

Paul Green Foundation

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1916-2016

I didn't think we should leave **2016** without thinking about **1916** when 22 year-old Paul Green came to Chapel Hill to attend the University of North Carolina. Here's how it looked:



So what led up to Paul Green coming to Chapel Hill in 1916?

Paul's first school was a **one-room log cabin** just a mile from the Green's farm in Harnett County. We read in *Watering the Sahara*, that the school year was only three months long but then extended to six – these children were needed on the farms. The cabin school was later torn down and replaced by a **two-room frame building**.

By age ten, Paul Green had read his Grandfather John Green's Edgar Allan Poe books and the Bible. One day Paul noticed a poem in the *Harnett County News* signed Bettie Byrd Green. "Mama, Mama, did you write this? I'll never forget it. She flushed. 'Yea, I wrote it.'" He later learned she'd had a poem in *Comfort Magazine*.

Bettie Byrd had taught music before her marriage; she sang and hummed constantly in the house; played the organ at church and when a "fiddle-playing" man came to Pleasant Union Church to hold a **music school**, she arranged for her children to be enrolled. "It was very early soaked into me the wonder and the comfort of music in man's daily life."

We know of Paul Green's habit of reading and memorizing poems as he plowed; his purchase of a **Stradivarius-model "fiddle"** from Sears, Roebuck and Company for \$2.50, and, with a correspondence course from Baltimore, he learned to play while resting in the shade of the trees. We recall his habit of sitting backwards reading on his horse (to avoid the sun in his eyes)

when taking the corn to the mill to grind – but as Paul explained – "the horse knew the way!"

When Paul completed **Pleasant Union School**, he entered **Buies Creek Academy** and met "the great man" James Archibald Campbell. Walking to and from school he wrote, "I'd start out... and I'd have a book of poetry or something, and my feet got to know that path. I would read and then I'd memorize and just go along, so happy. My gosh! The woods and the birds!"

Paul continued to buy books when he could get money. "When I heard that Herbert Spencer was sort of an atheist, I got hold of him and read him." He also "got hold" of Hamlet and was greatly moved by it and he was influenced by poets Hubbard F. Page, Robert Burns and John Charles McNeill. He began in earnest to write poems.

As graduation neared, Professor Campbell, who was impressed with Green's abilities, told him he had secured a scholarship for him to go to Wake Forest College. But Paul told him he wanted to go to the University (*Chapel Hill*). "Well, I don't want you to," replied the Professor, "it's a godless place and they have especially a fellow up there named Horace Williams who is an atheist!" Paul didn't tell him that was the *very* reason he wanted to go.

He passed the teacher's exam and took a position as principal of a four-teacher school at **Olive Branch**. He continued to read – Plato, Milton, Aristotle – remembering that his mother had told him to "Get out there and learn."

After two years teaching, growing tobacco, picking cotton and pitching ball, Paul had saved up \$300. He rode with his father in a two-horse wagon to the railway station at Angier. He had to change trains twice and, although it was only "sixty miles as the crow flies" it took him all day arriving at Carrboro, the nearest depot to Chapel Hill.

It was September 1916.

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