Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg State University Digital Commons

Little Balkans Review, 1980-1989 University Archives

August 1980

The Little Balkans Review, Fall 1980

Gene DeGruson

Shelby Horn

Steve Robbins

Ted Watts

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/lbr

Recommended Citation

DeGruson, Gene; Horn, Shelby; Robbins, Steve; and Watts, Ted, "The Little Balkans Review, Fall 1980" (1980). *Little Balkans Review, 1980-1989*. 1.
https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/lbr/1

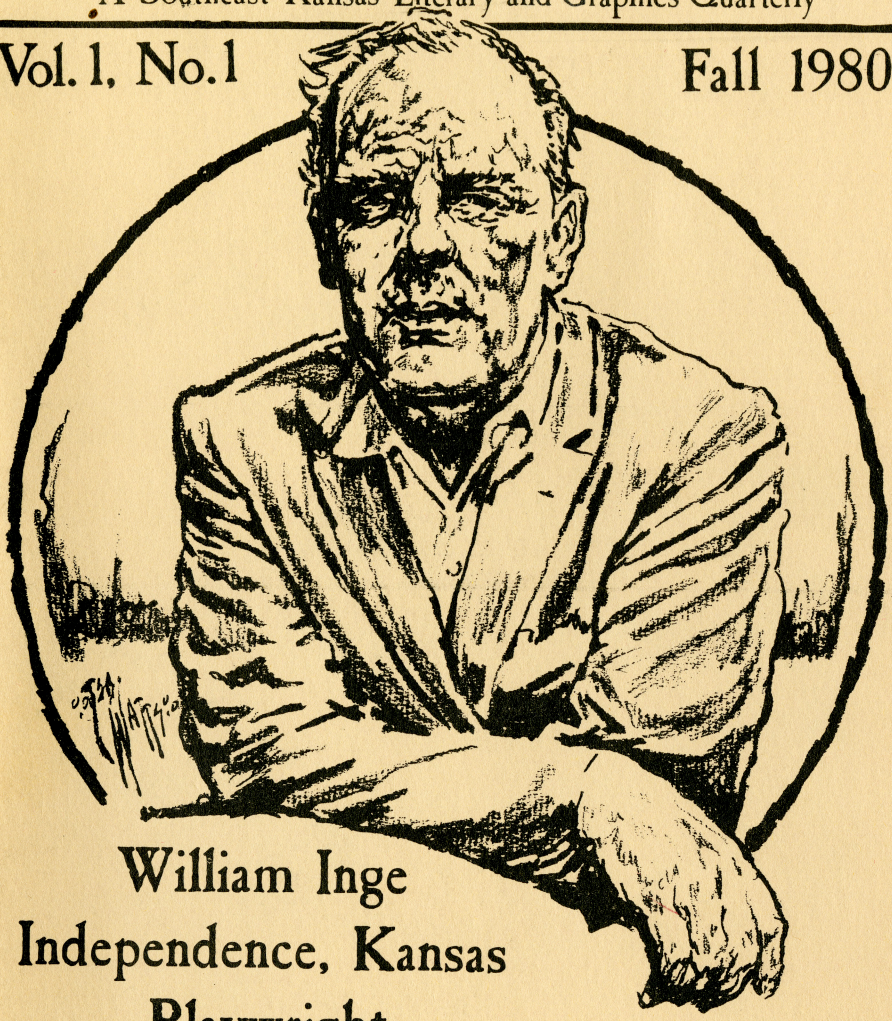
This Journal is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Little Balkans Review, 1980-1989 by an authorized administrator of Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@pittstate.edu.

ISSN 0271-7735

The Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 1, No. 1 Fall 1980



William Inge
Independence, Kansas
Playwright

The
Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphic Quarterly

Vol. 1, No. 1

Gene DeGruson, Poetry Editor
Shelby Horn, Non-Fiction Editor
Steve Robbins, Fiction Editor
Ted Watts, Art and Graphics Editor

All glory comes from daring to begin.—Eugene F. Ware

The Little Balkans Press, Inc.
601 Grandview Heights Terrace
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

Fall 1980

Copyright© 1980 by the Little Balkans Press, Inc.

Note: Copyrights to the following works revert to the author, artist, or photographer upon publication in this issue of **The Little Balkans Review:** Thomas Fox Averill, "Horses and Men: A Depression Story"; Charles Harmon Cagle, "Papa in Fredonia"; Robert Green, "Indian Fighter"; Zula Bennington Greene, "Heritage"; Max Good, photograph of Mt. Zion Church; Shelby Paul Horn, "William Inge: A Year in Columbus"; Eva Jessye, "To Grandmother Penny Jessye"; Patty Farris Kuhel, "Weeping by the Brook"; Karen Laskey, "Sending No Postcards Home"; Michael McClure, "Memories of Childhood" ©1979; Al Ortolani, Jr., "Grandmother"; William Stafford, "Saving Things," "Coming Back to Kansas," "A Memorial for My Mother," "A Return to Garden City," and "Missionary Meadowlark"; David Tate, photograph of barn; James Tate, "A Wedding"; Ted Watts, cover portrait and text illustrations; Charles Banks Wilson, "Indian Immigration" ©1976 - courtesy of the State of Oklahoma.

This project is presented in part by the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

The Little Balkans Review is printed by Crowell, Inc., 716 E. 4th, Oswego, KS 67356

First edition - 1,500 copies printed.

ISSN 0271-7735

The Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 1, No. 1 Fall 1980

Table of Contents

Preface v

Horses and Men: A Depression Story, by Thomas Fox Averill 1

A Wedding (poem), by James Tate 16

The Seed (sculpture), by Waylande Gregory 17

Photograph by Norman Trouw

Mt. Zion Church, Labette County (photograph), by Max Good 18

Memories from Childhood (poem), by Michael McClure 19

Grandmother (poem), by Al Ortolani 20

Ceramic Sculpture, by Bill Glass 21

Photograph by Ted Watts

To Grandmother Penny Jessye (poem), by Eva Jessye 22

Honey in December (poem), by Bertie Cole Bays 24

Heritage (autobiography), by Zula Bennington Greene 25

Indian Immigration (mural element), by Charles Banks Wilson 36

Five Poems, by William Stafford 37

Weeping at the Brook: A Lebanese Folktale, collected by Patty Kuhel 41

Papa in Fredonia (fiction), by Charles Cagle 42

Sending No Postcards Home (poem), by Karen Laskey 58

Youth (sculpture), by William Inge 59

Photograph by Bruce Daniel

William Inge: A Year in Columbus (biography), by Shelby Horn 60

Untitled Photograph, by David Tate 76

Indian Fighter (poem), by Bob Green 77

Shaking the Mop, Mulberry, Kansas (vintage photograph) 78

The Baldwin Shirt Company Employees (vintage photograph) 79

Contributors 80

Invitation to Submit 82

Preface

The Little Balkans Review (hereafter referred to as the LBR) derives its name from a region noted for its diversity. The origin of the name is shrouded in obscurity. Some historians say it was applied to the area by a Topeka editor in 1911 when describing the tumultuous activities of the unions and mine companies. Socolofsky and Self in their Historical Atlas of Kansas say that the fourteen counties of Southeast Kansas have been referred to as the Kansas Balkans "presumably because of its relative geographical position in the state and the diversity of its population." That presumption pleases us, and so from the Kansas Balkans may we present the LBR.

While our aim is to be regional and to provide a ready outlet for the art and heritage of our area in printed form, we pray not to be provincial, in the negative aspects of that word. We propose to show not only what is happening, but the best of what is happening. And if that best is Kansan or Southeast Kansan, we're delighted and hope you will be too.

In starting our venture, we contacted some of the best. We trust you will thank with us those outstanding former Kansans who have generously aided us with this first issue: Michael McClure, William Stafford, and James Tate, each a distinctively different type of poet, all award-winning writers with international reputations, who share an additional commonality in Kansas roots. Their biographies are available to you in any standard reference book at your local library, so we shall not give them here. Their present occupations and addresses are given in our contributor's listing, as are all whom you will meet herein. Please thank those personally who speak to you.

As the first issue of the LBR was assembled, a type of history evolved as well. As you know, the eastern edge of the Little Balkans formed at one time the Osage Neutral Lands (known later as the Cherokee Neutral Lands), its southern boundaries becoming part of the Cherokee Strip. In this issue, our Indian heritage is reflected in the contributions of Charles Banks Wilson (whose mural, Indian Immigration, may be viewed at the Oklahoma State Capitol) and Bill Glass, Jr., a young Cherokee artist whose sculpture and pottery often reflect the traditions of his forefathers. The part of that heritage we would prefer to forget is placed in perspective by Bob Green in his poem, "Indian Fighter."

At first solely agricultural, the Balkans became industrialized with the discovery of rich coal, lead, and zinc deposits and the resultant coming of the railroads. An accurate and personal history of the early pre-industrial days may be read in the chapter of Zula Bennington Greene's autobiography, which we are privileged to be the first to print. Remnants of the architecture of the period may be seen in Max Good's and David Tate's sensitive photographs—for many years the only form of preservation of our architectural heritage. Vintage photographs from the Pittsburg State University Archives show us once more the ever-present railroad car in the background of the most domestic of scenes, "Shaking Out the Mop" (from the Allie Leach Graves Collection); still young and vibrant are the employees of the Baldwin Shirt Co., an early Parsons industry (from the Mr. and Mrs. Carl N. Hunter Collection).

