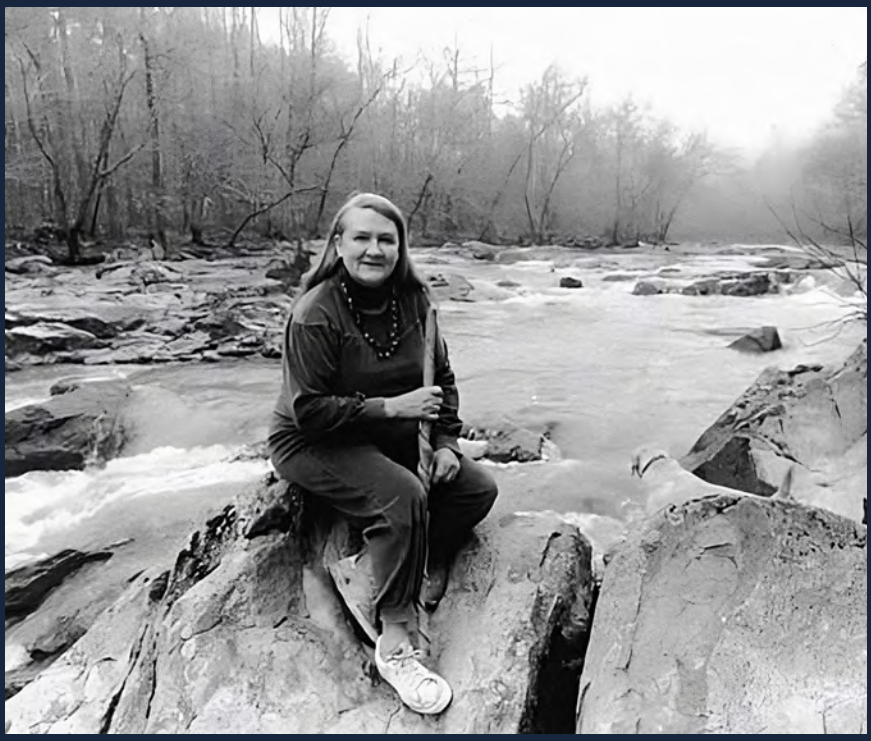
Saving the Eno River

Margaret Nygard and the Eno River Association



Julie J. Thomson

“A river is a vibrant thing. It’s restorative.
It replenishes you after walking on the pavement.”
—Margaret Nygard

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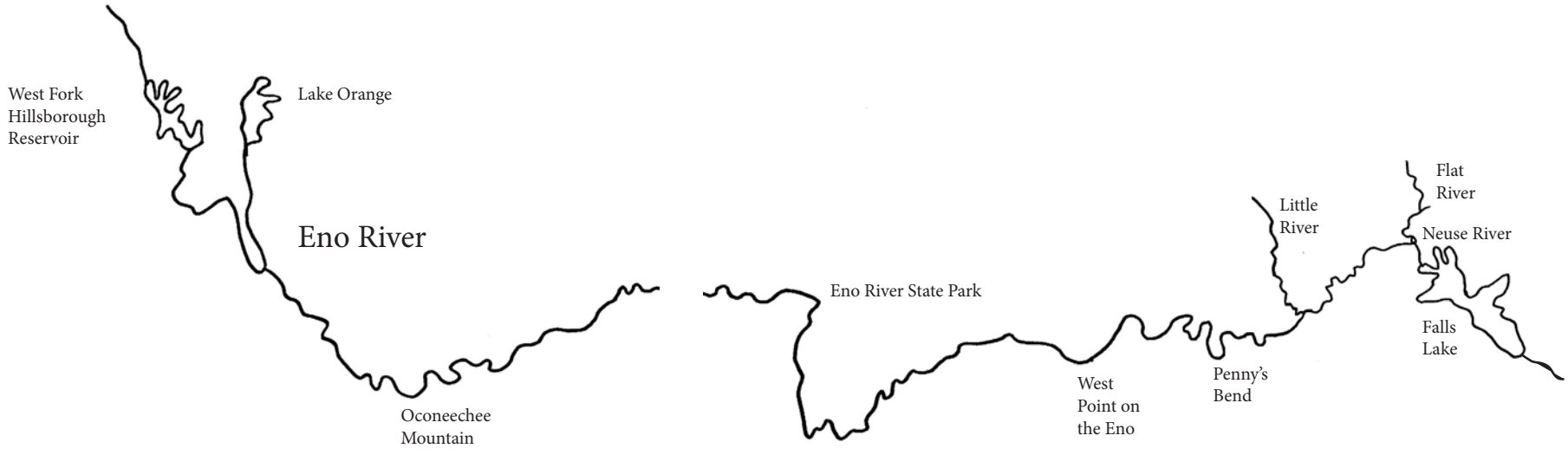

Have you ever visited the Eno River?

