



## The Piedmont

The rolling hills of the North Carolina Piedmont are home to most of the state's largest cities. In the fast-growing areas around Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh, skyscrapers and modern universities abound where cotton mills and farms once stood. The rich contrast between the old and the new provides a fertile ground for novelists to explore. Pamela Duncan and Doug Marlette have written novels looking at North Carolina's textile mills; Kathy Reichs and Katy Munger have created sharp-witted, fast-talking characters based in the urban areas of the Piedmont; and many novelists have based their books in the university communities in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill.

Alice Adams. *A Southern Exposure*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

At the end of the Great Depression, Harry and Cynthia Baird and their 11-year-old daughter move from Connecticut to Pinehill, N.C., a fictional town probably based on Chapel Hill. Hoping to escape debt, drinking problems, and past mistakes, the family is plunged into small town southern culture. The novel traces their attempts to fit in to a tightly woven community.

Alice Adams. *After the War*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

This novel, Adams's last, continues the story of the Baird family begun in *A Southern Exposure*. The story is set in the period during and immediately after World War II in the fictional Piedmont town of Pinehill. In tracing a number of crises, large and small, Adams portrays a large and diverse cast of characters and gives special attention to the details of domestic life in North Carolina in the 1940s.

Daphne Athas. *Entering Ephesus*. New York: Viking, 1971.

The Bishop family has fallen on hard times. Forced to leave their large and comfortable house in Connecticut, they move to the small, provincial town of Ephesus, a fictional Piedmont town based on Chapel Hill. In the midst of the chaos of relocating and adjusting to life in the south, the lively Bishop daughters -- Irene, Urie, and Loco Poco -- are just entering adolescence. Their thoughts and observations enliven the novel, which is set amidst depression and war in the 1930s and 1940s. There is a small community named Ephesus in Davie County, but this novel is clearly set in a Piedmont college town. *Entering Ephesus* won the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for the best work of fiction by a North Carolinian in 1972.

Ellyn Bache. *Activist's Daughter*. Duluth, Minn.: Spinsters Ink, 1997.

In this novel set amidst the Civil Rights protests of the early 1960s, Beryl Rosinsky has graduated from high school and is anxious to get away from her activist mother and her hometown of Washington, D.C. She enrolls at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she finds a different world -- conservative, Southern, and with long-standing campus cliques firmly established. Beryl is gradually drawn into local Civil Rights protests, which are based on actual demonstrations by UNC students against segregated businesses in Chapel Hill. As a result of her own political awakening, Beryl ends up with a deeper understanding and appreciation of her mother.

Nancy Bartholomew. *Stand By Your Man*. New York: New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Maggie Reid, a country music singer based in Greensboro, is questioned by the police when her former husband, the "Satellite Dish and Mobile Home King," disappears. In order to clear herself, Maggie pursues the mystery on her own, becoming involved in the seedy underside of life in Greensboro, where she finds, among other strange personalities, a mysterious group called "The Redneck Mafia."

Doris Betts. *Souls Raised From the Dead*. New York: Knopf, 1994.

The novel looks into the troubled relationship between Mary Grace Thompson, the teenage daughter of state trooper Frank Thompson, and her estranged mother, Christine. Mary Grace has a life-threatening kidney disease and the story takes us through the emotions and spiritual questioning a family faces during a tragedy. The novel is set in Carrboro, Hillsborough, Durham, Jacksonville, and Chapel Hill at the UNC hospital.

Jimmy Carter. *The Hornet's Nest: A Novel of the Revolutionary War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Former President Jimmy Carter's first novel (and the first novel to be published by an ex-President) follows Ethan Pratt and his family through the Southern colonies during the American Revolution. When things turn bad in Georgia, Pratt migrates to North Carolina in search of cheap land and opportunity. Carter's thorough research is evident in his descriptions of the Regulator movement in Orange County and the battle of King's Mountain.

Martin Clark. *The Many Aspects of Mobile Home Living*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

When Judge Martin Wheeler agrees to help the no-good brother of a friend who's up on a drug charge, he is quickly sucked into the lives of a group of oddball characters on a mission to recover a bounty of stolen cash. Set in the fictional Piedmont town of Norton, N.C., near Winston-Salem, the novel follows Wheeler and his strange new friends through the seedy underside of contemporary southern life.

Patricia Cornwell. *Hornet's Nest*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996.