With industrialization, immigration came to the Little Balkans. The 1900 Census shows fifty-one Nationalities residing in Crawford County alone. Soon after her arrival two decades later (in 1923), Margaret E. Haughawout recorded thirty-eight languages still being spoken on the streets of Pittsburg on a Saturday night. While Vance Randolph exhaustively recorded the folklore of the English-speaking inhabitants of the region, it remains for the culture of the immigrants to be collected by such as Patty Kuhel, whose Lebanese folktale is representative of that almost lost lore. Not to be forgotten is the Afro-American immigrant, whose rich heritage is insinuated in our pages by Dr. Eva Jessye, about whom more will be said shortly.

The melding of varied nationalities, ideologies, religions, politics, and tastes resulted, as you may imagine, in a multitude of creative efforts. There is no soil that has not nurtured some author, painter, or musician. As a part of our charge, we shall attempt to present unpublished works by significant personalities of the past. In this issue we give you a poem by Bertie Cole Bays, the last Kansas Poet Laureate, as will as a sculpture by Waylande Gregory, whose works graced the New York World's Fair of 1939, whose architectural sculpture adorns not only our nation's Capitol, but the administration building of the University of Kansas, the Hotel President and parks of Kansas City. Locally a ceramic mural of his may be viewed at the Columbus Community Center. We shall also examine the history of regional artists. Thus, in this issue, Shelby Horn explores the year that Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright William Inge taught drama at Columbus, and Bruce Daniel shares with us a sculpture molded by the dramatist a quarter of a century later.

Among present-day practitioners represented in our pages are Charles Cagle, the recent recipient of the Kansas Quarterly Seaton Award for Fiction, an author who has just published a textbook on creative writing and completed an article on Oscar Wilde in Kansas; Thomas Fox Averill, an active Kansas literary historian, who has conducted seminars in Oswego on Edythe Squire Draper and in Independence on William Inge in his Six Kansas Writers—In Place, sponsored by the Kansas Committee for the Humanities; Dr. Eva Jessye, who holds the distinction of having been the choral conductor for the original productions of Porgy and Bess, Four Saints in Three Acts, and numerous stage and film productions. Newer talents emerging on the scene include Karen Laskey, who has published only in student publications up to this time, and Al Ortolani, Jr., whose work shows him to be more than just the son of an Olympic trainer.

The editorial board of the LBR feels there is a need for education on the part of the general public on the cultural achievements and activities in the arts in the Little Balkans; we feel a need for recognition from their home state on the part of professional artists; we feel the need for an outlet for new talent, especially the graphic artist, the photographer, the craftsman. We promise you we will work unsparingly to fill these needs to the best of our diverse abilities.

Gene DeGruson, a librarian
Shelby Horn, an attorney
Steve Robbins, a journalist
Ted Watts, an artist

Horses and Men: A Depression Story

by Thomas Fox Averill

It was in the middle of the Depression--when most of us felt too bone-tired to budge, or even think about budging. When nobody had seen rain or thought happily about crops for so long we were beginning to worry we'd lost some fundamental knowledge of plowing and planting and harvesting. When women had to clean house religiously unless they wanted piles of dust settling deep in all the corners. When people would see another family pack up and stir a little cloud of dust on the road past their houses West, to California and Oregon, or East, to home and the folks. Right into the middle of this no-hope of Depression Kansas came Mr. Arthur Harding, runner.

He was as skinny as the livestock FDR had been making folks shoot. His knees were big knobs sticking out from his sinewy legs, and his chest was thrown out, which exposed his ribs so you could count them. But that puffed breast made him look cocky. His bony shoulders stuck straight out so he could pump his arms in that jabbing way he had when he ran.

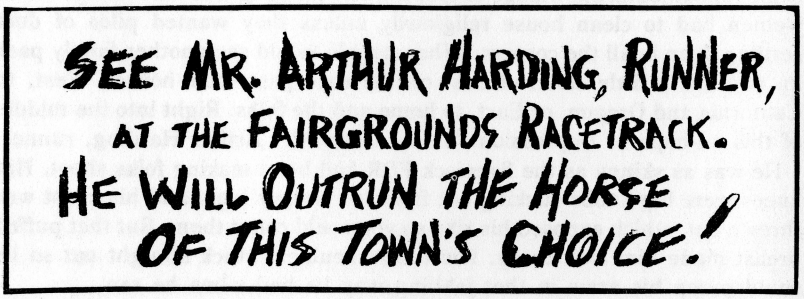
Arthur Harding ran right into the middle of town, and it was more of a town then, something you could run into the middle of. Not like now, all spread up and down the highways with franchises like it is. He scared the dickens out of the last delivery horses in town, Nat Henry's pair of white fillies that pulled the ice wagon. They snorted and pulled at their bridles when he came zinging down Kansas Street. Arthur Harding kept on going right down through town, circled the high school built in the twenties, in better times, then headed straight back up through town.

By the second run through, there wasn't a soul of us left in any shops. We all stood on the sidewalk either staring at this Arthur Harding like he was a wild goose we were ready to chase, or just outright laughing, some of us for what seemed like the first time in half a dozen years. By the time Arthur Harding made his second return trip from the high school, he had a few kids trailing behind him and more folks settled in one place than when Alf Landon came to town running for president of the United States.

He sure didn't look like Alf Landon. Not in his skimpy shorts and red shirt that barely covered his chest. Some of the women turned away--they'd been brought up better than to look at a man in such a costume. But those of us who didn't turn away, and that included every man and child, noticed the same thing: this Arthur Harding, who had run at least a mile and a half at a pace that would have been illegal if he'd been an automobile in this town, and who now stood before a large crowd, this Mr. Arthur Harding, runner, was hardly even breathing. Why, Alf Landon's chest had heaved up and down after a hundred-yard walk from the train station to the courthouse steps, and it hadn't been 98 degrees that day, either. When Arthur Harding introduced himself he smiled, and spoke calmly and forcefully, though his remarks were brief.

"Hello," he said. "I am Arthur Harding, a runner. I hope to see each and every one of you at the fair. Thank you." He waved and bolted down the street like a thief. We could see little pinches of dust on the horizon even after we couldn't see him. The whole town broke loose with talk, a solid sheet of talk--like the good spring rain that hadn't come for six years.

The talk lasted the entire week before the fair, because the next day when we were all on our way to church, we saw signs posted on most of the business buildings in town. Word spread to the countryside faster than dust on the wind. The sign read:



Now nobody knew who would choose a horse, and the signs looked seedy, like they'd been printed up in a hurry. Most folks just shook their heads, and some even spat, though Dr. Crumbine in Topeka had gotten all of us towns to pass no-spitting ordinances and even delivered bricks that said DON'T SPIT ON SIDEWALKS, just for a reminder.

On Monday, we knew more. Another sign appeared, this one in McCurdy's Barber Shop: RACE HEADQUARTERS. Jim Thomas saw it first and had a talk with McCurdy, who was also an auctioneer and could usually make more noise in less time than a flock of scared chickens. But he couldn't, or wouldn't, say much. Nobody had volunteered a horse to race yet, he said. "But when someone does," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "10-to-1 bets can be placed with me, and collected from me the day of the fair." McCurdy was in heaven, really. He'd handled all the illegal betting on county fair horse races for years, but the last of those had been in the early '20s.

On Tuesday, McCurdy put another sign up in his window: MR. ARTHUR HARDING WILL RUN AGAINST TOM CHRISTIAN'S TWO-YEAR-OLD BAY FILLY, ONE OF THE MOST SPIRITED HORSES IN THE COUNTY. This sign was so darn big it shaded the whole inside of the barber shop. Folks who began to crowd into McCurdy's to place their bets on the horse complained they couldn't see to count out their money.

Not that a heck of a lot of money was changing hands. The Depression saw to that. But a surprising number of folks came up with five or even ten dollars who owed Clint Barr, the grocer, or were deep in it to Pete Freauf at the bank for all the seed that had blown away since 1931.

Tuesday night was the council meeting, and it was the best-attended meeting since the dust started. When folks are curious, they like to be around other people. And folks were curious. Who was Mr. Arthur Harding, runner? Nobody knew except maybe McCurdy, and he wasn't there. Did Tom Christian know about all this before he put up his filly? No. Did anyone contact him, or did he volunteer to McCurdy out of the blue? Out of the blue, he claimed. Was he getting any money? Only if the horse beat Harding. How much? One hundred dollars.

The meeting room buzzed with that news. Zeke Daniels stood up. "Tom Christian's horse is a good one, I'll admit that. But mine is the fastest. Everybody knows it."

"He was," Clint Barr muttered loud enough for everyone to hear. "But he hasn't done anything but stud so long he's forgot all his limbs but one." Clint's wife turned away and wouldn't look at him again the rest of the meeting.

"I'd wager my roan gelding against your horse any day." Glen Throne was a farmer ten miles west of town. Other farmers challenged Christian's horse.

