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From “Gub’ner Green”
to *The Story of Cabbage Green*:

An Appreciation of the Writings of

Ovid Williams Pierce,

First Writer-in-Residence at
East Carolina University

by Douglas J. McMillan

Creative writing is and has been an integral program within the Department of English at East Carolina University, and it has a long and distinguished history and record. A good portion of the success of the creative writing program is due to the presence and effectiveness of ECU’s first writer-in-residence, Ovid Williams Pierce (1910-1989), who initiated and directed the program between 1956 and 1976, the years he was on the ECU faculty.

Pierce was born in Weldon, North Carolina. He graduated from Duke University in 1932 and received a master’s degree in English from Harvard University in 1936. During World War II he served with the US Army counter-intelligence corps, and after the war he taught creative writing, first at Southern Methodist University and later at Tulane University. Then he accepted the position of writer-in-residence and professor of English at East Carolina College (later University), a post he held until his retirement. After his retirement, Pierce continued to reside in Greenville, North Carolina, until his death.

When I joined the faculty in fall 1969, Pierce had already been writer-in-residence for thirteen years. I found him to be the type of man most people liked instantly – and continued to like over time. He was stately in appearance, welcoming yet reserved, and aristocratic but kind. His conversation was wide-ranging and always interesting. Some of my personal reminiscences of him are genuine highlights, the first being when my wife and I were invited with other English Department faculty to visit Pierce’s 350-acre plantation, his ancestral farm near Enfield, North Carolina. We spent an afternoon and evening with him at his home and got to know him more as a person than we had through our purely professional encounters on campus. He was a gracious host and took pride in showing us his house and his lands. Another time he brought his collection of Native American arrowheads and other shaped-stones collection to campus to show me. Over the years he had instructed his farm workers to save every unusual piece of stone they uncovered in their daily routines digging around the farm. Pierce had an authority date some of these pieces and learned that many were of astonishing antiquity.



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Ovid Pierce’s ancestral home in Weldon, NC