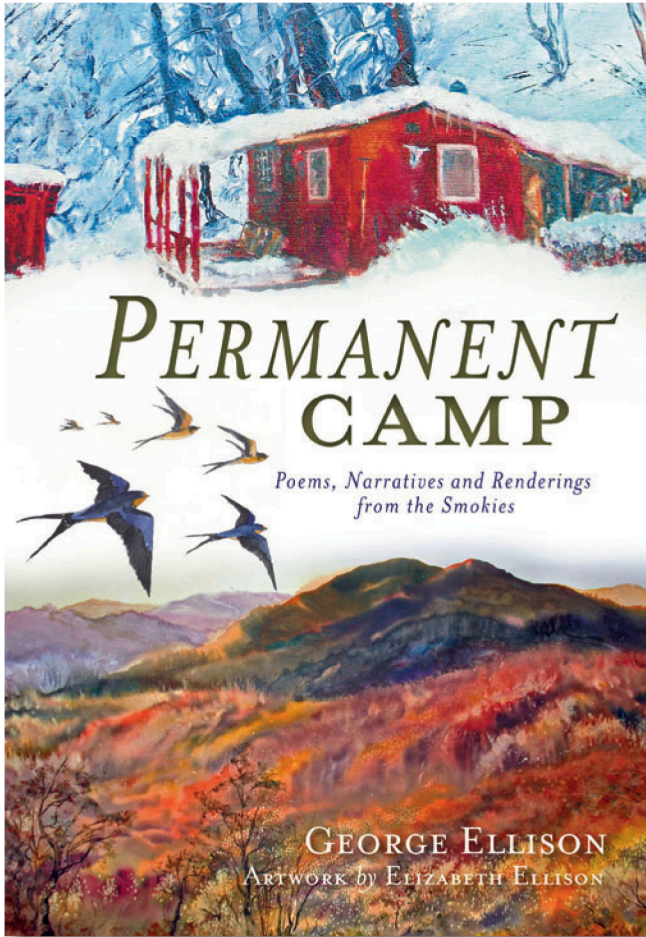


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THE  
History  
PRESS



*The stones in the creek bed will  
speak quite clearly.  
And the wind in the treetops will  
speak softly to the stones.  
And without even trying the water  
will listen and understand*



May 2012

I am pleased to announce the publication of *Permanent Camp: Poems, Narratives and Renderings from the Smokies* by George Ellison with artwork by Elizabeth Ellison.

The tranquility and harmony of nature have perpetually captured the imagination of man with everything from bird song to the light of the morning sun piercing through the clouds. Yet in the tumult of city life, one may forget the natural beauty that still resides just outside the concrete borders of suburbia. While home to some of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, North Carolina also lays claim to the Great Smoky Mountains, a landscape of misty grandeur.

The Ellisons have found their own secluded valley in these verdant mountains, crafting permanent camp in which to reflect on their place in the natural world. As one reads the poetic meditations and absorbs the vibrant artwork of *Permanent Camp*, the lyrics of Wordsworth come to mind:

With an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

In *Permanent Camp*, George Ellison continues in this romantic tradition with poems that detail the unique environment surrounding his isolated homestead in the woods. The poems vary from lengthy compositions bursting with imagery to short, three-line stanzas revealing the core of his emotions. With striking precision of language, his poetry speaks to one from the heart of the Smokies, imparting a deep appreciation for nature's beauty and powers of renewal.

Along with George's poetry, the watercolors, oil paintings and illustrations of his wife, Elizabeth, provide visual complements to the literary renderings of the Smoky Mountains. With a tactful eye for warm colors, Elizabeth's artwork depicts a variety of landscapes, flora, fauna and even more abstract pieces that express a wealth of feelings and capture the reader's conscience.

*Permanent Camp: Poems, Narratives and Renderings from the Smokies* will transport one into the arboreal peace of the Smokies and give respite from the haste of daily life. The book will retail for \$21.99 and be available throughout North Carolina and online at [www.historypress.net](http://www.historypress.net).