The Eno River starts in Orange County, North Carolina, and flows through the town of Hillsborough and then into Durham County. From there the Little River flows into the Eno River, and these flow into the Flat River, where the name changes to the Neuse River, which is now under Falls Lake.

Did you ever wonder how the parks and trails along the Eno River were created?

How the Eno was saved is an important part of North Carolina's history. This is the story of the people who joined together to protect the Eno River for all of us.



There's one woman who led the fight to save the Eno River. Her name was Margaret Nygard. She and her family wanted a home in the country so they could grow a big garden. They moved from downtown Durham to a historic house on Cole Mill Road. They found that the Eno River ran beside their house.

Margaret and her family began to learn about, and enjoy, the Eno River, and the wilderness surrounding them. In time they found many people who loved the Eno River



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THE DURHAM SUN

Wrap-Up

Don't miss Hugo Gorndon's "wrap-up" of the Louisville basketball tournament on the sports pages of The Sun today.

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Studies Go Back To 1911 And All Agree It Will Meet City's Needs—

Tapping Eno River As Durham's Water Source Isn't New Idea

EDITOR'S NOTE — The City Council is expected to take action soon to commission a study of the city's future water supply needs, with emphasis on the possible use of the Eno River as a source of supply. This is the first of three articles on findings of previous studies and city officials' attitudes in the matter.

By OWEN BISHOP

The idea of tapping the Eno River as a major source of Durham's water supply found support from engineers as far back as 1911, according to City of Durham records.

Several reports on engineering studies of the city's water needs, conducted between 1911 and 1923, pointed to the Eno as a good potential water source for Durham.

The earliest of these reports, which are on file in the office of the City Water Resources Department, was prepared by William M. Piatt of Durham.

Dated Feb. 20, 1911, it says, "The water of the Eno River would be very satisfactory as a source of supply."

Another, dated March, 1921, takes a stronger stand, saying, "We find that the Eno River is the best source of supply for Durham. It suggests that Flat River be abandoned as a source of supply in favor of a reservoir on the Eno.

A third report, issued in 1923, also supported the Eno as a water source and called for establishment of a larger reservoir than had been proposed in the 1921 report.

The Eno was the city's first water supply source, and met the city's needs until 1927, when the Flat River was tapped, according to the reports.

The Flat was later dammed to establish Lake Michie, which continues to provide the city with water.

The 1921 report, which was prepared by engineers Allen Hazen of New York and Charles B. Burdick of Chicago, appears to provide the most thorough analysis of the city's water supply needs.

It was based on an in-depth study conducted by the engineers beginning in November, 1920, at the request of the city Water Works Commission. The study was ordered to determine "the proper course to pursue" toward a long-range plan for Durham's water supply.

It says a reservoir on the Eno could "be made to produce 70 million per day," with a dam of 100 feet in height.

"There are favorable opportunities for storage of Eno waters, and all the water ever needed in Durham and its vicinity can be supplied from the Eno River," the report declares.

Noting that it will be cheaper to get water from the Eno than from the Flat because the former is near the city filter plant and because its elevation makes for lower pumping costs, the engineers said:

"We are clearly of the opinion that the Eno River should be selected for future supply."

A preliminary topographical survey of a nine-mile stretch of the Eno, outlined in the report, provides estimates on the capacity of the proposed reservoir at various dam levels.

A "few line" elevation of 300 feet would provide a capacity of 101 million gallons, while an elevation of 430 feet would provide a capacity of 13.9 billion gallons, according to the estimates.

The engineers favored an elevation in the neighborhood of 400 feet, which could be established with a 70-foot dam. A dam of this height would create a reservoir large enough to yield 36 million gallons a day.

A reservoir with this elevation would cover 532 acres of land and would be 7.2 miles long, with an average width of 630 feet, according to the 45-year-old study.

Concerning the problem of silting in the reservoir, the engineers said both the Eno and the Flat have heavy sediment content which would reduce their reservoirs' capacity as silt is deposited.