The council finally passed a motion agreeing to have an open horse race the next Friday to see who would have the privilege of getting one hundred dollars when the horse beat Arthur Harding at Saturday's fair. An announcement was to be printed in the paper on Friday, though the council asked Pete Freauf to have a talk with McCurdy.

The barber said it didn't matter how the horse was chosen. He even supposedly huffed a little: "Don't the sign say THE HORSE OF THIS TOWN'S CHOICE?" So Freauf went to the paper for a talk with editor Wakeeny.

By the time the paper was out there wasn't a man, woman or child in the county that didn't know about the excitement. That was good, since recent fairs had been like wakes: we'd tell each other stories of misery, and display our poverty rather than brag and show off our harvests. Why, there hadn't been a prize for the largest watermelon for the last seven years, and there hadn't even been a watermelon in the county bigger than a cucumber for six years.

Besides announcing the horse race, the paper ran its largest editorial page headline since Roosevelt's first election in 1932:

NSAS. Friday, August 6, 1937. OFFICIAL COUNTY P

WHO IS ARTHUR HARDING, RUNNER?

Since the unusual appearance of a man calling himself Arthur Harding, runner, in our town last Saturday, this community has rightfully been curious for information about this mysterious stranger. Nothing would please us more than supplying such information, and we have left no stones unturned in our pursuit of it. We have contacted newspapers all across Kansas and into surrounding states. We have wired law enforcement agencies from as far away as Denver, Topeka, and Wichita. All to no avail. Arthur Harding is, at this time, unknowable, except insofar as we know him already.

He appeared here at 2:15 p.m. last Saturday afternoon, running west on Kansas to the high school, then back east through town to First Street. He then ran around the block south to Russell Road, ran west to Third Street, came north to Kansas and proceeded west again through town. Upon reaching the high school, he again circled and started back to town, where he stopped in front of the Uneeda Drug Store and calmly addressed what had become a large group of onlookers. Those who observed him closely described him as a man approximately thirty years old, of medium height, with brown hair, a slight stubble of beard and a thin mouth. His most prominent feature, however was his thinness. Dr. Hammersmith, who observed him from his office above the drug store, said, "The man is skeletal, like an anatomy lesson." Others claimed that he looked to be the worst victim of starvation they'd yet seen on the Great Plains.

But starving or not, this so-called Arthur Harding, who wore a very brief track and field suit, will have to run hard to beat this town's choice of horse next Saturday. In the meantime, this paper refuses to take any part in the race. We caution others to be equally sparing in their participation except, of course, as spectators.

News of the Churches

That meant that Wakeeny wasn't going to have anything much to do, financially, with the biggest race on the track for twenty years. By Friday morning, half the town was convinced that Editor Wakeeny hadn't tried very hard to find out who this Arthur Harding really was. Why, Wakeeny had connections all over the state. He was even friends with William Allen White. Something seemed fishy.

And another thing. Pete Freauf and Clint Barr were known as gambling men. Their fathers had always had side bets on horses running in the fairs in the old days, and they'd been raised as sporting men, too. Probably half of us had played poker with one or the both of them in McCurdy's back room, and for big stakes, too. Neither of them had placed a penny on the horse, if McCurdy could be believed.

And then Friday noon, old Cole Aim walked into the barber shop and plunked down $50, more than most of us had seen in one place at one time in quite a while. We all knew Cole, who had hunted buffalo in these parts for years. He was one of these eccentrics who could have that much money and you'd never know it. That was all right. But Cole stood there ramrod straight and said, "My money's on the man. I want a receipt."

"Don't give receipts, Cole," said McCurdy. "This ain't like buying groceries, you know."

"Then it's between you and me. And everyone here as my witness. That's $50. And at your odds that's $500 when the man wins, right?"

"That's right," said McCurdy, grinning.

A few people snickered, but Cole stared them down. "You listen here, boys. This heat's fried your brains. I hunted buffalo in these parts for years. And all on foot. A horse just slows a good man down. Any fool that bets his money on one deserves to lose it. You wait and see." He let that sink in, then stalked out.

So, with the bigwigs staying out, acting above our gamble, and Cole Aim putting that much money against the horse, against all of the rest of us, really, we began to wonder. Some folks began to get suspicious.

But even with the suspicion, and the illegal spitting on the sidewalk that came as a result of it, all of us were secretly getting money together. McCurdy's Barber Shop had a spillover crowd. Probably more country farmers came for a barber shop haircut that one week than in any whole year since the Depression and dust took over the Great Plains. And for once, the talk was not of depression and dust, but of men and horses. How fast a horse can run, how fast a man can. Now we all knew that our native son Glenn Cunningham was the fastest man in the entire world. His mile record was 4:06.8. Where was Arthur Harding when Glenn set that record?

Friday afternoon, just before the race, Tom Christian was all smiles with news about how fast a horse can run. His thirteen-year-old boy Ben had ridden the two-year-old filly a mile and Tom's pocketwatch had timed her at 2:14.0. What kind of race was this going to be?

Clint Barr announced that he had driven the course of Arthur Harding's run through town, giving him a quarter of a mile to appear and disappear.

The stranger had run one and three-fourths miles in what most folks agreed had to have been well under ten minutes. Clint's boy, who ran on the high school track team, ran it as fast as he could and it took him twelve minutes. This Arthur Harding was awfully fast. But Clint Barr and Tom Christian both agreed that no man was faster than a horse. And the whole county but Cole Aim agreed enough to make McCurdy's Barber Shop as rich, for two days, as Pete Freauf's bank.

By Friday afternoon race time the wind was pounding dust right into the skin. That didn't stop thirty farmers from running their horses, or keep over 200 of us from coming to the fairgrounds to watch. We ran the horses in heats, which was literally true, because it was hot even for September--97 degrees in the grandstand. We ran five heats of six horses each, ran them each a mile. Then we ran the first horse from each heat. The final race ended in a tie. Two of the judges called it for Zeke Daniel's horse, and two for Tom Christian's filly. Pete Freauf, the fifth judge, wouldn't say.

Tom Christian was so mad he jumped up and down until everybody was worried he'd pass out from heat prostration. "I saw it plain as anything in my life," he screamed. "Plain as the nose on your face." Of course, Pete Freauf's nose was the biggest in town, but he was a judge here, and the banker, and he had to keep his dignity.

"A re-match," he said calmly. "Re-run the filly against the stud."

"It's too hot to run em again," Tom stormed. "I can't have my filly overheated or getting sore feet on this hot track."

The judges conferred, then Pete stood up. "It was a dead heat, I thought. But I am a judge here, and my judgment is for Tom Christian's filly since Tom was the first to offer his horse. Before anybody knew about the hundred dollars."

The crowd was very quiet. To a lot of us, Freauf's decision seemed fair enough, but still a little suspicious. A few booed aloud, but most of us were ready to get out of that sweltering grandstand and head for Kansas Street with the news.

People kept right on betting. McCurdy was poker-faced as an old saloon gambler. To most folks, it didn't matter finally who started it or why. In the long run, it was a sure bet. Still, when McCurdy put all the money into an old feed sack and took it across the street to Pete Freauf's Farmer's State Bank, another gully-washer of spit hit the street.

Saturday morning was so hot the birds would hardly sing. Farmers arriving in town had already soaked their shirts through with sweat, and everybody was a little on edge. If this race wasn't the most exciting thing of the year--even better than the fire in the wood addition of the courthouse--we would have stayed home. We all wanted to see this race, to watch this scrawny shrimp try to outrun Tom Christian's horse. Some folks laughed just to think of it.

McCurdy's Barber Shop was the natural first stopping place for most of us, and that stop was worth it. Behind the shop, sitting on the running board of an automobile with Colorado plates, was Arthur Harding. Folks who had been at the shop since nine o'clock in the morning, when the runner had been

driven into town, said that he'd been eating oranges for the past two hours. Sure enough, there was a pile of peels big enough to satisy half a dozen hogs. The kids couldn't believe it: Arthur Harding had eaten more oranges in two hours than most of them had gotten as their only Christmas presents for the past five years.

The runner looked just like the paper said. Only he was wearing overalls now and a sky blue shirt and he was clean shaven, no beard. His driver looked so like him they could have been brothers. Both of them were quiet, though people were at them like gnats on a dog's hide.

"He beat horses before?"

"Sometimes he does, sometimes he doesn't."

"Where?"

"Lots of places. All over."

"You related to him?"

"No."

"What's your name?"

"Trainer. Jim Trainer."

"How long's he going to eat oranges?"

"Until he's finished."

"When'll that be?"

"Exactly two hours before the race."

Sure enough, at eleven-thirty Arthur Harding quit eating oranges. He picked up the peels into an old flour sack, smiled at everyone, and swung it into the back seat of the automobile. He climbed after it and slumped down. The driver, and not a one of us believed his name was Trainer, started the engine and pulled away, turning onto Kansas in the direction of the fairgrounds. The crowd followed.

Some people paid attention to all the usual parts of a fair. There were implement dealers with free fly swatters, and there were some preserves and baked goods, most of the cakes with dark frosting so as not to show the dust. And there were quilts, and some sheep and goats and pigs that kids brought along. But it was most of the crowd at the racetrack. Clint Barr's boy did a regular North Pole ice business, selling cracked ice for his grocer father.

