

in print

N.C., A to Z

Encyclopedia of North Carolina. Edited by William S. Powell. The University of North Carolina Press, 1,314 pages, \$65.00.

Take it from someone who had to learn the hard way: if you drop William S. Powell's thirteen-hundred-page *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* on your foot, it's gonna hurt.

Hospitals: Well into the twentieth century, sick or injured North Carolinians were cared for primarily at home...

It's also a hard book to write about, if only because the entries—laid out from *Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad Company* to *Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation*—are so maddeningly intriguing.

Opossums (from the Powhatan Indian word aposoun) are the only marsupials indigenous to North Carolina and the United States...

When William Powell was in fifth or sixth grade, he'd sit on the courthouse steps in Statesville and write down the stories he heard people swapping there. He's now eighty-seven—he says he remembers when everyone would run outside to look any time they heard an airplane pass over—and he's the Old North State's preeminent historian. And though history might one day show that Powell retired from teaching at Carolina in 1985 and started working on the encyclopedia soon after, he has, in a sense, been working on it for most of his career, compiling lists, hoarding notes, coming up with criteria, plotting.

When Powell put out the call for contributions to the encyclopedia, people from all over the state volunteered. The final version represents the work of more than five hundred and fifty people, from college professors to amateur historians. Jay Mazzocchi, the associate editor of the encyclopedia, says that people lined up to help because they respected Powell's work and his "deep love for the history of North Carolina."

Histories documenting North Carolina's past and present were written by North Carolinians and others beginning in the early nineteenth century...

In 1976, Powell pretty well closed the book on Tar Heel places and geography with his book *The North Carolina Gazetteer*. Then he worked almost twenty years on his six-volume *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, which recounts the lives of famous (and infamous) North Carolinians. He says he envisioned this encyclopedia as the companion to those books. "I hope with these three different sources we have it all covered," he says, laughing. "There's a perfectly good book; you can look it up for yourself!"

And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go find out about the Brown Mountain Lights near Morganton. But first I'll maybe just read this one entry called *Cat-Throwing Incident*. And then this one about buck dancing. And what's a *Boys Road Patrol*?

—Jason Smith

William S. Powell is a professor emeritus of history at Carolina. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library provided funding and office space for the project.

Left, H.H. Oliver of Goldsboro delivers his prize-winning holler at the second annual Hollerin' Contest at Spivey's Corner on June 20, 1970. Image courtesy of North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh. From *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* by William S. Powell. Copyright 2006, University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

