

"Out of All Places, East Carolina":

Talking with NCLR's Founding Editor, Alex Albright

interview by Peter Makuck; edited by NCLR

Peter Makuck: Alex, how did the North Carolina Literary Review get started? Where did the philosophy or the vision statement come from?

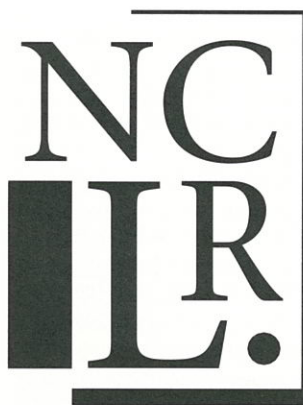
Alex Albright: The origin is with Dean Sparrow – Keats Sparrow¹ – it was his idea, and he brought the idea to me with the question, would I be interested in editing a magazine that focused on North Carolina literature. I'm not sure that the dean actually wanted it to be quite as big a magazine. I think his original idea was something more akin to the *New York Times Book Review*, a thing that would maybe come out quarterly; that was talked about some. One of the great things about working with the dean was his willingness to let me sort of stray from that original idea.

How did NCLR come to have its distinctive format?

A lot of that had to do with the appearance of Eva Roberts on the scene.² I got this note in the mail one day that said she'd heard we were starting this magazine and was there anything she could do. She was interested in helping with design. She wound up forming what I imagine would have been a very text-laden journal. I had an idea of the content – a very clear idea – but I didn't really have much of an idea of how it might be formatted. And then what I was used to were the MLA journals – that sort of standard academic thing that has a page of text and a page of text. I'd thought about photographs, but my idea of photographs would have been here's a picture let's run it full page, or put two on it, one at the top and one at the bottom. Roberts changed the way I looked at text and she sort of changed the way I look at words.

Thus the innovative print styles and sidebars?

The sidebar notion comes from us wanting to give context. I had a very clear idea that I wanted creative nonfiction pieces. I wanted text that would engage a reader in a nonacademic way, but it would treat subject matter as seriously as any academic would. And by that I mean we wanted to have works cited, but we didn't want them to be obtrusive; we wanted footnotes, but we didn't want them to be obtrusive. So you take that idea and Eva using white space, which I think is really brilliant. Not just her design but the way the design is complemented by the white space. So then she comes up with the margin notes and then you start thinking, wow, this is perfect for the academic who does sometimes actually take notes in the margins of his text, and your eye is sort of drawn to it as you need it not having to go back to the back of the article.



Notes contributed by NCLR

¹ Professor of English W. Keats Sparrow is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at East Carolina University.

² Now an associate professor, Eva Roberts has taught at East Carolina University since 1991. She has degrees in Environmental Design (1973) and Product Design (master's, 1976), both from North Carolina State's School of Design.