By twelve o'clock, Arthur Harding was out in the center of that half-mile racetrack doing stranger exercises than an Indian Yogi. He'd cross his legs and roll up and down his spine. He touched his head to his knees. He put one leg in front and one behind and touched his crotch to the ground--the splits. Then he sat with his legs bent so the bottoms of his feet touched and he pushed his knees clear to the ground. Kids in the stands started trying it, too, only their mothers made them stop before they crippled themselves.

Then Arthur Harding ran once around the track. He did have quite a lilt to his stride, too. When Tom Christian saw, he made his boy Ben get up and take the horse after. When the filly galloped by the runner on the last turn, the crowd shouted and laughed. Some folks started bragging to their neighbors about their secret bets.

At one o'clock, this fellow who drove Arthur Harding around carried a megaphone right down in front on the track.

"The rules of this race are simple," the man barked. "The object is for one or the other in this contest to outrun the other. This is a race of time and distance, my friends. Arthur Harding will outrun this beast, both in speed and in distance. That is what he promised. That is what our sign said. That is what he'll do." The man paused, then shouted at the top of his lungs: "This is a thirty-mile race!"

By the time Tom Christian began to move toward the man, the crowd was all on its feet muttering, stammering, shouting, hooting, even cheering, everyone distracted with the news. Nobody could hear for the ten minutes it took Tom Christian and Arthur Harding's driver to talk. Only when Tom took the megaphone did the crowd quiet.

"There hasn't been much reason to ride this horse thirty miles in the two years since she was born," he started, and he talked quickly so the crowd wouldn't start interrupting him. "She's in good shape, though. I've known a hundred horses to go thirty miles in a day, most of them pulling a wagon. There's few men been that far on their feet in a day. But this man here says that Arthur Harding will run thirty miles in less than three hours. Less than three hours, non-stop."

The crowd started up again. Now it was some horse race, probably the best thing since the Pony Express, but that had been all horses, and men on them, clear across the country in a few days.

Tom Christian waved the megaphone above his head to get everybody's attention. "And I'm still going to let my boy run this horse, and I'm still standing behind her all the way!" He dropped the megaphone and waved his fist in the air.

The people followed his lead. They were still gawking and shouting and slapping at each other, three hours on everyone's lips, but they waved their fists and did not budge in spite of the fact that McCurdy was under the grandstand with a small account book under his arm to take or change folks' bets right up to the start of the race, which was just ten minutes away. Little Ben Christian began drinking water, and the filly sucked up her share from a five-gallon bucket. Five minutes before the race, Tom Christian waved the megaphone again and people hushed up.

"You all know my boy Ben Christian. He's always wanting to ride longer than I'll let him. Well, here's your chance, Ben." Ben's friends had crowded around him. The boys were all touching him but the girls kept their distance with their hands behind them. To those kids, three hours was a long time.

In fact, to anybody who has sat under a Kansas sun, quickly soaking a shirt, feeling the slow queasiness come on like after a breakfast of spoiled potatoes, three hours can stretch out like a long drought.

Arthur Harding's driver took the megaphone. "I would like you to raise a shout for Mr. Arthur Harding, runner of international renown. He qualified for the Olympic games as a marathon runner, but refused to go to Berlin and Hitler's games. Most recently he has run across the breadth of England in just two days. And he has kept himself in excellent condition since his return to the United States. He and his kind should be the pride of their country.

Should inspire all of us to physical and mental achievement. Ladies and gentlemen, a great American, Arthur Harding."

A few people clapped, and Arthur Harding ran in a small circle, lifting his knees high. Others in the crowd were reassuring each other that England wasn't nearly as far across as Kansas, that probably two of England wouldn't even begin to fill up the Sunflower State. Ben Christian mounted the two-year-old filly and moved to the middle of the racetrack.

"Remember," shouted Arthur Harding's friend. "If either man or beast quits before thirty miles has been run, the race is lost. If both go the distance, the first across the starting point on the 60th lap wins the race. Mr. Peter Freauf will count for Christian's horse, and Mr. Clinton Barr will count for Arthur Harding." He raised a gun in the air and shouted: "To your marks. Set. Go." Only nobody heard the "Go" for the noise of the gun and the crowd.

The filly reared with the gunshot and little Ben almost fell onto the racetrack. When they got their bearings, Arthur Harding was 100 yards ahead on the inside of the track and little Ben started after him so fast his father yelled him down.

Of course Ben was past hearing. When the boy caught up to Arthur Harding, he veered the filly away from the inside fence, kicking around the runner in a flurry of dust. The crowd cheered. They cheered the second time around, too, and the third. The filly was settling down. Ben could control her. With each lap he'd bear down on Arthur Harding and give that filly a little kick. She'd pick up speed, and Ben would spur her away quickly, and she'd stir up enough dust that Arthur Harding was soon as brown with dust as the racetrack. He began moving to the outside each time the horse approached him. The crowd applauded.

After his second mile, he was way behind the horse. But people in the crowd started realizing they could set their watches by him. Every time around clocked at exactly two minutes and fifty seconds. As long as the horse stayed ahead, people could joke: even though he'd lose, Arthur Harding had a good future as the town clock--just run him around in circles hour after hour. And the horse stayed easily ahead. Most everybody watched for the first twenty minutes before settling down to wait out what they began to think of as a tedious exercise. Why, the man was crazy. All that time and energy, all that sweat and pain. What was it for? The man would lose.

People began to leave their seats and probably everyone took their minds off the race somehow. It was too depressing to watch, as monotonous as time, as methodical as death. Little children curled up for naps under their momma's dresses, which they tented for shade. Old people began to nod off to sleep and the kids laughed at the flies crawling across their wrinkled faces. Men were irritable when their wives asked for water, and wives were beginning to wonder just how much their husbands had bet against this man. "Not against the man," one fellow said, "but for the horse."

After the first hour, Millie Jones fainted. She stood up from her seat like she was going somewhere, then flopped onto the people in front of her and

there was quite a stir. The temperature was 101 degrees, with the sun straight above the grandstand, and a hot south wind. Just about everybody needed some relief. We found out later that Millie found her relief in some shade and smelling salts and a good dousing with water.

Tom Christian ran out to Ben with a water jug, but it took him two times to get it to the boy because that filly, all bug-eyed, kept shying away. She was right at 30 laps, halfway there. Arthur Harding was at 23 laps. At that rate, the horse would be finished in an hour, and folks talked about it quietly, nodding in a righteous way. They knew horses, and they knew men, and this Arthur Harding was a damn fool running his overheated brain around and around on that dusty racetrack. Folks began counting what they expected to take home, the men finally admitting, with a smile, how much they'd staked. If it wasn't so blamed hot, everybody agreed, it would have been a better county fair than the one six years ago with the peep show we'd had to run out of town.

A lot of folks quit watching the race except out of the corners of their eyes. Some drifted away for a time seeking lemonade or shade. It was just one man, and one boy on a horse, going in circles in that heat. Not that interesting to watch. No better, really, than watching someone plow, circle after circle, but at least then there was something to show for the work. Some people talked about Arthur Harding, runner. Why would anyone work so hard just to be able to run smooth, like clockwork, around and around, his shoulders thrown back, his arms jabbing the air, his breath in smooth flux, his skinny legs knotting, then relaxing, as they pumped him along the track?

Every once in a while his driver would hand him a cup of water. Arthur Harding would drink it down and throw the cup back over his shoulder to let the other man run it down before it blew away. Harding's partner was slow and awkward chasing the cups, like one of us spectators might be, but we still laughed at him.

After she'd gone twenty-one miles, on her 43rd lap around the racetrack, the filly quit trotting and began to walk. She needed water. That's when we perked up a little. Arthur Harding was just nearing his halfway count, and for the first time, he passed the horse instead of her passing him. He was still way behind, of course, but it caused a stir. Not quite an hour and a half had gone by, with Arthur Harding more on schedule than the Union Pacific Railroad, and now he had passed Tom Christian's horse. People down front heard Tom yell out to Ben: "It's okay. Let her walk a bit, she needs the rest."

And she did. She was a strong horse, but in that heat there wasn't a horse in Kansas that wouldn't have lathered up. Arthur Harding passed her again, running by close, and she shied away.

"Give that horse room," yelled Tom Christian, running a ways down the track with his hands cupped to this mouth. He seemed silly clomping along all hunched into himself, his boots stirring up more dust than the horse. He looked heavy, tied to the ground.

"Scared, Tom?" laughed a few people, but he didn't look at them. It was 44 laps for the horse and 29 laps for Arthur Harding.

"Get her going a little," Tom yelled at Ben next time around, and the filly responded to Ben's boots in her flanks. She was tired, but a fine-muscled, beautiful horse. Pretty soon she lapped Arthur Harding and it was 45 to 30. She was three- fourths there, and the runner was just half. Tom Christian sat back down.

For the next few laps, Ben trotted the filly one, then let her walk one, and the counters went up evenly, side by side: 46 to 31; 47 to 32; 48 to 33; all the way to 50 for the filly and 35 for Arthur Harding.