However, they said the estimated high rate for all silt depositing would be about 300 parts per million and this would "not present a serious problem."

The 1923 report, which Piatt prepared, said studies conducted by Hazen and Burdick were extended "to cover the reservoir site which we believe to be the proper one to develop."

Citing Hazen and Burdick's recommendation that a low dam be built on the river initially, it pointed out that changes in the situation since the earlier report make it "imperative" that "we should provide a somewhat larger reservoir than has been previously considered. . . ." from the standpoint of water supply alone.

A higher dam "is necessary, we believe, to obtain the increased storage we consider necessary," the report added.

Piatt suggested the establishment of a 78-foot dam initially, with additions to raise it after 15 years of use.

(Next: A view of the city's water supply needs, as presented by engineers' reports which

ENO RIVER: PROPOSED WATER SOURCE—The Eno River meanders across Durham County north of Durham from the Orange County line eastward until it becomes part of the Neuse River a few miles east of Old Oxford Highway. It was the city's first source of a water supply before Flat River was tapped and Lake Michie established—and it may become a second major source to supplement the supply from Lake Michie. Engineers as far back as 1911 and as recently as 1962 have supported the idea. —Sun Staff Photo.

One day in 1966 Margaret and her friends heard about a plan by the City of Durham to build a dam across the Eno River. This would cause the river to become a lake. The Eno would not be a wild river anymore.

The City of Durham was growing. The city was looking for another source of drinking water for Durham. They thought that building a dam on the Eno River would provide more water for the people of Durham.

Margaret and her friends started telling city officials that there were better sources for drinking water. A dam across the Eno would put the plants and animals underwater, and hide the Eno River Valley's history.

Eno Valley People Formulate Plans

The City Council soon will be asked to make a feasibility study of alternate areas from which to obtain municipal water in favor of utilizing Eno River.

Some 50 residents of Eno Valley met Wednesday night at the home of Prof. and Mrs. Holger Nygard on Cole Mill Road to discuss the matter. They are members of the Society for the Preservation of Eno Valley.

Nygard later reported the group formulated plans to present to the City Council, possibly at its meeting next week, and further discussed "the importance of preserving the Eno as an historic and ecological area. . . ."

Margaret and many other people felt that they had to speak up to save the Eno. They wrote letters to city officials and attended city council meetings. Margaret, her husband Holger Nygard, and additional community members spoke at City Council Meetings.

They contacted the newspapers with their views about why the Eno River needed to be kept as a wild and scenic river. They talked to more people about how special the Eno was.



They also led hikes along the Eno River so that they could introduce the river to many more people in the community.



Together in 1966 Margaret and a group of community members formed what became the Eno River Association. Working together as a group they made their voices heard by city leaders.

Preserving and protecting a place like the Eno River Valley is what the non-profit organization The Nature Conservancy does. The Nature Conservancy helped Margaret and the Eno River Association members realize that making the land surrounding the Eno into a State Park would be the best way to preserve the Eno River and all the wilderness around it. That way everyone could enjoy the Eno.

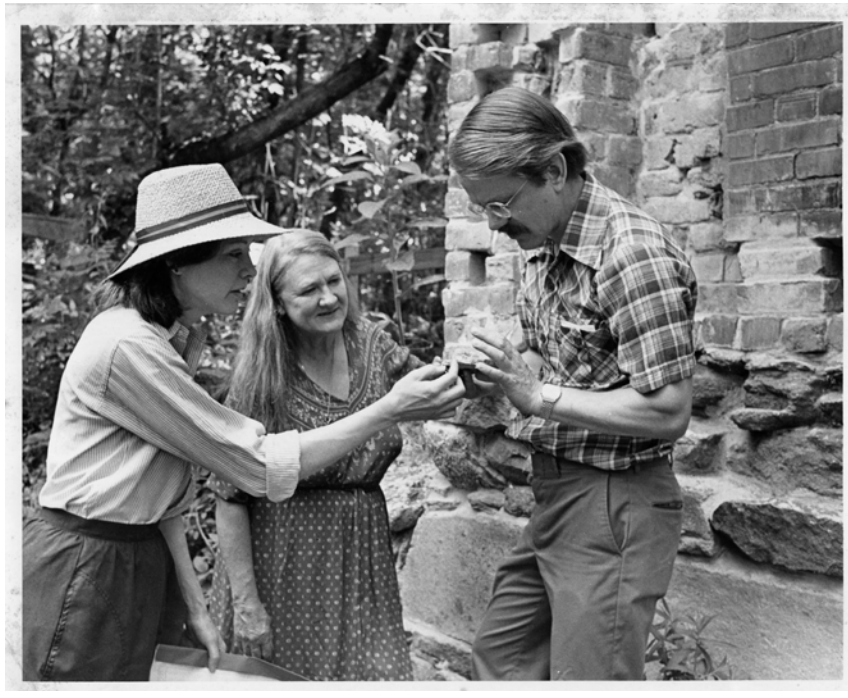
Helping protect the Eno was the Nature Conservancy's first project in North Carolina.



