

Paul Green's Legacy - Alive and Well

By Roy Parker Jr.

Paul E. Green, the writer-humanist who grew up on a Harnett County farm and pitched baseball both right and left-handed, has been dead since 1981. But the passions of his long life (he was born in 1894), both literary and humanistic, are still animating current life in North Carolina.

Green would have been deeply gratified by the reawakened social consciousness of the state over the matter of the death penalty and other human rights' efforts. Nearly all of his earliest work, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *In Abraham's Bosom*, turned either directly or in some measure on the shame and outrage that he felt for the atrocities of the gas chamber, of the chain gangs—Green's "Hymn to the Rising Sun" — and of the discrimination that race and poverty visited on common people.

In the decades from the 1920s to the 1970s, Paul Green was the state's leading advocate for the end to the death penalty. He stood at vigils and visited condemned men on death row. It is no accident that one of the leaders of the growing current revulsion against the death penalty is none other than Green's grandson, **Paul M. Green**, an attorney who works on capital cases in the Office of the Appellate Defender.

If the younger generation has carried on Green's passion for social justice, his children and other literary trustees are busy with projects emphasizing his literary contributions.

In recent years, spearheaded by daughter, **Betsy Green Moyer**, the Paul Green Foundation reprinted the 1935 edition of *This Body of Earth*, a novel of hardscrabble sharecropper life set in the "Cape Fear valley of North Carolina."

This Body of Earth is a word pilgrimage through a largely-vanished North Carolina human and even physical landscape. It is rich with descriptive color of turn-of-the-century life in the cotton bottoms of the Cape Fear, a virtual encyclopedia of the folklore of the farm, country church, crossroads store, and fishing hole.

In addition to shepherding this project, Betsy Moyer, an accomplished nature photographer, put together a book that would combine her talent with Green's own deep interest in the state's flora. Her photography illustrates descriptions of flowers, plants, and trees from an immense Green book, known as *Paul Green's Wordbook: An Alphabet or Reminiscence*, a compendium of folklore, nature observations, colloquiums and comments on just about everything else that Green observed in a lifetime of keeping notebooks. Her book is *Paul Green's Plant Book: An Alphabet of Flowers and Folklore*.

Another daughter, the late **Dr. Janet Green**, published a small paperback memoir describing her life with her mother in, *Elizabeth Lay Green, a memoir by her daughter Janet McNeill Green*.

Dr. Margaret D. Bauer, English professor at East Carolina University and Foundation board member, has distinguished herself in recent years with three Paul Green works: she edited the interviews between James Spence (an early Harnett County friend) and Paul Green entitled *Watering the Sahara*. As editor of the *North Carolina Literary Review*, Dr. Bauer focused on Paul Green's **Hollywood screen writing career** and, in 2014 her critical edition of Green's 1931 *The House of Connelly* will be published by McFarland Press.

Paul Green Scholar, **Dr. Laurence Avery**, professor emeritus of UNC's English Department edited Green's voluminous correspondence into *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green 1916-1981*, and a compilation of Green's works called *A Paul Green Reader*.

Dr. John H. Roper edited a book of Paul Green's WWI poetry entitled, *Paul Green's War Songs*.

In addition to all this, Paul Green's place as the father of **Symphonic Outdoor Drama** is secure. Summer people still flock to such attractions as the *The Lost Colony* on Roanoke Island, his first of 17 such dramas and still packing them in over 75 years after it was first staged. Green's legacy is administered by the **Paul Green Foundation**, located in Chapel Hill. \

The foundation gives small grants to aspiring writers, playwrights, and social activists through 501(c)(3) charitable organizations, and seeks publishers and researchers interested in the great archive of **Paul Green Papers** now in the **Southern Historical Collection at UNC Chapel Hill**.

A "**Friends of the Paul Green Foundation**" support group was initiated by the late **Maxine Swalin**(1903-2009), who was wife and supporter of her husband, the late Benjamin Swalin, director of the North Carolina Symphony.

Few ambidextrous baseball pitchers turned writer have so much going on in their name as Paul Green.

Roy Parker (1930-2013)

Editor of the *Fayetteville-Observer-Times*

Trustee of the Paul Green Foundation

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