Then the horse stopped. She was walking, and then she stopped, dead still on the far side of the track. Arthur Harding whizzed by her and everybody could see little Ben's boots flailing that horse's flanks. Nobody could hear a thing. Almost the whole grandstand stood up and talk clamored up into the hot sky. Tom Christian ran over to Arthur Harding's driver, then across the midway to his son, who looked like a dancing puppet on top of that now stolid horse.

By the time his driver raised the megaphone to address the crowd, Arthur Harding had passed the horse again. It was 50 to 36. Folks were quiet. "Stopping is not quitting, but it's awfully close," the driver yelled. "The horse needs to move soon. But the race is to the finish, no matter how man and beast pace themselves. The beast cannot be led." That sounded reasonable, and the crowd began yelling at Tom Christian to get his horse moving. She wouldn't budge. A minute later, Arthur Harding ran close by the stopped filly. It ws 50 to 37.

The crowd came alive again and Tom went for a five-gallon bucket of

water. The filly drank. "Not too much, Tom," some of the crowd admonished in a buzz of sound.

Then, in a slight pause, a single voice from the top of the grandstand filled the whole racetrack: "It ain't the water, it's the feet." It was Cole Aim. His voice was steady and clear, loud enough to address the whole crowd without a megaphone, and when people turned to look at him, the sun beating down on all of them, Cole Aim stood up.

"You're all a bunch of damn fools," he said. "Anybody that thinks that horse can win is going to have a sad time paying up under the table." People began to wave him away and mutter against him, but he put his hand up for silence. "This country was settled by men, not horses," he shouted. "The man will win this race!"

At 50 to 39, the Christians finally spurred the filly to a walk again. Some of us figured the time. If Arthur Harding kept up his pace, he would be finished in exactly 58 minutes. That gave the filly less than an hour to go five miles. Why, a man could easily walk five miles in an hour. And so could a horse. But we were a little worried how, and speculation moved from one side of the grandstand to the other--a nodding of heads like wheat in the wind.

Cole Aim sat down and calmly watched the numbers. Arthur Harding's pace seemed to quicken, though those with pocket watches said he was still at two minutes and fifty seconds each time around. It was 51 to 40, with Arthur Harding still passing the horse, shaving by her where she hugged the inside rail in what seemed terrific slow motion to the crowd. It was 52 to 43; then 53 to 46; then 54 to 48; then 55 to 50. The horse had two and a half miles to go; the man still had five. Arthur Harding was soaked through, and flecks of his sweat dropped into the dust and disappeared. He was breathing hard, now, his mouth open, his lips and teeth black with dust except when he took water and spat it out.

But it was a real race, because in spite of all of little Ben's yelling and kicking, and all of Tom's rump slapping, that horse was still losing power, favoring all four feet at once, trying to get up on its toes like that ballet dancer who'd been through town at Christmas.

At 56 to 52, little Ben did something right for a change. We couldn't tell quite what, but that horse began to trot a little. Nothing breakneck, but it was almost keeping pace with Arthur Harding. We all stood up, and watched while the runner took twice as long to pass the horse. That made it 57 to 53, the horse still ahead and just three laps to go. A few people waved their fists in the air, some turning around to Cole Aim. Some of them even started down so as to get to McCurdy's and beat the rush.

But they were stopped dead in their tracks. For the first time, Arthur Harding slowed down. His driver had given him another cup of water, and shouted something to him. What, people didn't know. But suddenly, Arthur Harding was next to the horse, and slowing to her pace, running right beside her. At first, there was muttering and exclaiming about it, then those in front started shushing those farther back. Because Arthur Harding was talking to Ben, or to the horse. He was challenging them to keep up, and after the first

turn, the horse was speeding up. That really got the crowd going. Why would he do that? Some said it was a plot, that he was deliberately throwing the race. There was head shaking all around. One woman thought he was the devil himself, trying to cast a spell.

This time when Cole Aim stood up, folks nudged each other to silence. But Cole just watched for a lap: 58 to 54, just one mile more for the horse. Maybe only Cole noticed, but maybe everyone sensed it somehow. Arthur Harding was really running faster. And faster. All of a sudden, Cole whooped like an Indian: "Run her, boy. Run her till she drops."

Arthur Harding ran her hard around the first turn, then even faster down the back stretch. It was 59 to 55 and faster. One more lap for the horse. Then it happened. Right in front of the grandstand that two-year-old filly fell. She just tripped all over herself in a flurry of going down and Ben Christian was thrown. Not badly, it didn't look like, but thrown toward the inside fence so he had to scramble away. Arthur Harding waved his hands in the air, his dusty black mouth open wide, and kept on running hard while the crowd gasped and stood and gaped and Tom Christian ran awkwardly to his horse and his boy. The boy was fine, though he wobbled on his legs when he got up. Tom pulled the filly's bridle hard and she tried to stand. Her front legs came up, then buckled under her and she rolled over on her back and began swaying, her tired feet in the air, her back caking with dust. The loose saddle ended up on her side and Tom uncinched it. He stood in front of her yelling, and eveybody heard every word because the silence was heavier than before a tornado. He cursed and screamed and pulled while she rolled. He jerked and went berserk while her eyes got bigger and her mouth more flecked with foam.

Arthur Harding zipped by: 59 to 56, with just two miles left for him. Tom waved his fist, but was too busy with the horse to touch the runner. By the time Arthur Harding had made the second turn, and was heading for lap 57, the crowd began talking again, encouraging Tom. At 59 to just over 57, the crowd began to curse. Though the horse had calmed some, she still refused to rise.

Finally, at 59 to 58, she stood up and Tom hoisted Ben up to ride bareback. But this wasn't much of a ride for little Ben. He was dog tired, and he didn't dare kick her. She moved at her own weak pace. When the filly got halfway around the racetrack on her last lap, Arthur Harding passed his 59th lap. One more to go. He ran faster and faster to catch up, and when he did, on the final turn, he raised his arms and howled like a wolf at a full silver moon. The filly collapsed again, rolled Ben off like an old scab, and lay heaving in the dust. Tom Christian started to run to her, and little Ben was up and jerking hard on her bridle. All of us in the grandstand got quiet.

In the hush, we thought we heard Tom Christian sobbing. Then Cole Aim's voice came like a curse: "She's dead, you fools. Dead."

When folks realized he was right, all hell broke loose. Arthur Harding's driver had a string across the racetrack, but when Arthur Harding carried it streaming across his chest at the finish line, not many cared. Arthur Harding limped through the storm that was invading the racetrack, but people gave

the gasping, dust-covered runner only a glance. Some spat. Someone brought Tom Christian a gun and he started waving it at Arthur Harding, but people restrained him. The runner, now walking around the track, shaking his head and heaving for breath, went unmolested. At the other end of the track, he looked like he was going to collapse, and his driver supported him to their automobile. He was gone before anyone could get up the courage to shoot him.

Some went to look at the horse, some went to look for McCurdy, who had drifted away, but most of us just milled around the track, dazed by the heat and the long race. We weren't quite sure what to do. Tom Christian was near raving, and the only thing he could conveniently shoot, the horse, was already dead. When Tom finally headed off with the gun to McCurdy's Barber Shop, those of us who could get away from the wife and kids followed along.

McCurdy was sitting in his chair reading the paper as though he'd never heard of a race between a man and a horse. Tom Christian reminded him with the nuzzle of the gun, insisting that Arthur Harding had deliberately killed the filly to win the race. He demanded his hundred dollars. Others behind Christian shouted for their money back, too. By the time the din got loud enough that no one could hear any single demand, Jake Kinder, the sheriff, came out of McCurdy's back room. He was flanked by Pete Freauf and Clint Barr.

"Put that gun away, Tom," said Jake.

"But it ain't fair," insisted Tom. "My horse is dead from that race and this man oughta pay me."

"Did the horse win or lose?" asked Freauf.

"She didn't do neither one. She was killed. It ain't a bit fair."

"She lost, Tom," said Clint. "She was outsmarted and outrun. And she died. Everybody saw it."

"Jake, you understand, don't you?" Tom Christian appealed. "That money don't really belong to anybody. McCurdy's got no rights to it."

"I don't want to hear about any betting," said Jake.

"Not even from Arthur Harding?" asked Tom Christian. "Because he's got to come back here to claim his money, don't he?" Others behind Christian hooted out. They just wanted to see this Arthur Harding come running after that big illegal bag full of money. Then they could take care of things.

Freauf eased forward. "Arthur Harding already has his money, Tom. I saw to that."

Tom Christian dropped the gun on the floor. He was mad, but he was too hot and tired and discouraged to do anything more. When he finally spoke, it was quietly. "Did you give him all our money?" And he spoke for us all.

Jake picked up Christian's gun and walked out, leaving the bigwigs to face down the rest of us--the nickel and dime and staying behind crowd.

"Arthur Harding took only his share," began the banker.

"His share!" some of the men protested.

"That's right. One thousand dollars. And Cole Aim got his five hundred, too."

"But there was more than that," yelled Zeke Daniels. "Who's gettin that?"

