon employs a traditional tool for tapping the depth of western cultural memory, and that is classical metaphor. She has used it often in her earlier work and for her, a classics

teacher at Guilford College, it must be as personal as it is cultural. This time, she chooses a Greek title but adds an ironic parenthetical definition. With similar twists, she gives us Venus recovering from a hysterectomy and Atlas making the headlines, not for bearing the world on his shoulders but for embodying the power to destroy it as our first ICBM.

Evidence of lifelong concern for the human condition emerges from Ms. Deagon's choice of articles dealing with individual crimes, community problems, social and racial conflict, national policy, and international upheaval. For example, the first item pulls many of these together in a 1980 account of black clergymen travelling to Iran in the hope of using spiritual strength to solve the national and international hostage crisis. Juxtaposed to that is her own recollection of recovering in the hospital from a hysterectomy. In the personal piece, the themes of illness, love, humane action, understanding, and realization appear again and again. Twenty-five years into the past she was giving birth when the newspaper printed a prison-escape story including a Catholic priest's view of the convicts' desperate grasp for freedom. Back twenty-five years more and the personal vignette is her own birth. This, she reveals, was on the same day that a convicted murderer was sentenced to death for killing his estranged wife to whom he claimed he was seeking return.

Echoes and variations are not confined to the eleven prose pairs. The book design itself reinforces her meaning: for the news items, a heavier typeface printed in gray ink contrasts with the personal recollections printed with lighter-weight type and in red ink. The designer and publisher, Coco Gordon, selected *The Pentekontaetia* for one of her Watermark Press Breakthrough Awards. Working thoughtfully with Ann Deagon's composition, she gave it a form indicative of her own creative techniques. Her handmade paper wraps (this reviewer did not see the "special edition" binding) blend her vitality with the author's humane austerity. The result engages the reader's senses insistently but without sensationalism. This is not the first of Ann Deagon's books to be

issued by a publisher especially noted for book design. An earlier example was *There Is No Balm in Birmingham*, published by David R. Godine.

In sum, the book is a work of autobiography using journalistic methods transcended by the feeling and imagination characteristic of poetry. It would be a fine addition to a large literature collection, to a North Carolina literature collection, or to a collection of small press books. Where creative writing is taught, this book could be used to illustrate the skillful adaptation of journalistic fragments.

Tucker Respass, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ronald H. Bayes, ed. *North Carolina's 400 Years: Signs Along the Way. An Anthology of Poems by North Carolina Poets to Celebrate America's 400th Anniversary.* Introduction by A. R. Ammons. Durham: The Acorn Press, 1986. 83pp. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0-89386-019-0); \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0-89386-024-4). Add \$1.00 per copy for postage. Order from the North Carolina Poetry Society, Rt. 4, Box 247, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

This anthology brings together a selection of poems about North Carolina by North Carolina poets. The purpose of the book is to offer a sampling of works about some of the special aspects, events, places, and people that have distinguished the state's past and characterize its present. Workshops sponsored by the North Carolina Poetry Society were held across the state to celebrate North Carolina's 400th anniversary. Contributions of poetry were solicited from the workshop attendees; this volume represents the choices of a variety of readers and editors.

Sam Ragan opens the collection: "How do we tell their story?/ That was the question before us?" The participants have taken as their themes subjects as diverse as the state itself: a revival tent, a hog butchering, an Indian in the trees at Saxapahaw, curing tobacco, the flight at Kitty Hawk, Blackbeard, a slave grandmother, and the colonists at Roanoke are examples of the lively stories told in a variety of poetic forms. Readers will recognize with pleasure familiar details and appreciate the pictures and emotions poetic language can conjure up. The quality of the writing is uneven, but all of the poems are accessible and demonstrate craftsmanship and control.

The volume is edited by Ron Bayes, founding editor of the St. Andrews Press, assisted by Marsha Warren. These editors, poets themselves, deserve praise for their scrupulous presentation of the material. A. R. Ammons, a North Carolina

native son and a well-known contemporary poet, introduces the collection with a thoughtful essay asking "How does a regular person become a poet?" Besides the interesting bibliographical notes on the contributors, one of the best features of the book is its handsome illustrations; members of the Lumbee Art Guild contributed works, many of which depict Indian artifacts. These drawings enhance a shapely book, carefully designed and put together.

Michael McFee said recently in a piece remembering the poet John Ciardi, "He had readers in the real world." This book should find a receptive audience among North Carolinians in the "real world." School libraries and public libraries especially should acquire this book and promote it as a worthy cause and a pleasure to read.

Coyla Barry, Burroughs Wellcome Company, Research Triangle Park.

Roger H. Crook. *Our Heritage and Our Hope: A History of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church (1884-1984).* Raleigh: History Committee, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1985. 252 pp. \$10.00 plus \$1.25 postage and handling. ISBN-0-9614485-0-4.