Members of the Eno River Association continued to write letters, attend and speak at city council meetings, and talk to the media.

They also planned ways to introduce more people to the Eno River.

They planned Spring Wildflower Hikes, Winter Hikes, and River Rafting trips



They researched the history of the Eno River Valley and the people who had lived there.

They published this information in a journal called *Eno*.

They asked experts to help them make lists of all the plants and animals found in the Eno River Valley. They even identified some rare species living there too!

They gave talks and slideshows to school and community groups.



They:
made bumper stickers,

created an annual fine art poster,

printed old maps of the Eno and drew new maps,

and also held photo contests.

Every year they published an art calendar to share the history and photographs of the Eno with more people.



And they kept talking to many people about saving the Eno.



They even started a tradition of hiking alongside the Eno River on January 1st!

Margaret and members of the Eno River Association continued the long, hard fight to protect the Eno River and to create a state park. They also researched and worked to save additional land along the Eno including the creation of the city of Durham park West Point on the Eno.



DR. TANG

Then, one day a city employee and civil engineer named Dr. Hai Chuan Tang rechecked the math for a dam across the Eno River. He found that a dam would *not* result in as much drinking water as the city had thought!

Durham's city budget director, Larry Amick, suggested using the Teer Quarry as a water reservoir for the city's drinking water. Dr. Tang calculated the capacity for the Teer Quarry and found it would have a similar capacity and would also be cheaper.

So city officials dropped the plan to dam the Eno.

However the Eno River was not saved yet.



298-Acre Sale Starts Eno Park

By CONNOR JONES
Herald Raleigh Bureau

RALEIGH — The state Tuesday accepted the deed for the first 298 acres of the Eno River State Park to be established in Durham and Orange counties.

The deed was sold to the state by the Nature Conservancy for $358,173.86. It was accepted by the Council of State for the department of administration.

"This is the first time we have been able to walk on a piece of land in this area and say 'this is ours,'" said Thomas Ellis, director of the division of state parks.

"We know the Nature Conservancy has some of the land we need for this park," he said. "We know they are holding it for us and we will eventually get it when we get the money."

Ellis said the land purchased Tuesday is not on the river, "and may never be contiguous with the land we will acquire on the river."

It will be treated as part of the Eno River State Park, however, he said.

"This is part of the same land the governor was talking about when he announced the Conservancy was acquiring land for us a few weeks ago," Ellis said.

He said this portion was leased by the Nature Conservancy in April 1971.

It is in the Red Hill area, about four miles southeast of Hillsborough. It is on the south side of Highway 70 and extends to Interstate 85.

The Council of State also approved condemnation proceedings on 118.5 acres of land for Raven Rock State Park in Harnett County.