"Well, it's in the bank." And then Freauf's voice got stentorian like all the bigwigs can make their voices do--they practice at their social fraternity meetings. "You blamed fools have been hiding your money in mattresses and door jambs and tin cans for the last six years. Some of that betting money was moldier than your grandma's wedding dress. This town is suffering and everybody's hiding the one thing we all need, and that's money changing hands. So here's what we'll do if it's all right by you. The money that's in the bank is going to stay there for a year, unless one of you varmints wants to rob it. It'll be in your names and you can get it one year from today. And I'm not paying you interest. Is that satisfactory?"

"How do you know how much we bet?" someone asked.

"Mr. McCurdy deposited his account book along with the money."

"Why you double-crossing," Zeke Daniels waved his fist at McCurdy.

"Now don't blame him," said Clint Barr. "Would you rather pay what you really owe? Or try to go to court over this?"

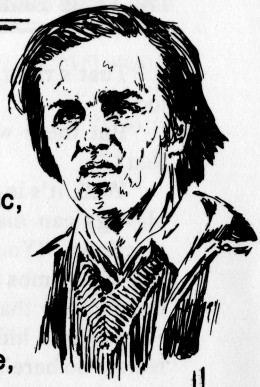
"And Tom Christian," said the banker, "you'll get $100 deposited into your account, where it will sit for a year."

Pete Freauf and Clint Barr walked out, and McCurdy went into his back room and locked the door. The rest of us went on home, quickly finding our wives and children who were drifting towards us from the fairgrounds.

The next day, church attendance set a record for the county. On Monday, those of us in town thought Tom Christian had a lot of gall boasting around that he'd never made a better deal. But nobody argued. When had anyone else in that town been paid a hundred dollars for a dead horse?

The bank gave more loans than ever that fall, just in time to put more hopeless wheat in the dry ground. The winter snow was better that year, though, and in the spring a good rain settled down on the town for two straight days. Grown men stood outdoors and cried. All of us who planted a crop that year got at least a little return for a change, and we all started remembering the way things used to be. Before the Depression. Before Mr. Arthur Harding, runner, came along and sure enough outran the horse of this town's choice.

A Wedding



She was in terrible pain the whole day,
as she had been for months: a slipped disc,
and there is nothing more painful. She

herself was a nurse's aid, also a poet
just beginning to make a name for her
nom de plume. As with most things in life,

it happened when she was changing channels
on her television. The lucky man, on the other
hand, was smiling for the first time

in his life, and it was fake. He was
an aspiring philosopher of dubious potential,
very serious, but somehow lacking in

essential depth. He could have been
an adequate undertaker. It was not the first
time for either of them. It was a civil

service, with no music, few flowers.
Still there was a slow and erratic tide
of champagne-corks shot clear into the trees.

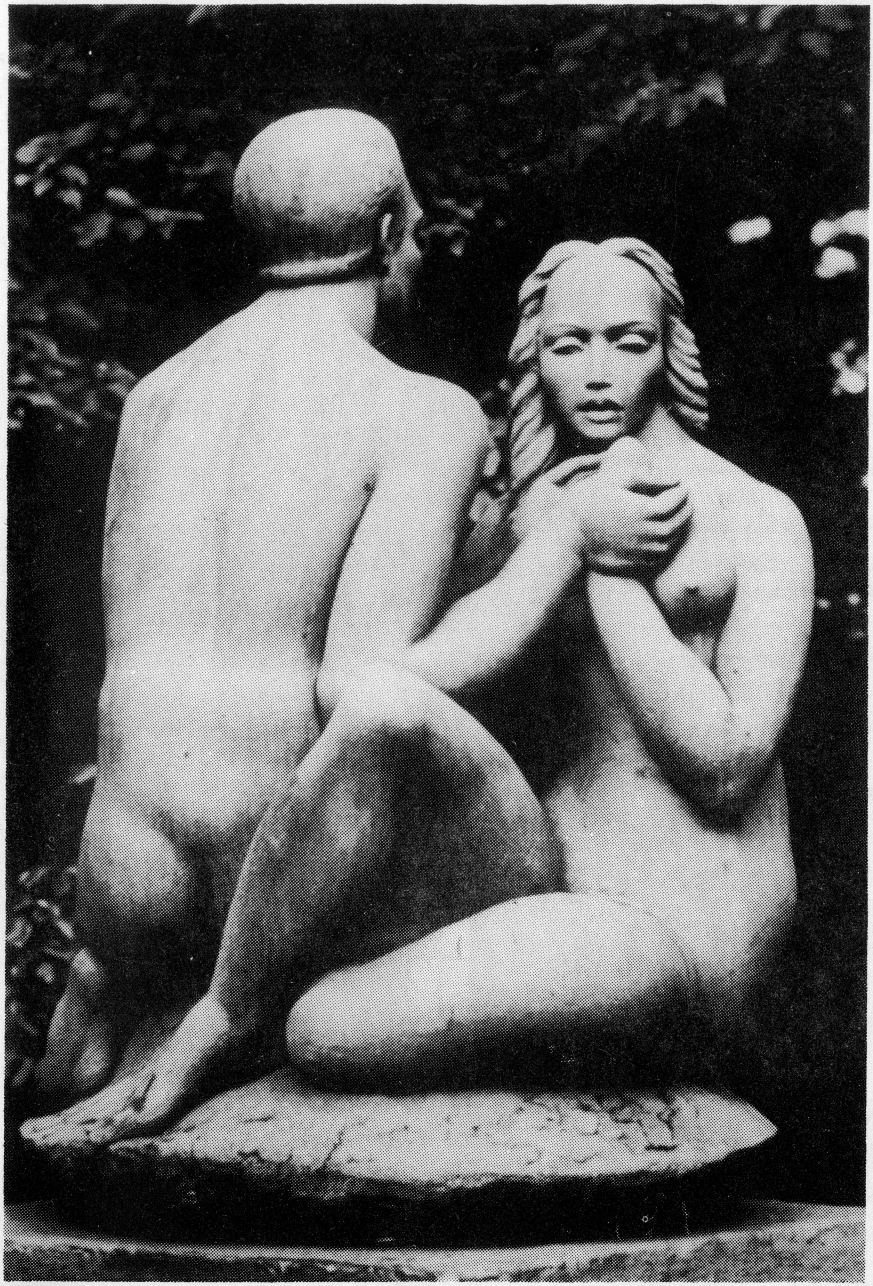
And flashcubes, instant photos, some blurred
and some too revealing, cake slices that aren't
what they were meant to be. The bride slept

through much of it, and never did we figure out
who was on whose team. I think the groom
meant it in the end when he said, "We never

thought anyone would come." We were not the first
to arrive, nor the last to leave. Who knows,
it may all turn out for the best. And who

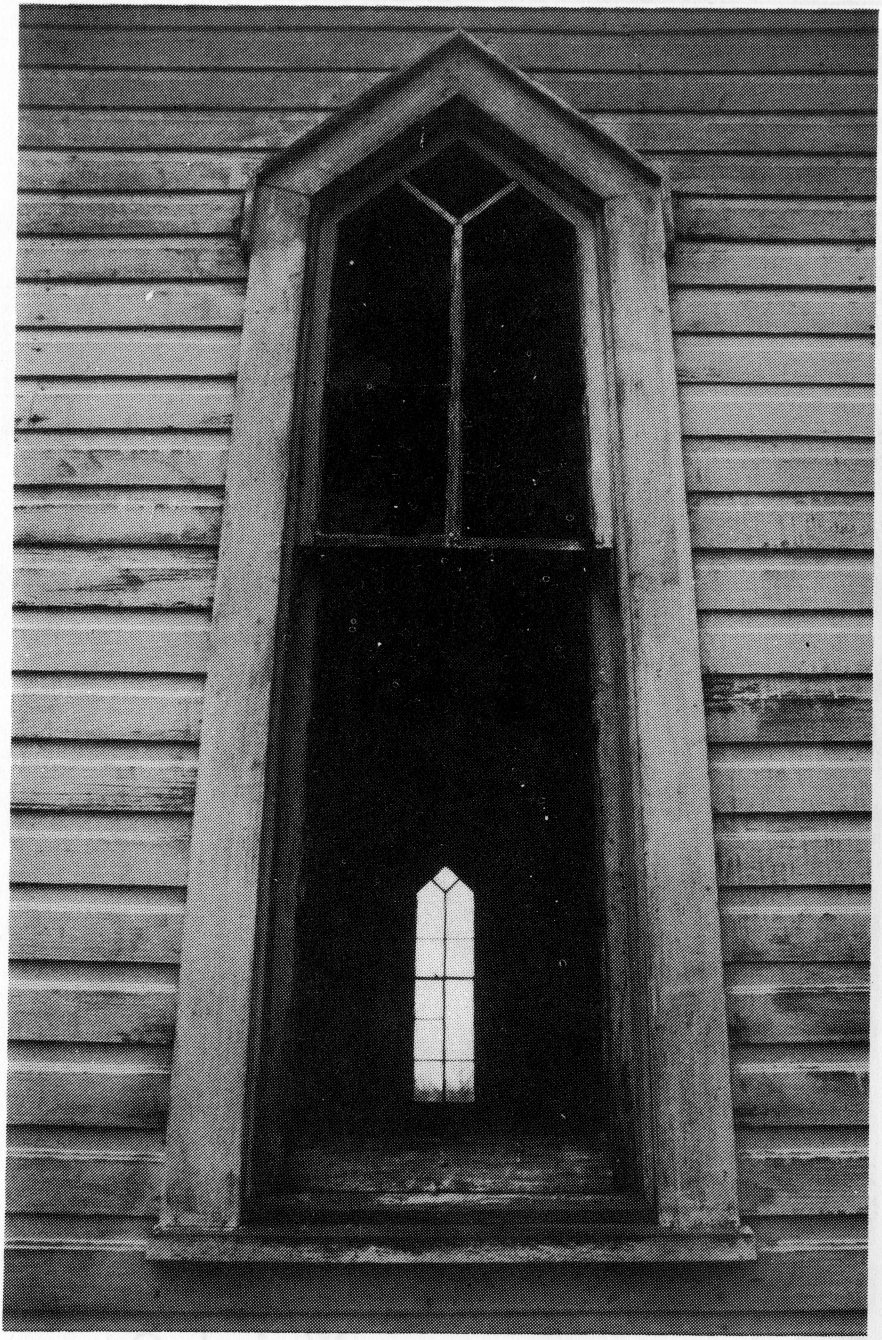
really cares about such special days, they
are not what we live for.

