Our Many Waters, by Bland Simpson (c. 2015)

Our rivers will run, they will roll and flow, whatever we do or do not do – and yet they
would not choose to be left alone. They want their headwaters, whether in swamp or
brushy seep or forest spring to run clean and clear, and their courses sheltered. For if
they remain fresh and clean enough that one might scoop a handful and drink it, so will
the broad streams they feed, till those are in tidewater and salt is in the mix.

People of a province with seventeen river basins, with ten thousand miles of interior
coastal shorelines and with over two million acres of estuarine waters must needs be full
of love for every bit – if the Lord sees the least sparrow when it falls, and He does, then let
us keep our eyes on every rivulet and rill, every creek, crick, branch, run, stream, prong,
fork, river, pocosin, swamp, basin, estuary, cove, bay and sound, and help them all.

Our purpose must be health. As poet Wendell Berry wrote in The Unsettling of America:
“To be healthy is to be whole. The word health belongs to a family of words, a listing
of which will suggest how far the consideration of health must carry us: heal, whole,
wholesome, hale, hallow, holy.”

Let us keep our rivers healthy, and holy, and hold them close in the deepest chambers
of our hearts. And part of that care, that health, will surely be to turn our vision ahead,
clearly, toward what the sea’s steady rise will mean, especially to those streams on the
outer coastal plain and the people near them, in this century and beyond.

Let us make our many waters living models to the world.

We will come back to them all again, and float upon many another, the Scuppernong and
the Pasquotank, the Cape Fear and the French Broad, the Yadkin and the Lumber, the
Roanoke and the Rocky, the Catawba and the Uwharrie and the Haw. The waters never
end, and there is no story without them, and this is why the first question those with the
most powerful lenses and sensors and probes ask of cosmic landscapes is: where is the
water, or the proof of water past, or the nature of liquid present, like the methane seas
of Titan. The rivers of Carolina are precious as veins, givers and bringers of life, home
of oldest trees and newest songbirds, of great black bear and least newt, and of tiny
 glutinous eggs bound to become great fish in the sea, and to return and spawn. Anyone
looking in on our waterways from as close as a boat afloat upon them, or from as far
away as an unknown orb in the thrall of some distant star, will see no less than the sweet
wondrous mysteries of life, as if through a glass brightly, now face to face.
People have always depended on rivers and streams for survival, and many major settlements are located along rivers. Franklin, NC was established in Macon County along the Little Tennessee River in 1829, and Cullasaja Falls is located on another Macon County river. The Cullasaja River joins the Little Tennessee River and eventually flows into the Tennessee River. The Tennessee River is an important water source for many in the southeastern United States. - Cathryn Sill

“Paddling the Cullasaja”
Photo Credit: Angela Faye Martin
The Old Well is a Wake Forest landmark. The well served as the main water source for students, faculty, and staff of Wake Forest College until the campus installed a water system in 1895. In 1911, the graduating class donated a decorative marble fountain to replace the old well’s metal hand pump. Over twenty years later, the Class of 1934 gifted the gazebo shelter designed by New York architect Frank Perkins. In 2001, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary donated the Old Well to the Wake Forest College Birthplace Society. Today, the Old Well is part of the Wake Forest Historical Museum’s gardens.

- Sarah Soleim, Manager of Community and Academic Learning, Wake Forest Historical Museum

Caption: “Old Well in the Brewer Harris Garden”
Photo Credit: Wake Forest Historical Museum
Three trawlers set out from their inland port to search for shrimp in ocean waters in this picture from the 1960s. Generations of coastal North Carolinians have made a living from commercial fishing, and today NC remains the biggest supplier of blue crabs and shrimp on the U.S. Atlantic seaboard. - Tom Stroud, Dep. Director of Partnership for the Sounds

Caption: “Trawlers”
Photo Credit: North Carolina Estuarium
The Cape Fear region is defined by the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Cape Fear River on the west. Between these two bodies of water we have expanses of marsh, creeks, and estuaries - vital breeding grounds for all kinds of aquatic life, birds, and land animals. Also important to the community for recreational boating, fishing, and crabbing, these fragile resources are increasingly impacted by encroaching development and its accompanying stressors. Due to the difficulty in negotiating the terrain, much of the most fragile marshlands, creeks, and barrier islands had minimal contact until late in the 19th century. This changed in 1889 when trestles were built and track laid to connect Wilmington, a thriving railroad center built on the Cape Fear River, to the new resort of Wrightsville Beach on the Atlantic.

- Madeline Flagler, Executive Director, Wrightsville Beach Museum of History

Caption: "Marshlands"
Photo Credit: Wrightsville Beach Museum
In the 1750s, after American Indians in the North Carolina piedmont had moved west seeking refuge from war and disease brought on from European encroachment, other groups began moving onto the land. British land agents sought out farmers and speculators to ensure the creation of farms and tax revenue to send to England. Those seeking fertile land found it along the tributaries of the Haw and Yadkin rivers, and populations boomed along these waterways. When corrupt land speculators began charging exorbitant fees and taxes in the 1760s, farmers organized and petitioned authorities to make reforms. The first such group, the Sandy Creek Association, all came from the Sandy Creek region in modern day Randolph County. These associations coalesced into the Regulator movement, and Regulators held their meetings in mills, like Dixon’s mill on Cane Creek in Alamance County. Mills served as a community gathering place and brought groups together based on what creek or river they lived on. - Sherri Singer, Department Head, Social & Behavioral Sciences Alamance Community College
Wildcat Lake was built by the Edgar Tufts Memorial Association in 1933, during the height of the Great Depression and was the answer to a need for a permanent water supply for Grace Hospital, Lees-McRae College, and Grandfather Home for Children. Today, it is owned by the Grandfather Home for Children and is enjoyed by many for water recreation, including fishing & swimming. - *Amber Westall Briggs, Library Director AMY Regional Library System*

“Canoe at Wildcat Lake, Banner Elk, Avery County, NC”

Photo Credit: Todd Bush bushphoto.com
WHAT IS WATER/WAYS?