Best-selling novelist Patricia Cornwell sets this mystery in Charlotte, "a city of ambition and change." During an especially hot summer in the Queen City, a number of tourists are gruesomely murdered, and all are left with the same mark of an hourglass on their bodies. A serial killer is clearly at work. Police chief Judy Hammer and her deputy Virginia West battle city politics while they work with young *Charlotte Observer* reporter Andy Brazil to uncover the facts of the case. As the police procedural unfolds, Cornwell describes the physical and cultural landscape of North Carolina's largest city.

Kurt Corriher. *Someone to Kill*. New York: St. Martin's, 2002.

When John Pavlak's wife is murdered, he isn't satisfied to just sit back and let somebody else handle the investigation. Especially when he becomes a suspect himself. Pavlak is a decorated veteran of the Vietnam conflict, and the athletic director at a small college that sounds a lot like Davidson. He races to keep just

ahead of the police, following the investigation to Berlin when it looks like his wife's work as an investigative journalist may have led to the discovery of sensitive Cold War secrets. In the end, the trail leads him right back to North Carolina.

Virginia DeBerry and Donna Grant. *Far From the Tree*. New York: St. Martin's, 2001.

Sisters Celeste English and Ronnie Frazier are surprised to learn, after their father's death, that they have inherited an old house in fictional Prosper, N.C. They had no idea that the house even belonged to the family, and decide to check it out for themselves before they sell it. The house turns out to have important connections to the family, and as Celeste and Ronnie explore the house and Prosper, they uncover old family secrets, and learn a great deal about their mother's troubled past.

Pamela Duncan. *Plant Life*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2003.

This novel is largely the story of a group of women who work in the textile mill in the fictional Piedmont town of Russell, N.C. The town and its residents are seen through the fresh perspective of newly divorced Laurel Granger, who has returned to Russell after fifteen years in Las Vegas. As Laurel struggles to cope with her aging mother and begins to find romance again, she is comforted by the friendship and understanding of the women she works alongside at the mill. *Plant Life* won the 2003 Sir Walter Raleigh award for the best work of fiction by a North Carolina author.

Jonathan Farlow. *Brouhaha*. Boone, N.C.: Parkway Publishers, 2005.

The mayoral election in the fictional Piedmont town of Ashewood Falls has the whole town astir. Everything was proceeding smoothly in the decidedly quirky town until a bowling alley argument led to the entry of a new candidate in the race. Incumbent Johnston "Birddog" Farley is faced with an unexpected challenge from Purdie Mae Pearce, the "fried chicken queen." As befits as modern election, this one is filled with scandal. There are allegations of adultery, suspicions of electoral fraud, and a bevy of special interest groups clamoring for attention.

Kaye Gibbons. *Divining Women*. New York: Putnam, 2004.

Mary Oliver travels from Washington, D.C. to her hometown, the fictional Elm City, N.C., to spend time with her aunt Maureen in the fall of 1918 with the nation at war and a deadly flu pandemic sweeping the country. Maureen's troubles, it turns out, are much more immediate. Her cold and cruel husband has reduced her to a quiet and cowering existence and Mary takes it upon herself to save her aunt. Drawing from the example of strong women in the family's history, and with the help of caring relatives, Mary and Maureen plan their escape.

Marianne Gingher. *Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit*. New York: Ballantine, 1986.

Everyone in the small town of Orfax, N.C. is astir when local rock-and-roller Bobby Rex hits the big time with his song "Pally Thompson." The only one who isn't thrilled about it is Pally Thompson, who insists that she didn't go nearly as far with Bobby Rex as the song would suggest. Set in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the novel follows Pally's attempts to redeem her reputation, but is in effect a rich portrait of adolescent small town life in the postwar South. Fictional Orfax is about twenty miles from Greensboro, the author's hometown. *Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit* won the 1987 Sir Walter Raleigh award for the best work of fiction by a North Carolinian.

Judy Goldman. *The Slow Way Back*. New York: William Morrow, 1999.

Thea McKee is a woman with a successful radio call-in show in Charlotte, N.C., when she receives in the mail a packet of letters written by her grandmother more than 60 years ago. As she seeks help understanding the letters -- they are written in Yiddish -- Thea reflects upon three generations of her

Southern Jewish family. The letters ultimately reveal family secrets that allow Thea to resolve long unanswered questions about her childhood. *The Slow Way Back* won the 2000 Sir Walter Raleigh Award for the best work of fiction by a North Carolina writer.