The life of a church is much like the life of a person, filled with critical events; affected both positively and negatively by external influences and forces; and marked by periods of growth and pain, self-giving and self-examination, peace and comfort. Roger Crook has succeeded in capturing the life of a very vital and important church in his history of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church.

The book begins "with an epilogue, a word 'spoken upon' what has gone before." In this way, Dr. Crook places the history of Pullen firmly within the foundations of Baptist faith and tradition. His concern with proper historical method does not end there, however. Each chapter deals with a specific period of time, and begins with a brief recounting of the major political, social, economic, and religious events and movements taking place during the given period. Other pertinent historical information from the world at large is sprinkled throughout each chapter, giving the reader a good understanding of the spirit of the times and Pullen's place within that spirit.

Dr. Crook also gives the reader a great amount of information about what was going on within Pullen during each period. He tells of the various pastors and other church staff who have helped make Pullen the special community of faith it is. However, unlike some local church his-

torians, he does not stop there. He also deals extensively with the lay people of the church, all of whom have had just as definite an effect on Pullen as its professional staff.

Pullen has not seen many times of peace and comfort during its life. In fact, controversy has been more a way of life for this church than for most. Freedom of the pulpit has been of the greatest importance for both the church and its ministers. While many aspects of the history of Pullen could evoke subjective judgments from the most detached historian, Dr. Crook maintains an objective and level account of the lives and events that have gone into the making of the history of Pullen.

Appropriately, the book ends with a prologue, an "anticipatory statement." "Pullen's one-hundred year history is an anticipation of things to come. The enduring ideals, the fixed commitments, and the confident hope which have characterized the church demand a continuing embodiment in a believing, worshipping, and working fellowship. That is the Pullen of the future because it has been the Pullen of the past."

Roger Crook is the Head of the Department of Religion and Philosophy of Meredith College in Raleigh. He has written several books in the areas of religion and the religious life. He faced the obstacle faced by anyone who endeavors to write the history of a local church—the scarcity of written information. His research, however, appears to have been as thorough as possible. It would be difficult to imagine a fairer or more complete account of a church's history. Dr. Crook has been an active member at Pullen for twenty-five years, indicating that the writing of this book was probably a labor of love. More photographs, particularly of the stained glass windows and the hand-made paraments which grace the sanctuary, would be a welcome addition. The photographs that are included are well done. For the reader interested in statistical records, there is included an appendix containing a statistical table. This book would be a good choice for any academic or public library that attempts to collect significant works in the area of religion.

Joseph C. Tuttle, North Carolina State University.


Other Publications of Interest

In 19th century North Carolina, gristmills were abundant; today few remain. In *Exploring the Old Mills of North Carolina*, author Grimsley T. Hobbs and illustrator Kate Russell Forbes describe thirty-nine of these remaining mills. A map of the state is included, on which each mill is

plotted. An informative introduction explains how mills work and tells a bit about their history. This book is a good choice for any library with a North Carolina travel section. (\$8.95 from Provincial Press, Box 2311, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. ISBN 0-936179-07-4.)

X The North Carolina Museum of Art had a remarkable exhibit from January 18 - August 13, 1986: "Heavenly Visions: The Art of Minnie Evans." Evans was born in North Carolina in 1892 and began painting in 1935. Her work is often described as "visionary" and was inspired by religious conviction, nature, dreams, and exotic visions. Mitchell D. Kahan, Curator of American and Contemporary Art, prepared a fifty-one page book to accompany the exhibition. The text is both informative and gracefully written. The color reproductions add to the reader's appreciation of Evan's art; the black and white reproductions are not as representative of the work of this artist who used color so well. The paperbound volume, which shares the title of the exhibit, is available for \$8.00 from the University of North Carolina Press. ISBN 0-88259-951-8.

Libraries that collect books on fishing will want to get a new volume from John F. Blair, Publisher, in Winston-Salem titled *Coastal Fishing in the Carolinas, From Surf, Pier, and Jetty* by Robert J. Goldstein. The author discusses equipment, kinds and size of fish one can expect to catch, and all of the forty-four piers in the Carolinas. A useful appendix lists sources of tackle, addresses of fishing clubs, and sources of additional information. There is even a short section illustrating and describing fishing knots. An index is included. \$10.95 paper. ISBN 0-89587-050-9.

Genealogical Publishing Company recently issued *Marriages of Rutherford County, North Carolina, 1779-1868* by Brent H. Holcomb. The volume contains abstracts of all marriage bonds issued in Rutherford County for the dates indicated. The data are arranged alphabetically by the groom's name. Each entry includes the name of the bride, date of the bond, name of bondsman, and, after 1850, the date of the marriage. \$20.00 plus \$1.25 postage and handling. (1001 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, MD 21202) ISBN 0-8063-1144-4. 

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