

Summer 8-1-2022

North Carolina: Land of Water, Land of Sky

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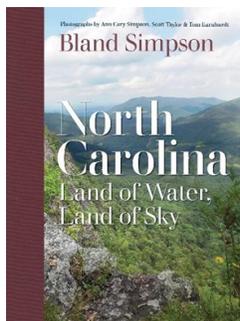
Uong, Linh (2022) "North Carolina: Land of Water, Land of Sky," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 70: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol70/iss2/5>

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REVIEWS

North Carolina: Land of Water, Land of Sky



Bland Simpson
Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 2021
ISBN: 9781469665832
240 p. \$37.00 (Hbk)

Known as the Old North State, North Carolina is a land of art and music, folklore and history, and water and sky. In

North Carolina, Bland Simpson shares his appreciation, love, and respect for his home state, from the Outer Banks and coastal plains, to the Piedmont, and Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains. With a storyteller's charm, he narrates the stories of its land and the lives of its people.

Organized by geography, this coffee table book is divided into three sections: the coast, Piedmont, and mountains. In the chapter, "This Wet and Water-loving Land," Simpson reminisces about the waterways of his childhood in Elizabeth City, located in the northeastern part of the state. By skiff, canoe, jon boat, and kayak, he and his companions (i.e. friends, family, and friends made later in life) would venture out, sometimes along the Pasquotank River which connects to Albemarle Sound and in turn, the Atlantic Ocean – crossing paths with blue herons, "spanished moss" (p. 15) as his then 4-year old twins would say, and on occasion, cottonmouths. Sometimes, they made their way out to Ocracoke Island in the Outer Banks, where in 1718, the infamous Blackbeard the Pirate (aka Edward Teach) met his end in the spot now known as Teach's Hole.

In "Short Hills and Sand Hills," Simpson moves inland to the Piedmont Plateau. It was there at Chapel Hill, his mother's hometown, where he spent the remainder of his childhood and where he currently teaches at the University of North Carolina. He tells of the old Durham Athletic Park, once home to the minor league baseball team, the Durham Bulls. He also tells of Wood-

side, a historic plantation house outside the little town of Milton, with its nautilus-designed stair rail created by Thomas Day, a master craftsman and a free man of color.

In "Jump-up Country," the author recounts his first trip out west to the Carolina Smokies with his Boy Scout troop. From the top of High Rocks Mountain looking north, they could gaze over at Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains. Twenty-some years later, he would be atop Bluff Mountain, a little further north in the "Lost Province" counties forming the corner of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. On this mountain, over 400 species of plants have been found, making it one of the most diverse areas in the Southern Appalachians. Lastly, he describes the metropolis of Asheville, home to Seely's Castle and Biltmore House – where Robert Moog set up his synthesizer company in the 1970s, and where the Black Mountain College, founded in 1933, "pushed the limits of [art and the] imagination for twenty-four years" (p. 163), whose students included Robert Creeley, Buckminster Fuller, and Willem and Elaine de Kooning.

As a writer and musician, Simpson has spent his life surrounded by art and music. He is the Kenan Distinguished Professor of English & Creative Writing at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and has been the pianist for the Tony Award-winning string band, The Red Clay Ramblers, since 1986. Additionally, he has been a songwriter and/or performer for a number of theatrical plays including *Diamond Studs*, *King Mackerel* & *The Blues Are Running*, and *Fool Moon*.

Along with his collaborators, photographers Ann Cary Simpson (his wife and a conservationist), Scott Taylor (professional photographer), and Tom Earnhardt (host/director/writer for the PBS show, *Exploring North Carolina*), Simpson has created a visual travelogue that captures the heart of his state. His vignettes of country and city life from colonial to present times, along with the images – the panoramic views of the tidal flats at Beaufort Inlet, close-ups of a *Baltimore Block* brick from an Elizabeth City street and the pews made by master craftsman Thomas Day, first-sign-of-spring rosebuds in the Piedmonts, and majestic vistas of Grandfather and Max Patch Moun-

tains in the western half of the state – accompany the reader throughout the book and provide a colorful, and nostalgic and/or historic backdrop to his stories. One caveat, however, for those new to North Carolina, a big map or a small one for each of the three geographic regions of the state would be very helpful to have on hand.

This travelogue is recommended for newcomers and visitors, as well as those who have long-called the Old North State their home. It would be an enjoyable addition to public library collections and the leisure section for academic libraries. For those interested in stories of North Carolina, try these books by Bland Simpson: *The Coasts of Carolina: Seaside to Sound Country*, *Ghost Ship of Diamond Shoals: The Mystery of the Carroll A. Deering*, and *The Great Dismal: A Carolinian's Swamp Memoir*.

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Remote Access: Small Public Libraries in Arkansas



Sabine Schmidt &
Don House
Fayetteville: University
of Arkansas Press, 2021
ISBN: 9781682261729
352 p. \$45.00 (Hbk)

In this moving work of
photography, artists
Sabine Schmidt and

Don House pay tribute to the vital, yet underappreciated role public libraries perform in rural communities throughout the State of Arkansas. *Remote Access* is the third installment of The Arkansas Character series, following *True Faith*, *True Life* (2015) and *An Arkansas Florilegium* (2017). Schmidt and House's book is a fitting addition to a series that highlights "insufficiently celebrated accomplishment." Published as a coffee table book, this charming volume features 21 of the Natural State's smallest libraries through images and essays.

After consulting the Arkansas State Library's list of smallest libraries in the Natural State, the artists identified, scouted, and photographed libraries over a three-year period that concluded in March 2020. The selection of fea-

tured libraries was primarily determined by community population and geographic diversity. This lineup includes 19 classic examples of municipally-funded, stationary public libraries, a county library system bookmobile, and an independent library solely supported by community donations and volunteer staffers.

Series Editor Robert Cochran provides the introduction to the book, Schmidt the prologue, and House the epilogue. The work is organized into 21 chapters, one per library. Schmidt begins every chapter with an essay and color photographs of the library and the community it serves. House concludes with his own essay and vivid black and white snapshots of the librarians, patrons, and other community stakeholders that support these institutions.

As a work of photography, *Remote Access* skillfully captures the essence of small-town public librarianship in Arkansas through three lenses: place, space, and people. A sense of place is developed on both a macro (state) and micro (community) level. From the lush Ozarks to the silo-studded Delta, the Natural State's diverse landscapes and pastoral beauty are on full display throughout. Scenes of cotton bales, rusty water towers, and deserted downtowns further immerse the reader in the rural environments these libraries operate in. Images of libraries housed in abandoned storefronts and a recycled FEMA trailer are conspicuous reminders of the precarious future these institutions face in towns plagued by chronic depopulation and dwindling tax revenues. Despite these unique challenges, the warm photographs of patrons from various walks of life reaffirm that Arkansas' small public libraries are indispensable pillars of the communities they faithfully serve.

What the authors cannot visually document, they record through essays. Schmidt and House repeatedly underscore how these public libraries are a lifeline for rural Arkansans marginalized by the digital divide. Patrons without reliable internet access depend on these digital oases to stay connected to the outside world, check out DVDs for home entertainment, and obtain their GEDs. *Remote Access* also shines a spotlight on the unfavorable conditions staff often endure at underfunded libraries, such as crammed facilities or no working heat. In short, these essays not only supplement the photography but provide essential commentary about these featured libraries.