

North Carolina Poets Laureate ^[1]

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by Steven Case, 2009. Updated 2014.
NC Government & Heritage Library.

A JOINT RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE AND EMPOWER THE GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA TO NAME AND APPOINT SOME OUTSTANDING AND DISTINGUISHED MAN OF LETTERS AS POET-LAUREATE FOR NORTH CAROLINA

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring:

SECTION 1. That the Governor of this State be and he is hereby authorized and empowered to name and appoint some outstanding and distinguished man of letters as Poet-Laureate ^[2] for the State of North Carolina.
SEC. 2. That this resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after its ratification. Ratified this the 11th day of May, A.D. 1935.

Resolution No. 60 (H.R. 909), 1935

The word "Laureate" comes from the Ancient Greek custom of crowning heroes and poets with wreaths of laurel. To be "given the laurel" means to be recognized for extraordinary accomplishment.

The office of English Poet Laureate (from which the US custom grew) has its origins in the time of Charles II. While there had been official court poets or King's poets prior to this time, the first Letters Patent making the position an official part of the Royal Household weren't issued until 1670, when John Dryden was given the laurel.

The U.S. Library of Congress appoints a Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. Many states also appoint poets laureate or poets in residence. A full list is maintained by the Library of Congress: <https://guides.loc.gov/united-states-state-poets-laureate/> ^[3].

Despite our long history as a colony and a state, North Carolina has only had a handful of Poets Laureate. The Laureate serves for 2 years, and may be re-appointed at the Governor's discretion. Until Fred Chappell's tenure, the position was considered a purely honorary position that paid tribute to the incumbent's stature as a poet. Since then, the Poets have worked with the North Carolina Arts Council ^[4] to create a much more activist position, promoting literature and literacy throughout the state.

John Charles McNeill ^[5] (1874-1907) was sometimes called the Poet Laureate of North Carolina. These words are, in fact, carved on his tombstone. However, no such official designation existed during his lifetime.

North Carolina Poets Laureate

For comprehensive biographical information on North Carolina Poets Laureate ^[2], visit the official page at the North Carolina Arts Council ^[6] ^[6].

Arthur Talmage Abernethy ^[7] (1872-1956) Abernethy was appointed the first official Poet Laureate by Governor R. Gregg Cherry ^[8] in 1948.

James Larkin Pearson ^[9] (1879-1981) Pearson was appointed Poet Laureate by Governor William Umstead in 1953. His tenure lasted until his death at the age of 101 in 1981.

Sam Ragan (1917-1996) Ragan was appointed Poet Laureate by Governor James B. Hunt in 1981. His tenure lasted until his death in 1996.

Fred Chappell ^[10] (1936 -) Chappell was appointed Poet Laureate by Governor James B. Hunt in 1997. Unlike his predecessors, Chappell's appointment was time limited--his tenure lasted until 2002.

Kathryn Stripling Byer ^[11] (1944 -) Byer was appointed Poet Laureate by Governor Mike Easley in 2005.

Cathy Smith Bowers ^[12] (1949 -) was named North Carolina's Poet Laureate in January 2010 by Governor Beverly Perdue.

Joseph Bathanti ^[13] (1953 -) was named North Carolina's Poet Laureate on August 30, 2012 by Governor Beverly Perdue.

Valerie Macon was named North Carolina's Poet Laureate on July 11, 2014 by Governor Pat McCrory, but resigned on July 17, 2014.

Shelby Stephenson ^[14] (1938 -) was named North Carolina's Poet Laureate on December 22, 2014 by Governor Pat McCrory.

Subjects:

Poets ^[15]

Authors:

Case, Steven ^[16]

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