

Roanoke-Chowan Group ^[1]

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Roanoke-Chowan Group

by Roy Parker Jr., 2006

The Roanoke-Chowan Group of Writers and Allied Artists began in 1948 as an informal gathering of writers, musicians, painters, and patrons of the arts called together by retired banker [Gilbert T. Stephenson](#) ^[2] and his wife, Grace, at their [Northampton County](#) ^[3] country home, known as Warren Place. In 1953 the organization established and endowed the Roanoke-Chowan Award, since given annually to the best book of poetry by a North Carolinian that year. The endowment for the award was subsequently transferred to the [North Carolina Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[4], which names judges. The award is presented with other state [literary awards](#) ^[5] at the annual meeting of the association.

Stephenson, who served as president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association in 1956, wanted to prove that "material for literature as well as art is to be found in every nook and cranny of our state." The original Roanoke-Chowan Group included 14 authors, 5 painters, and several musicians. Among its early and enthusiastic luminaries were authors Bernice Kelly Harris of Seaboard, Mebane Holoman Burgwyn of Northampton County, [Inglis Fletcher](#) ^[6] of Chowan County, and Ovid Pierce of [Halifax County](#) ^[7]; painters [Francis Speight](#) ^[8] of [Bertie County](#) ^[9] and Frith Winslow of Plymouth; church historian Henry Lewis of Jackson and Chapel Hill; and journalists Holley Mack Bell of Windsor and Roy Parker Jr. of Jackson and Ahoskie.

For several years in the 1950s, members of the group met annually, usually in summer at a member's home, where they shared a typical eastern North Carolina feast of fried chicken, ham biscuits, watermelon rind pickles, and summer vegetables. Into the 1960s, some members would meet together at annual meetings of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association during "[culture week](#)" ^[10] in [Raleigh](#) ^[11]. Roanoke-Chowan Award winners have included Frank Borden Hanes for *Abel Anders* (1953), Carl Sandburg for *Wind Song* (1961), Fred Chappell for *The World between the Eyes* (1972), Reynolds Price for *Vital Provisions* (1983), [Kathryn Stripling Byer](#) ^[12] for *Black Shawl* (1998), and Michael McFee for *Earthly* (2001).

Reference:

Gilbert T. Stephenson and Grace Stephenson, *We Came Home to Warren Place* (1959).

Additional Resources:

North Carolina Literary Map. Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry: <http://library.uncg.edu/dp/nclitmap/details.aspx?typ=award&id=5> ^[13]

Subjects:

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[Writers, journalists, and editors](#) ^[18]

Authors:

[Parker, Roy, Jr.](#) ^[19]

Origin - location:

[Northampton County](#) ^[20]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[21]

1 January 2006 | Parker, Roy, Jr.

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Links

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[2] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/wwii/stephenson/bio.html>

[3] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/northampton>

[4] <https://ncpedia.org/literary-and-historical-association>

[5] <https://ncpedia.org/literary-awards>

[6] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/fletcher-minna-inglis>

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