Judy Goldman. *Early Leaving*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

The night he graduates from a prestigious private high school in Charlotte, N.C., valedictorian Early Smallwood shoots and kills an African American teenager. This novel follows Early's mother Kathryne as she tries to understand the events of that night and reflects on Early's childhood, wondering if there was something she could have done in order to prevent the tragedy.

Robert Inman. *Captain Saturday*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2002.

*Captain Saturday* is the story of Will Baggett, a popular television weatherman in Raleigh, whose life begins to crumble when in a short span of time he loses his job, his wife leaves him, and he's arrested for a crime he didn't commit. Baggett escapes from his sophisticated life in the Triangle to visit family in rural Brunswick County where he begins his recovery by delving into his past. The book provides an excellent portrait of life in contemporary Raleigh, commenting on the city's struggles with development and the often contentious relationship between new arrivals and the denizens of "old Raleigh."

Toni L.P. Kelner. The Laura Fleming Mysteries.

*Down Home Murder*. New York: Kensington, 1993.

*Dead Ringer*. New York: Kensington, 1994.

*Trouble Looking for a Place to Happen*. New York: Kensington, 1995.

*Country Comes to Town*. New York: Kensington, 1996.

*Tight as a Tick*. New York: Kensington, 1998.

*Death of a Damn Yankee*. New York: Kensington, 1999.

*Mad as the Dickens*. New York: Kensington, 2001.

*Wed and Buried*. New York: Kensington, 2003.

Laura Fleming is a computer programmer living in Boston with her husband, a Shakespeare professor at a local college. In nearly all of these novels (with the exception of *Country Comes to Town*) Laura travels to her hometown of Byerly, N.C., a fictional town in the western part of the state, and when she does, trouble breaks out. Time after time Laura's amateur detective skills are called into play as she gets to the bottom of a murder. In between chasing criminals, Laura introduces her husband to the South. Kelner describes Byerly as "based on my memories and knowledge of Southern mill towns like Granite Falls, Conover, and Dudley Shoals. If it were real, it would be near Hickory, NC, with its own exit off Highway 321."

Joyce Lavene and Jim Lavene, *Pretty Poison*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Peggy Lee, a botanist and owner of a garden shop in Charlotte, N.C., comes to work one day to find one of the richest men in town sprawled across her plants with his head bashed in. The police nab a homeless man for the crime, but Peggy doesn't think he did it. The problem is, if she finds evidence to free the current suspect, then the next most likely killer is one of Peggy's employees, whom she's sure had nothing to do with the murder. Peggy dives into the investigation, digging through the dead man's past in search of a possible killer. As she combs through the evidence, she's assisted by a younger man who may prove to be more than a friend.

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Fred Leebron. *Six Figures*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

Warner Lutz and his young family have just moved to booming, affluent Charlotte, N.C., but they have yet to benefit from the largesse around them. Walter's job is unsatisfying and he often takes out his frustrations on his family. When his wife is attacked by an unidentified assailant, Walter becomes a suspect in the crime. *Six Figures* is a compelling portrait of twenty-first century isolation and evidence that even in a bustling New South city, not everyone is thriving.

Michael Malone. The Justin and Cuddy Novels.

*Uncivil Seasons*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983.

*Time's Witness*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989.

*First Lady*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2001.

Justin Savile V and Cuddy Mangum and police officers in the fictional town of Hillston, N.C., a small college town described as "A Bright Star in the Flag of the New South." All of these novels are filled with funny observations about Hillston and its citizens and provide an honest look at the continuing clash between contemporary southerners and the traditions and ideals of the Old South.

Doug Marlette. *The Bridge*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Pick Cantrell, a successful but controversial editorial cartoonist, has just moved from New York to his hometown in North Carolina. In the course of adjusting to his new life, Cantrell learns about his family's connections to area's rich textile history, most notably his grandmother Lucy's involvement in a mill workers' strike in the 1930s. The novel is set in the fictional town of Eno, North Carolina, most likely based on Hillsborough, and includes scenes in Chapel Hill.

Sharyn McCrumb. *St. Dale*. New York: Kensington, 2005.

This funny, touching novel is a modern-day retelling of the *Canterbury Tales*, following a group of unlikely friends on the Dale Earnhardt Memorial Pilgrimage. The "Number Three Pilgrims" travel to several of the sites of prominent victories of the late NASCAR legend and North Carolina native. In the course of their journey they visit Piedmont North Carolina, "the land of textile mills and furniture factories, of tobacco fields and hog farms -- and race tracks." At stops at the Richard Petty museum in Randolph County, the North Carolina Motor Speedway in Rockingham, and the Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, the pilgrims find solace and inspiration in the life and legacy of Earnhardt.