Many thanks,

*Katie Parry*

Publicity

The History Press

635 Rutledge Avenue

Suite 107

Charleston, SC 29403





IF ONE ADVANCES CONFIDENTLY IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS DREAMS, AND ENDEAVORS TO LIVE THE LIFE WHICH HE HAS IMAGINED, HE WILL MEET WITH A SUCCESS UNEXPECTED IN COMMON HOURS.

— Henry David Thoreau

Walking west of Bryson City, North Carolina, on July 1, 1976, George and Elizabeth Ellison happened upon a magical cove tucked into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It held a small house of many windows, a shining creek, a tree-lined meadow and a pathway into a dark forest. They moved in for the summer and never left. For nearly forty years, this secluded spot has been the touchstone of their work as author and artist. These interrelated poems, narratives, renderings, notes and paintings form an artistic whole in praise of the outer and inner landscapes within which we all reside.

The History Press is proud to present this new title  
by George Ellison

978.1.60949.685.2 {160 pp., \$21.99 }  
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George Ellison moved to Western North Carolina in 1973. Since 1976, George and Elizabeth have made their home in a forty-six-acre cove surrounded on three sides by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. George writes the “Nature Journal” column for the *Asheville Citizen-Times*; the “Botanical Excursions” column for *Chinquapin*, the newsletter of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society; the “Back Then”

regional history column for the *Smoky Mountain News*; and has published numerous books.

Elizabeth Ellison depicts the varied wildflowers, animals, human inhabitants and landscapes of the Smokies region and beyond, utilizing both traditional and oriental techniques. Her pen-and-ink drawings and watercolor washes have graced *Asheville Citizen-Times*, *Blue Ridge Outdoors*, *Outdoor Traveler*, *Friends of Wildlife* (the journal of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation) and *Chinquapin* (the newsletter of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society). Elizabeth is the cover artist for Niche Gardens of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, an award-winning nursery. She was the real-life watercolorist for the character “Alice” in the movie *Songcatcher*, which was filmed in Western North Carolina in 1999.



*Excerpt from Permanent Camp: Poems, Narratives and Renderings from the Smokies*



PRAISE FOR GEORGE ELLISON'S PERMANENT CAMP

*What an occasion the publication of Permanent Camp marks! Inveterate naturalist and student of the southern Appalachians George Ellison returns to his roots as a poet after having compiled an impressive array of prose works. As with many of his previous titles, such as Blue Ridge Nature Journal and Mountain Passages, Permanent Camp is made visually stunning by the accompanying watercolors and pen-and-ink washes of George's wife, Elizabeth. The poems included in this collection range from crystalline haiku to longer narrative pieces that spring from epigraphs as thoughtful responses to the works of other writers who have also roamed and loved these mountains.*

—Chris Wilcox  
Owner-operator, City Lights Bookstore  
Sylva, North Carolina

*If there is anyone who understands the idea of a “permanent camp,” it is George Ellison. As someone who has not only talked the talk (through his involvement over a lifetime with the work of Horace Kephart and James Mooney), he has more than walked the walk—having lived for the better part of forty years in what amounts to a permanent camp with his artist wife, Elizabeth, in the back woods along a roaring creek in Swain County, North Carolina. While journalistic prose and ethno-botany have been his bread and butter all these years, it has been poetry that was at the center and heart of his work. And now, finally, with the publication of this book, we are privy to “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower,” as Dylan Thomas referred to his poetic muse. It does one's heart good to finally see George Ellison at his ecologic and rhapsodic best.*

—Thomas Rain Crowe  
Author of Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods

1.

## Permanent Camp

*When camp is made in a certain locality with no intention of moving it until the party is ready to go home, it is usually called a "permanent camp."*

*This is a misuse of terms; for a camp of any kind is only a temporary biding place.*

*"The camp and not the soil," says Gibbon,  
"is the native country of the genuine Tartar."*

*When speaking of a camp fixed in one place for a considerable time I shall call it a "fixed camp." It differs from a "shifting camp" in permitting more comforts of home.*

—Horace Kephart, *Camping and Woodcraft*



"And so," I say, waving one hand to the far ridge,  
tin cup of Beam balanced in the other,  
"Maybe this is what it's come down to  
what we were maybe even destined for  
all these years, never even knowing."  
You grin, lifting your cup, its burnish  
dull gray in the evening light.