James Tate



The Seed
[Ceramic Sculpture, 1935]
Norman S. Trouw, Photographer

Waylande Gregory



Max Good, photographer

Mt. Zion Church, Labette County

Memories from Childhood

I REMEMBER THE FIELDS
of Kansas and the laws

that made
them flat and bare

I know when and where
the fieldmouse died.

I watched the rivers tried
for treason

then laid straight,
and the cottonwood and oppossum

placed upon the grate
of petroleum civilization!

I
go

back, in my mind,
to where I came from!

Michael McClure

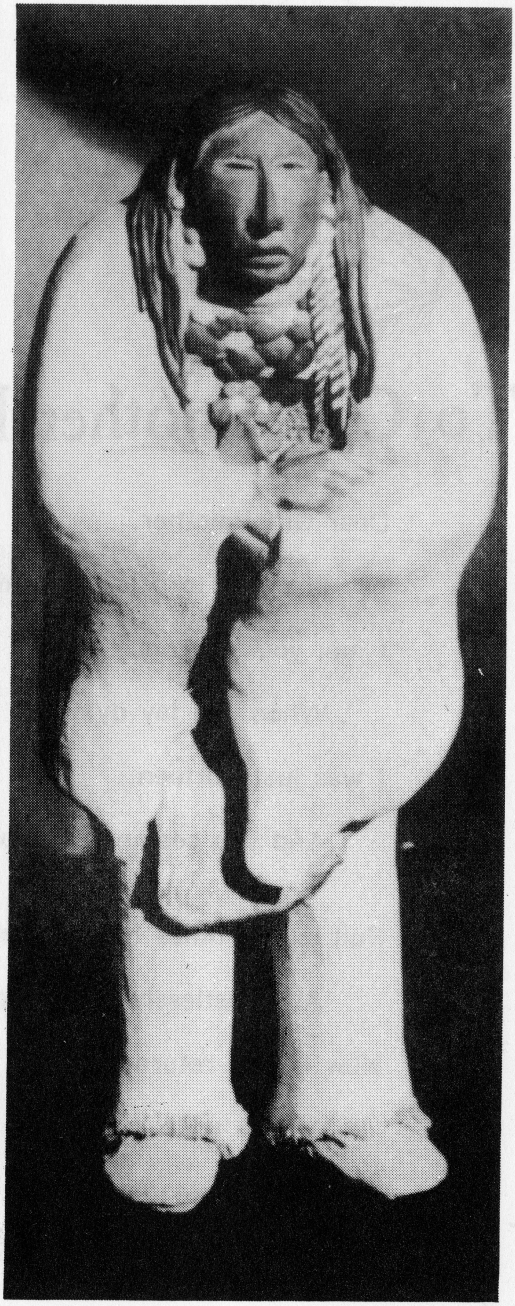
Grandmother

Grandmother, I
will trade you
three years for that quilt.
So afterwards, I can wrap myself
and listen
to your voice again.

The fire, dim
and crackling, the clock
above the stove ticking.
Outside, a cold November wind
creaks through the sills.

My sister cries in her sleep,
a cough as damp
as the croup itself,
and the spell
is broken.

Al Ortolani



Ceramic Sculpture, 1978
Ted Watts, Photographer

Bill Glass

To Grandmother Penny Jessye

Dear Grandmother,

Sleeping in a lonely grave,

I met you only once:

When you lay dying.

I was just thirteen

And you seemed ages old.

Full eighty times have the seasons changed

As I restlessly the world ranged.

Now I have returned home

To the wide plains and the open sky

Where you, sleeping, lie.

Do you know I am here?

Eva Jessye

Ted Watts, Photographer

During my second term in college I was called to the bedside of my paternal grandmother Penny Jessye. She, at the venerable age of eighty years, had been stricken with an illness all knew to be her last. On the morning I arrived I found some eight or nine women sitting around her bed. There lay the wasted form of what had been a woman of gigantic stature.

I had never seen my grandmother before and I stood gazing on the calm, set face which already bore an expression no longer human. The end was only a question of moments.

Suddenly, her eyes opened as if in response to a mysterious call. Their gaze roamed searchingly around the room until they rested on me. A smile of inexpressible joy lighted up her face as she murmured "So like, so like," referring to my resemblance to my father. He was her favorite son and she had not seen him for many years.

I knelt by the bedside and she spoke weakly. She stroked my bowed head and in a faint whisper began singing a weird air the words of which I could scarcely understand. The weight of her hand grew heavy and the voice quavered into silence. Some kindly soul lowered the pillows and her spirit ebbed its way to the Heaven her eyes of faith had long beheld. Most of my grandmother's history is lost. It is, however, known that she was a full blooded South African and spent almost thirty years as a slave in Louisiana. After being freed she lived in Texas and Oswego, Kansas.--Eva Jessye, My Spirituals (New York: Robbins-Engel, Inc., 1927), p. 72.

Honey in December

She must be all of eighty,
That widow who follows the pale long box
And mourns before the world her husband's passing.

If she loved him
Then she has lost everything.
But if she did not love him

She has lost more,
For flowers do not grow in winter
And bees do not make honey in December.

Bertie Cole Bays

Heritage

by Zula Bennington Greene

A popular debate topic argued waggishly at our school "literaries," but never to a decision, was "Which is more useful, a horse or a cow?" Psychologists have mulled over the question of which contributes more to a child's personality, heredity or environment, and that has never been settled either.

With the exception of a trip to Oklahoma to visit relatives, I was never as much as twenty miles from home until I was fifteen. These early years were lived in our little world of home, farm, school, church, relatives, and neighbors, almost as remote from the outside world as if we had been enclosed in a great bubble. Those whom I knew best and saw oftenest were closely related to me and it was by them or through them by inheritance or companionship, that my life was formed.

I grew up feeling safe and secure, feeling myself at the center of our little world, certain that whatever I needed would be supplied. In our simple life I found few things to need or want. We were an entity in ourselves, shut away from the outside world, not even a telephone in the early years.

My father was a restless man. An air of melancholy hovered about him, sometimes a quiet wistfulness, sometimes a remote detachment. He was lean and in summer so deeply tanned that his intensely blue eyes looked like turquoises in a terra cotta setting. His straw hat left a line across his forehead that marked the end of the tan. His high cheek bones were emphasized by the hollows beneath them.

"Now, Mag, watch the children and don't let them..." was a familiar line. He didn't want Julia and me to wash dishes standing by the stove; our dresses might catch on fire. He would leave the house with his usual warning, then a short distance away, return and repeat it.

He was born in Indiana, the son of Reuben and Julia Anders Bennington. Reuben's first wife and all but one of their five children died of tuberculosis. Julia was his second wife. They had three boys, John, Jacob, and Frank. Two older children had died. Various causes were assigned--summer complaint, billous fever, or they just died. In later years my Uncle John said, "It was hard to get a child to ten years. About every week a little casket would be hauled through the muddy White River bottom to Tolbert's Chapel. If the mud was deep, men on horses would ride beside the wagon hearse and help pull it with ropes." This may be what my father was seeing when he seemed distant and remote.

The boys were about eight to twelve when they learned that their mother had tuberculosis. Reuben had heard that the new state of Kansas was an invigorating place for the ill, and the family set out in a covered wagon with hopes of health and a new home. They traveled thirty-one days with numerous stops so that Julia could rest. One was to see an old friend who had moved to Missouri, and there they met George and Christina Holley, a circumstance that was to set my inheritance.

The Bennington boys played with the Holley children, Margaret and Laura and several younger ones. The Benningtons also met Martha Bird, Christina's spinster sister. You will hear more of her later.

Reuben took his family on to Kansas and acquired land in Cherokee County. But the climate which the land agent had advertised as salubrious did not heal Julia's lungs. One day the boys came home from school and found their mother lying on the bed, their father in a chair beside her.

Later he told them, "The doctor says your Ma's not going to get well and she wants us to take her home. We'll start back to Indiana as soon as we can get ready."

Many years later a receipt turned up in an old letter. It was dated Feb. 10, 1880, and said: "Rec'd of Reuben Bennington Eighteen dollars in full for burial and care and box for Julia A Bennington, deceased."