Katy Munger. The Casey Jones Novels.

*Legwork*. New York: Avon, 1997.

*Out of Time*. New York: Avon, 1998.

*Money to Burn*. New York: Avon, 1999.

*Bad to the Bone*. New York: Avon, 2000.

*Better off Dead*. New York: Avon, 2001.

Casey Jones is a sassy, irreverent Durham-based detective. Due to a previous record she can't get a private investigator's license, so Jones operates with forged credentials, careful to keep just ahead of the law. All of the novels are set in North Carolina's Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill), and Jones frequents many familiar places in Durham. In her description of the series, Munger promises that the

novels all feature elements of classic hardboiled detective stories: "cussing, chasing, rescues, gun fights, drinking and sex."

Laurence Naumoff. *Silk Hope, N.C.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994.

The old farmhouse outside of the small Piedmont community of Silk Hope has passed down through generations from mother to daughter. The original occupants stipulated that only women could inherit the house. The current owners, Frannie and Natalie Vaughan, have just inherited the house and are faced with a tough decision. The sisters couldn't be more different -- Frannie is a rebel, the wild one in the family, while practical Natalie comes up with the idea to sell the house and land. As they struggle to decide what to do with the house, the sisters have to consider their own roles in the family's history, and determine whether or not, in the modern South, women still need a sanctuary all their own.

Lawrence Naumoff. *A Southern Tragedy, in Crimson and Yellow.* Winston-Salem: Zuckerman Cannon, 2005.

In this work of "docufiction," Naumoff explores the tragic 1991 fire at a chicken plant in Hamlet, N.C. in which many workers died when they were locked into the building, unable to escape from the flames. Naumoff engages many of the broader themes of the tragedy, looking at the struggles of the small town in a changing economy, and examining the complicated relationships between the employers and employees.

Barbara Neely. *Blanche Passes Go.* New York: Viking, 2000.

Blanche White is on her way back to her hometown, the fictional Farleigh, N.C., located near Durham. Blanche is going to spend the summer working for a friend's catering company, and is sure to be busy with the months-long celebration of Farleigh's bicentennial. But coming home is not easy. Blanche is confronted by painful memories from her past, and, finding that her detective skills have preceded her, she's hired to investigate a prominent local family. Viewing her hometown as an African American with a strong feminist perspective, Blanche provides a refreshingly different look at the New South.

T.R. Pearson. *Glad News of the Natural World.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Pearson's widely-acclaimed first novel, *A Short History of a Small Place*, was the story of young Louis Benfield of Neely, N.C. Now, twenty years later, Pearson returns to Neely and picks up the story of 34-year-old Louis. Tired of his listless life at home and his dead-end job, Louis moves to New York city, but things don't get a whole lot better. He bounces from one odd job to another and makes several desperate stabs at romance that are only doomed to fail. It is only when tragedy strikes his family that Louis is forced to make responsible decisions and, in a way, finally grows up.

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Michael Phillips. *The Shenandoah Sisters.*

*Angels Watching Over Me.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003.

*A Day to Pick Your Own Cotton.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003.

*The Color of Your Skin Ain't the Color of Your Heart.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004.

*Together Is All We Need.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004.

Two young women from very different backgrounds must rely on each other in order to survive in the turbulent times following the Civil War in fictional Shenandoah County, N.C. Mayme Jukes is a former slave whose family members were killed by Confederate soldiers. Katie Clairborne is the last person left on the once majestic Rosewood plantation. In these novels, the girls usually face danger and emerge with a deeper understanding of race, friendship, and their Christian faith.

Kathy Reichs. The Temperance Brennan Novels.

*Deja Dead*. New York: Scribner, 1997.

*Death du Jour*. New York: Scribner, 1999.

*Deadly Decisions*. New York: Scribner, 2000.

*Fatal Voyage*. New York: Scribner, 2001.

*Grave Secrets*. New York: Scribner, 2002.

*Bare Bones*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

*Monday Mourning*. New York: Scribner, 2004.