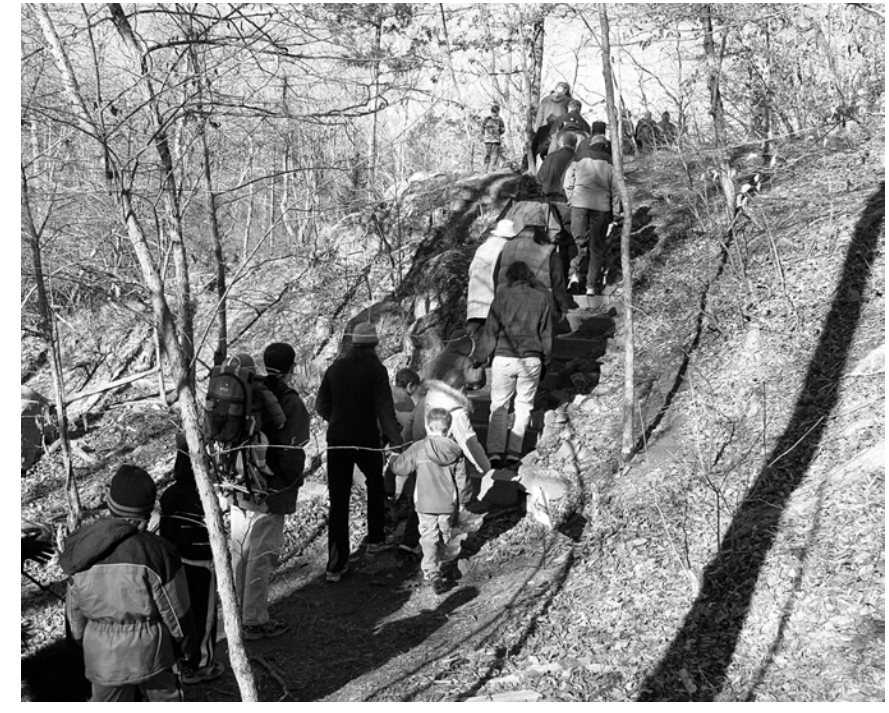
This land belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Elton Arnold. In a resolution, the Council of State said the department of administration has been unable to buy the property by negotiation.

Ellis said this property will bring to nearly 1,500 acres the land acquired for Raven Rock State Park. When all land has been acquired, the park will contain about 3,000 acres, he said.

The city of Durham needed to sell the land it had bought around the Eno River for the dam they had planned to build. The city of Durham and the state of North Carolina reached an agreement that the state would buy all of the city's land around the Eno River, and that this land would be the beginning of the Eno River State Park.

Many people who owned land along the Eno wanted to help make the State Park happen. Some donated their land for the park, while others helped by selling their land to the State of North Carolina so that it could be in the park.

After many years of hard work by many community groups and conservation groups working together, hundreds of acres of land along the Eno River were acquired for the Eno River State Park.



In 1973 James Holshauser, the Governor of North Carolina at that time, announced the creation of the Eno River State Park. Instead of being dammed, the Eno became a State Park! The Eno River was protected as a wild river.

Trails began to be made so that people could hike alongside the Eno River.



In July 1976, the Bicentennial Folklife Festival was presented by the State of North Carolina at the West Point on the Eno City Park. Thousands of people attended. This was a wonderful outdoor event by the Eno with music, art, crafts, and food.



In 1980 the Eno River Association liked the idea and held a Festival for the Eno in the same place. The Festival for the Eno became a yearly tradition and continues to be held every July. The Festival raises money to help conserve more land along the Eno River for parks and nature preserves.

While they prevented the dam across the Eno, and helped create the Eno River State Park, there was still more work to do.

Since the Eno River is about 40 miles long—before it joins the Little and Flat Rivers to become the Neuse River—there are thousands of acres to try to acquire and preserve on both sides of the river.

The Eno River Association keeps working with more people and organizations to create more parks and nature preserves including:

West Point on the Eno in 1976

Penny's Bend Nature Preserve in 1983

Occoneechee Mountain in 1997

The Confluence Natural Area in 2018

And in 2022 efforts began to add these to the Eno River State Park:
the Historic Occoneechee Speedway Trail,
the James M. Johnston Nature Preserve,
as well as parts of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.



In 1988 Margaret Nygard was awarded the first national Alexander Calder Award for Conservation in Washington DC by Secretary of State Stuart Udall. However, in 1995 Margaret Nygard died suddenly and many people grieved.

For all of her hard work and perseverance to save the Eno, Margaret Nygard received the Order of the Longleaf Pine from Governor James Hunt. This is the highest honor that a community member in North Carolina can receive.



Millions of people have visited the parks and preserves along the Eno River. Many people enjoy hiking, canoeing and kayaking, or spending time at the Eno to get a break away from the busy cities where they live.

ENO RIVER STATE PARK

It has been over 50 years since the Eno River Valley lands became a state park, but the Eno still needs your help. The Eno River Association still works to protect the Eno River from development and pollution, and to preserve more land for the parks.

The work to protect the Eno is never ending. If a project is proposed that could harm the Eno and the plants and animals that live there, you may need to speak up for the river too. It will be necessary for all of us to continue to work to protect the Eno always.

Here's a song about the Eno, in case you want to learn it.

I Love the Eno **by Keith Nealson**

G C
Have you ever given thought to where the water

D G
that you drink comes from? Comes from . . .

G C
And do you even have a clue of exactly what you'd do

D G
if you did not have the water that you do?