Water/Ways is a traveling exhibit developed by the Smithsonian Institution that explores the endless motion of the water cycle, water’s effect on landscape, settlement and migration, and its impact on culture and spirituality. The exhibit looks at political and economic efforts to ensure access to water and explores how human creativity and resourcefulness provide new ways to protect water resources and renew our relationship with the natural environment. Water/Ways focuses on the relationships between people and water. How has water shaped our history and traditions? How does it impact our daily life? How does water unite communities? How will the relationship between people and water evolve in the future?

Water/Ways was adapted from an exhibition organized by the American Museum of Natural History, New York (www.amnh.org), and the Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul (www.smm.org), in collaboration with Great Lakes Science Center, Cleveland; The Field Museum, Chicago; Instituto Sangari, Sao Paulo, Brazil; National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada; San Diego Natural History Museum; and Science Centre Singapore with PUB Singapore.

HOW DID WATER/WAYS COME TO NORTH CAROLINA?

Water/Ways is part of North Carolina Humanities Council’s Museum on Main Street program, a one-of-a-kind cultural partnership program between the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, state humanities councils nationwide, and local organizations. Designed for small-town museums, libraries, and cultural organizations, the North Carolina Humanities Council’s tour of Water/Ways serves as a catalyst to convene conversations about water’s impact on American culture. Local communities host the Smithsonian exhibit, create complementary exhibits and public programs, and facilitate educational initiatives to deepen understanding about what water means culturally, socially, and spiritually in their own community. In 2020 Water/Ways will tour in North Carolina, South Carolina, California, Missouri, and Utah.

HOW IS WATER/WAYS FUNDED?

North Carolina Humanities Council’s two-year, multi-program initiative, “Watershed Moments,” explores our varied relationships with the environment culturally and historically through multiple programs. “Watershed Moments” programs include a Statewide Read of The Water Knife and Dry, an environmental journalism panel, film discussion series, and the statewide tour of the Smithsonian exhibit, Water/Ways. Learn more at www.nchumanities.org

Water/Ways is brought to North Carolina by the North Carolina Humanities Council and sponsored by NC Museum of Natural Sciences, Our State Magazine, North Carolina Sea Grant, NC Water Resources Research Institute, and the National Humanities Center.

“Watershed Moments” is part of the national initiative on “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” administered through the Federation of State Humanities Councils and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

HELP SUPPORT “WATERSHED MOMENTS” IN NORTH CAROLINA:

Sponsorships support programs and costs associated with hosting the exhibit, public programs, and more. For sponsorship information call 704.687.1520.

HOW DOES WATER IMPACT YOU?

We invite you to join the conversation by taking part in our other “Watershed Moments” programs. For dates and locations, more information is available at www.nchumanities.org

• Join a group to discuss our Statewide Read books The Water Knife and Dry
• Examine disaster reporting through a curated panel discussion (Charlotte, NC)
• Attend a series of film screenings and discuss environmental issues (various NC locations)

You can follow the conversation online at @NChumanities using #NCWatershedMoments
Bland and Ann Simpson have collaborated on a trilogy of books about eastern North Carolina for UNC Press, with his text and her photography: Into the Sound Country (1997); The Inner Islands (2006); and Little Rivers & Waterway Tales (2015). They are now at work on a fourth book, about the whole state of North Carolina, also for UNC Press. Bland is Kenan Professor of English & Creative Writing at UNC Chapel Hill and longtime pianist for the Tony Award-winning North Carolina string band, The Red Clay Ramblers; he has received the N.C. Humanities Council’s 2017 John T. Caldwell Award for the Humanities and the North Carolina Award for Fine Arts in 2005. Ann is a strategic-planning consultant for non-profits at Raleigh-based moss+ross, is immediate past board President for the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, and is current Board Chair for North Carolina SeaGrant; she served seventeen years as Associate Dean for Development at UNC’s School of Government, for which she received the UNC Chancellor’s Award.

(Above left) Merchants Mill Pond in Gates County, NC by Ann Carry Simpson
(Above Right) Photo credit Scott Taylor Photography
ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
The North Carolina Humanities Council is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Through grant-making and public humanities programs, the Council has served as an advocate for lifelong learning and thoughtful dialogue about our shared human experience since 1972. The Council operates the North Carolina Center for the Book, an affiliate program of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. Learn more at: www.nchumanities.org

ABOUT MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
Water/Ways is a part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and state humanities councils nationwide. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress. The mission of Museum on Main Street is to provide access to the Smithsonian for small-town America. Museum on Main Street engages small-town audiences and brings attention to underserved rural communities. Museum on Main Street exhibitions, like Water/Ways, are designed to be a springboard for local exhibitions and complementary humanities programming. Learn more at www.museumonmainstreet.org