Dr. Temperance Brennan is a forensic anthropologist who divides her time between Charlotte, N.C. and Quebec. In each of these novels her job calls her to the scene of a mysterious murder and she has to rely on both her technical expertise and old-fashioned detective work to unravel the usually complicated story behind the crime. Reichs writes with authority – she is a professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and appears regularly as an expert witness in criminal trials. Most of these novels include scenes set in Charlotte, which Dr. Brennan describes as “a poster child for multiple personality disorder, the Sybil of cities.”

Jack Riggs. *When the Finch Rises*. New York: Ballantine, 2003.

The narrator of this novel, twelve-year-old Raybert Williams Jr., lives in Ellenton, a fictional North Carolina mill town in 1968. Raybert's mother and father, each with deep problems of their own, teeter between responsible parenting and neglect, while Raybert's best friend Palmer faces an even tougher lot with an abusive stepfather and a potential sexual predator in the family. Raybert and Palmer find comfort in each other's company, and in their shared fantasies of growing up and escaping Ellenton.

Karen Rose. *Have You Seen Her?* New York: Warner Books, 2004.

Special Agent Steven Thatcher is on the trail of a serial killer who is targeting cheerleaders in the fictional Raleigh suburb of Pineville. In between chasing criminals, Thatcher, a widower, finds time to care for his three sons. Worried about his eldest son, he meets with the boy's teacher, Jenna Marshall, and the sparks fly. Their romantic involvement becomes especially complicated when it turns out that the killer may be eyeing Jenna as his next victim.

Sarah Shaber. The Simon Shaw Mysteries.

*Simon Said*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

*Snipe Hunt*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

*The Fugitive King*. New York: St. Martin's, 2002.

*The Bug Funeral*. New York: St. Martin's, 2004.

Simon Shaw is a professor of history at historic (but fictional) Kenan College in downtown Raleigh. Dr. Shaw's specialty is historical anthropology, and this leads to his being called into action in each novel to investigate a long-unsolved crime. Although Simon lives and works in contemporary Raleigh, his adventures often take him to other parts of the state. In *Snipe Hunt* Simon digs into North Carolina's maritime history while on vacation at the Outer Banks, while in *The Fugitive King* he looks into a crime in his hometown of Boone.

Steven Sherrill. *Visits from the Drowned Girl*. New York: Random House, 2004.

Despite the impressive panoramic view from the radio towers atop which Benny Poteat works, he doesn't usually see much. But one day, as he watches silently, too far away to help, he sees a young woman walk into a river and calmly drown herself. Instead of reporting the suicide to the police, Benny examines the materials left at the scene, learns the identity of the girl, locates her family, and becomes romantically involved with her sister. The story is set in the fictional Piedmont town of Buffalo Shoals, which is populated by strangely intriguing and uniquely Southern residents.

Louise Shivers. *Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 2003.

Roxy Walston is a young wife and mother on a Tarborough, N.C. tobacco farm in 1937. Farmlife is simple and tough, and Roxy feels restless, especially when Jack Ruffin is hired to help with the harvest. Roxy feels an instant attraction to Jack and is soon faced with choices that could change her forever. When *Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail* was first published in 1983, it was praised for its tender evocation of life on a tobacco farm and was named the best first novel of the year by "USA Today."

Judy Reene Singer. *Horseplay*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004.

Fed up with her life, Judy van Brunt quits her teaching job, leaves her philandering husband, and finds work at a North Carolina horse farm. Her instincts were correct: she finds happiness much easier to come by in the simple world of the horses. Singer writes with knowledge and humor about the equestrian world as she portrays Judy's efforts at riding and managing thoroughbreds. Judy has some success with the horses, but their complicated and colorful owners prove more difficult to handle.

June Spence. *Change Baby*. New York: Riverhead, 2004

When Avie Goss returns to her hometown, the fictional Regina, N.C., to care for her elderly mother, she finds more than she had expected. The simple family relationships that she had known growing up turn out to be much more complicated than she had thought. The story is told from the alternating viewpoints of Avie, her mother Zephra, and Zephra's close friend Mabry. As Avie untangles family mysteries, changes loom in her own life when she begins dating a local minister.

Martha Witt. *Broken as Things Are*. New York: Henry Holt, 2004.

Fourteen-year-old Morgan-Lee divides her summer between spending time with her autistic and occasionally abusive older brother and developing a crush on a childhood friend. Morgan-Lee's parents, aunt, and younger sister are too caught up in their own lives to pay much attention, leaving the young narrator to take the first steps into adulthood on her own. The story is set in a piedmont North Carolina town similar to the author's hometown of Hillsborough.