C G C G
Sometimes the water bubbles up from below.

C G D D
Sometimes it falls as the rain and snow.

G C
But an awful lotta water that we need to share

D G
comes from the river that is right over there.

G C D G
Chorus: And I love the Eno . . . and the Eno . . . loves me.

G C D G
Yes, I love the Eno . . . and the Eno . . . loves me.

The river is a place where the animals meet,
where the turtles swim and the herons eat,
and if you didn't have a river what would the fishes do?
They cannot move into your house with you.

CHORUS

The river is a place that the plants all know,
where the Sycamores and the Birches grow,
where the Panhandle pebblesnail meets his match,
and the Neuse River waterdog plays catch.

CHORUS

The river is a resource we need to share,
help keep it clean just to show we care.
And if we take care of the river like we ought to do,
then the river will take care of us too.

CHORUS (as many as you want to)

Photo credits:

Pages 1-2: Eno River drawing by the author.

Page 3: Photograph by Jim Sparks of the *Durham Morning Herald* Holger and Margaret Nygard in 1968, courtesy of the Nygard Family.

Page 4: Article in *The Durham Sun*, March 27, 1967.

Page 5: Article in *The Herald Sun*, October 27, 1966.

Page 6: Photograph of a 1969 Hike along Cabe Lands on the Eno, courtesy of the Eno River Association Archives.

Pages 7, 10, 20: Eno River Association logo and bumperstickers designed by George Pyne, courtesy of Milo Pyne.

Photographs by Duncan Heron, courtesy of the photographer.
Page 8: A river rafting trip on the Eno.
Page 14 Hike along the Eno.
Page 15: Attendees at the 1976 Folklife Bicenntennial Festival.
Page 16: Elizabeth Cotten performing at the Festival for the Eno.
Page 19: Hike along the Eno.

Page 9: Photograph of Alice Oveal-Lawerence, Margaret Nygard, and John Fugleso, courtesy of the Nygard Family.

Page 10: Jennifer Nygard, Silkscreen poster of a River otter, 1982, ©Jennifer Nygard.

Page 11: Margaret and community members on a hike in 1969, courtesy of the Eno River Association Archives.

Page 12: Photograph from *The Herald Sun*, November 24, 1973.

Page 13: Article in *The Herald Sun*, August 8, 1973.

Page 18: Holger and Margaret with ERA Award at Take Pride in America Ceremony at the White House. Photograph by Erik Nygard, courtesy of the Nygard Family.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Kerstin, Jenny, and Erik Nygard for their help to tell this story. Special thanks to Ranger Lawson Osteen for his research and writing of the public program "The Fight for the Eno" which helped me understand this history and story. Thanks also to Jean Bradley Anderson for her review of this book and to her, David Southern and Herbert Englishman for sharing their research and knowledge of the Eno's history with me. This book was also inspired by Brian Bockhahn's Storytelling Techniques Workshop. Thanks also to Greg Bell for his knowledge of the Eno River Association's archives. Thank you to Keith Nealson for letting me include his song about the Eno, and to Duncan Heron for letting me reproduce his photographs.

Research for this book comes from articles published in the *Eno Journal*; materials in the Margaret Nygard Collection for the Eno River #5232, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and the Eno River Association's archives.

This book was written for Julie J. Thomson's Community Partnership Project for the completion of her North Carolina Environmental Education Certification.

Any proceeds from this book will go to the Eno River Association's Margaret C. Nygard Land Acquisition Fund.

For more information about the Eno:

Eno River State Park
ncparks.gov/state-parks/eno-river-state-park

Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area
ncparks.gov/state-parks/occoneechee-mountain-state-natural-area

Eno River Association
enoriver.org

North Carolina | History | Environment

The Eno River starts in Orange County, North Carolina, and flows through the town of Hillsborough and then into Durham County. In the 1960s the city of Durham proposed a dam along the river. *Saving the Eno River: Margaret Nygard and the Eno River Association* tells the story of the people who joined together to protect the Eno River for all of us, and how the Eno River State Park was formed. Margaret Nygard led the fight to save the Eno. Together in 1966 Margaret and a group of community members formed what became the Eno River Association. Working together as a group they made their voices heard by city leaders. How the Eno was saved is an important part of North Carolina's history.

Julie J. Thomson is an Environmental Educator and Naturalist. This book was written for her Community Partnership Project for the completion of her North Carolina Environmental Education Certification.

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