

JOHN MARSDEN EHLE, JR.

Everybody dreams. John Ehle is distinguished by the quality of his dreams and his remarkable success in realizing them for the public good.

In 1962 while a member of the UNC faculty, he attracted the attention of the governor with his ideas for invigorating education. Soon he was busy with the political as well as conceptual work for such projects as the Governor's School, the North Carolina School of the Arts, and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics -- institutions that offer our young people marvelous environments for developing their talents. He also conceived the North Carolina Fund, an attempt to break the cycle of poverty for poor children that served as a model for Lyndon Johnson's national Anti-Poverty Program. And to this day he maintains a foundation for identifying promising minority students, directing them to appropriate schools, and funding their education.

But this entrepreneur for the common weal is first a writer. His non-fiction ranges from the removal of the Cherokees in the last century, to the civil rights movement of the sixties in Chapel Hill, to a holiday with the cheeses and wines of England and France (and nips of Irish whiskey). He is chiefly a novelist, however, and the special home of his imagination is the area around his native Asheville. In eleven works so far -- set from colonial days to the present -- he brings to life universal human experience usually in the milieu of the Southern Appalachian mountains. Filled with insights that ring true, the novels betray the skills of a marvelous story teller.

North Carolina is fortunate in its tradition of dreamers who make their dreams come true. Today we salute a staunch embodiment of that tradition as we confer on John Marsden Ehle our degree of Doctor of Letters.