"But the next move," I say,  
"and we'll just go on home, over the ridge  
and into the park, hide out on Peachtree,  
up the Middle Fork, where it's really quiet.  
And the stones in the creek bed will speak quite clearly.  
And the wind in the treetops will speak softly to the stones.  
And without even trying the water will listen and understand."

"That's the pretty dream," you say.  
The pathway descends.  
Walking-sticks prod dry ground.  
Mimosa blooms unknowingly.  
Red shack without window glass.  
Winter in the creek.  
Your hand catches my arm.





Above lines dated "July 1, 1976" scribbled in an All Weather Level Book.  
Day after Independence Day we moved into the shack...tacked photos of  
Mr. Ben Lilly, his favorite dog, Tippy, Han Shan, Kep, and George on the wall.  
Been here going on 36 years now. Raised 3 children. Sit by my window most days.

10 dogs buried across the creek under piles of stone we call "kairns."  
Rising was my favorite. Several days ago I asked my wife  
if we ought not start calling our place Permanent Camp.  
She grinned, shook her head and said:  
"That would be 'a misuse of terms."



## Composition Book

Sobered up...sort of...sitting alone at the kitchen table  
 mending some of the recently broken silence  
 watching shadows fade in far corners  
 I open a Mead composition book:  
 100 sheets...9¾ x 7½ in.  
 wide ruled...Dayton, OH  
 black & silver (model  
 #09918) designed  
 by Jackson Pollock.

Composition books are therapeutic...especially those with  
 inside back covers featuring the multiplication tables (9 x 7  
 has been a lifelong difficulty)...not a journal...not a diary  
 ...no dates...no themes...mostly illegible pages  
 decorated with mustard stains & beer bottle rings.

At the top of a blank page I print  
 in Lilliputian-sized lettering each  
 word as it enters my mind:

*IT'D BE PLEASANT TO SUPPOSE THAT  
 EACH ENDING IS A NEW BEGINNING*

A red bird sings unseen from a tangle on the mountainside:  
 "Rite-cheer!...Rite-cheer!...Rite-cheer!"

*CONSIDER NOLAND RIDGE EVER DESCENDING FROM THE HIGH DIVIDE...  
 AN OUTREACHING FINGER THAT CONTRACTS AND CASTS STEEP DRAWS &  
 BOTTLENECK COVES SEEMINGLY AT RANDOM INTO ADJACENT  
 WATERSHEDS*

The red bird sings again still unseen but closer:  
 "Pretty!...Pretty!...Pretty!"

*CONSIDER THE WAY YOUR TONGUE MOVES LATE AT NIGHT  
 DARTING HERE AND THERE SEEKING THE SMOOTH GAP  
 IN THE BACK RIDGES OF YOUR TEETH*

Through the kitchen window I can see the bend in the  
path that leads to the spring and thought about my friend.  
I could not see the water...but I knew that it was moving.  
I could not see my friend...but he was there in my mind.  
Pulse slows and the taste in my mouth changes...the  
soft blunt point of the lead pencil stub moves easily  
across the smooth white surface of the blue-lined page:

*EVEN SOBER YOU CAN'T GET EVERYTHING INTO A POEM.  
FOCUS ON ONE BELL RINGING...AN UNSEEN BIRD SINGING...  
A CERTAIN SLANT OF LIGHT...HER DARTING EYES...*

*THE SOFT GLOW OF JUST ONE PENDANT LILY...  
THE WAY BLUE WOOD SMOKE SPIRALS...  
THE SLOW FIRE OF MOSS...*

*THE GLASS-SMOOTH GAP IN YOUR TEETH...  
THE WAY CREEK WATER ARCS INTO AND OUT OF A BEND...  
THE WAY SOMEONE ARISES IN MEMORY AS IF ALIVE.*

*CHANCES ARE IT'S JUST ANOTHER DREAM TO  
SUPPOSE A NEW BEGINNING IN EVERY ENDING...  
ODDS ARE WHEN YOU DIE YOU'LL BE DEAD.  
SO SPROUT THE WINGS OF IMAGINATION...  
ROLL ON YOUR LIPSTICK & LACE UP YOUR  
PRETTY RED FLYING SHOES...SAIL WITH  
ME OVER RIDGELINES FOLLOWING WORN  
TRAILS THAT WAVE FAR BELOW LIKE  
BROWN RIBBONS IN THE WIND.*

The red bird sings from a tree limb outside the kitchen window.  
Daughter of the sun...she was held hostage by the ghost people  
in the darkening...yet her songs are whistled bright and clear.

Without looking at what I had scribbled  
I close the composition book  
and listen to bird song.

7.

## Gravity Flow

GRAVITY IS A DOWNWARD CURVE OF ENERGY  
THAT ACCELERATES IN THE ABSENCE OF FRICTION  
BUT ALSO FLOWS SLOWLY THROUGH ALL THINGS.

Below the ridgeline above the house a wooded slope  
plummets into a basin that is nearly level...on its upper  
edge tangles of interlocking red-hued blackberry canes  
are carpeted underneath with lush grass that withstands  
all but the most bitter frosts of early winter.

Startled rabbits explode from grass-tufted hideaways  
against grade...you could shoot them easy or just  
watch white flaring from brown combust  
impressed on retina even after gone.

When you were a boy you learned that a rabbit  
like so many other creatures large or small  
is locked into an ancient pattern of deceit:  
it almost always circles back  
to the very spot where  
its startled flight  
had begun.



At the tail of the basin cupping ridges flex and  
constrict like pelvic bones to a point of confluence  
as basin narrows to ravine and the vein wells out over  
freestone into a springhead where water is diverted to  
the house or allowed to find its way down into the  
shade-dappled glade over which Fred's ashes  
were suspended before drifting slowly  
to the earth and the moving water  
one Sunday afternoon in May.



In the evening after supper I go outside...  
always to the back deck where I teeter on edge  
peering back up the slope that off to my left  
flows from basin through ravine into glade.  
Sacred business...schoolboy again.  
Gaze averted skyward concentrating.  
Another sort of faucet turning.  
Liquid blooming.

And if the moon or stars or both  
are sufficient the sweet arc glints...  
a sibilant string of upward yearning  
light that always turns and  
becomes downward  
bearing.



13.

## “What do you do?” She Asked

Besides drinking?  
Read...hum...scribble...  
watch walking ferns just  
to see where they're going ...  
Not necessarily in that order.

Listen to sports talk maybe 10 hours in a normal day and Outlaw Ray-dee-o the rest of the time...which is where I heard the part in Billy Joe Shaver's "When I Get My Wings" about "Ain't a chain that can hold me...gonna die with my boots on... gonna go out in style with a freewheeling feeling and a honky-tonk smile...when I get my wings I'm gonna fly-fly-fly-fly away singing and reach a new heaven higher than high" or something like that and thought to myself "Hell-fire if Billy Joe's gonna sprout wings and fly away singing over the pearly gates into heaven like the great speckled bird why my celestial report card is at least as good as his...if not better...so there's hope for almost anybody if it wasn't something Billy Joe just made up to sing at the New Lazarus Bar & Grill.

Ran a ruby mine on upper Cowee  
six weeks then ran out of red glass.  
Last count I'd got up 129 gallons  
of moon glow...a civic responsibility.  
Drove the dream-mo-bile over the  
Smokies from seventy-eight 'til eighty-five.  
Since then been keeping a low profile  
like Nixon advised. Some day  
whether I set my mind to it or not  
I'll get to do pure nothing.  
How 'bout yourself?



# { our mission }

The History Press brings a new way of thinking to history publishing—preserving and enriching community by empowering history enthusiasts to write local stories for local audiences. Our books are useful resources for research and preservation, but it is their value as touchstones for community identity that drives us to publish works that national houses and university presses too often have ignored. Infused with local color, our books are highly readable, often brief and aimed at a general readership.



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