Reuben returned to Kansas with the boys, who grew up there and went to a Teacher's Institute. I think it was the place my father loved most. He spoke of Columbus and Hallowell and Ft. Scott with the tenderness a man holds for his first love. Something he kept from those years was a square brocaded silk scarf of pale turquoise given him by a girl, I think a distant cousin. A few years ago my mother gave it to me and I have worn it threadbare.

The old Indiana friend who had moved to Missouri wrote Reuben about a nice single woman there that he would do well to get acquainted with and urged that he come and see her. She was Martha Bird, the sister of Christina Holley whom they had met on the way to Kansas.

A widower of fifty with matrimony on his mind courts fast. Reuben's sons, now grown young men, journeyed to Missouri for the wedding, and lingered when they saw what pretty young women the little Holley girls had become. A photograph of my father at that time shows him standing beside a shock of wheat in a studio in a fur hat that might have come off a

Coldstream Guard, a young man with a serious face, high cheek bones, and questioning eyes. A picture of my mother at about the same time shows her with hair smoothed from a center part, round gold earrings--she had her ears pierced--and a white lace at the neck of a wool and velvet basque, a young woman composed and unsmiling. Nobody smiled when a picture was being taken.

The wedding of John and Laura occurred soon afterwards and that of Jacob and Margaret a few months later. The two couples started their married lives together in the same house, the house where I was born and in which I grew up. My parents bought the land after John and Laura went to Oklahoma when the "Strip" was opened. Reuben and Martha had a house near us on the same farm. We called them Grandpa and Aunt Martha. She was our great aunt.

When I was four or five I would walk down to their house, along the narrow clayey road between the woods and the rail fence that enclosed the pasture. Papa didn't want me to walk through the pasture. I might fall in the pond.

"Grandpappy"--the name he called himself to us--would be sitting in his hickory rocker made by Hugh Harper. It was not a comfortable chair. It still isn't. I have it in my home now, but nobody sits in it. The slatted back rises at a right angle to the seat, originally woven hickory bark, now replaced by twine. Nobody had comfortable chairs. The aged sat out their last years in hard rockers, with at best a pad of cloth between bones and wood.

Grandfather would take me on his lap and doze off, his long beard rising and falling with each breath. I looked into the fireplace, saw the flame attack the wood, charge it, surround it, and devour it until it surrendered and fell in burning coals. I would rather have been in the garden with Aunt Martha or combing her hair, but I was afraid if I moved that I would wake him.

Aunt Martha was a short, mousey, plumpish woman. She wore steel-rim glasses and calico dresses tied in with a long apron, though she really had no waistline. She would sit in a straight chair on the opposite side of the fireplace and let me comb her long brass-colored hair, which she wore pulled back from a center part and knotted in the back. She had never learned to read, which may be why she was quiet and serene. A person can get awfully upset by reading.

Life in their three-room house centered around the fireplace. A Waterbury weight clock stood in the center of the low mantel. On Aunt Martha's side was a pin cushion and whatever sewing or knitting engaged her at the time. On Grandfather's side were his two corncob pipes, one plain and one polished. After he finished smoking he would knock the ashes into the fireplace and lay the pipe away. His two canes leaned against the side of the fireplace, a Sunday cane turned out in oak and an every-day cane that was halted on its way to being a stout young hickory tree.

On the bed in the bedroom was a white counterpane and square pillow shams. On one was the embroidered motto: "I slept and dreamed that life was beauty," with an outline of a sleeping woman. On the other the woman had arisen and was sweeping the floor. It said: "I woke and found that life was duty." On the floor was a home-woven rag rug and in a corner a bureau of dark wood with little drawers on top.

We ate in the kitchen sitting under a large poster of "Our Martyred Presidents," made soon after the assassination of McKinley in 1901. The others were Lincoln and Garfield. We sat at the round table covered with a red checkered cloth. Aunt Martha always cooked something especially good. If Grandpa had a cold I was given a sip of his hot toddy, but not without a few clucks from Aunt Martha.

Reuben was a man of strong opinions which he defended vigorously and volubly. Though a Republican, he was for William Jennings Bryan and free silver. He liked to argue about religion, to speculate on the likelihood of the pearly gates swinging open for the heathen who had never had a chance to be saved. Other topics were infant damnation, the unpardonable sin, and the Second Coming.

One day after working outside he took a chill. His sons were summoned with telegrams--telegrams were sent only when someone was near death--and neighbors came in to "set up all night." Then one December dusk when people had gathered around the fireplace, my mother said to me, "Honey, Grandpappy's gone." I remember standing in the cemetery with my head against her coat watching the lumpy soil being shoveled into the grave and making a hollow sound on the box.

Aunt Martha lived on in the house. She kept a turkey wing to fan the fire and the tail feathers for a duster. She had a white rose in her yard. Everybody had pink roses, but she had a white rose and a white syringa, a red honeysuckle and two red plum trees.

My father liked to read and he was interested in anything that went on anywhere. In the daily paper he came across the picture of a woman in a dress cut very low in the back. He showed it to my mother while making mild noises of disapproval of such scandalous exposure, then added, "But she does have a nice plump back."

He sat in the rocking chair, a large plain, "store-boughten" comfortable chair padded with home-made cushions. He wore blue chambry work shirts that my mother made, and trousers several sizes too large, held up with suspenders. For Sunday he wore a light colored shirt without a collar--the collar was supposed to be attached with collar buttons, but he hated collars and ties. He had no celluloid collars, the wash and wear of the period. He didn't like bought underwear, wanted my mother to make it. She made him long drawers and a shirt with long sleeves, the shirt buttoned part way down. These were for summer. For winter the same design was made in red flannel. Shirts with a band but no collar are in with a certain class of enlightened young men in the moment this is being written.

This is my family. My father and mother, Jacob and Margaret Holley Bennington. My sister Julia, with hairbow, is standing beside my mother. I am at right, my brother George in the middle. Taken about 1915. **ZBG**

We all sat by the heating stove, Papa and Mamma reading or knitting, children doing their home work or playing. I often stood and combed Papa's hair. I liked to comb hair and if I had been growing up at a different time I might have been a hair dresser instead of a newspaper columnist. Papa liked to have me comb his hair, but Mamma couldn't stand for me to touch hers, said she was "tender-headed."

Presently my father would glance at the clock standing on the wall shelf on the other side of the stove and say it was time to be getting ready to go to bed. The stove was near a wall, making a cozy warm place to dress and undress when the weather turned cold. One of my earliest memories is watching my father wind the clock, a Waterbury weight clock with a painting on the door of a little girl in a blue dress holding a basket of flowers.

The clock now stands on my mantel, where it still ticks away the hours. I wind it every night with the brass key that has survived these many years. I can't say that it keeps perfect time. It runs a little ahead of Greenwich Observatory, but it hasn't slowed down as much in its time as I have.

Sitting at the center are my maternal grandparents, George W. and Christina Bird Holley. The youngest child, Sam, is on his lap. Sitting at far left is my father, Jacob Bennington, holding Julia on his right knee and me, Zula, on his left. Standing behind him, one hand on his shoulder and on her father's shoulder, is my mother, Margaret. The others are her sisters and brothers, except the man sitting far right, who is the husband of the woman standing behind him, who is Etta. The two tall men at back are, from left, Will and John. Next to my mother is Selden and next to him in a striped dress is Nora, the youngest of four girls. Missing are Laura and her husband, John Bennington, a brother of my father. They went to Oklahoma. Taken about 1896.

ZBG

If we had known the word we would have called our Grandfather Holley a patriarch. George Washington Holley was a tall, slightly stooped, rangy man whose thick sandy beard gave his face a square look. He was called Judge Holley, the title then given to county commissioners. He inspired respect and some awe. A man not much given to talk, he was more likely to listen, but when he did speak it was a considered opinion. He was not demonstrative and rarely took a grandchild on his lap, but he was fair and just and kind. In a time of parental harshness, he managed his four sons and four daughters without lifting his hand or his voice. His only punishment--my mother, the oldest of the eight, said--was requiring a misbehaving child to "toe the line," an equivalent to being stood on the floor at school.

On his rich creek bottom farm he and his family provided their own living and their own security. They spun and wove wool from their own sheep for the family's clothing, including his trousers, which his wife

sewed and lined, by hand since she had no sewing machine. One year my mother was kept out of school to weave linsey for dresses. She said they mixed in the wool from a few black sheep to give the cloth a salt-and-pepper look.

Grandmother Holley, who was born Christina Bird, wove bedspreads from intricate patterns brought from Tennessee a generation before. The settlers in that part of Missouri had, soon after the Revolutionary War, crossed the mountains and the Mississippi and stopped when they saw hills that reminded them of home. Grandmother Holley had not learned to read or write, and there was no diversion that took her from her housework. During twenty years she bore ten children. Two died in childhood of typhoid, but eight grew up, married, and had children. She wore a perpetual look of anxiety, or it may have been weariness, which seemed a kind of fretting foothill against the silent mountain strength of her husband.

Both smoked corncob pipes, but none of their children ever smoked. It was not unusual for older women to enjoy a puff of tobacco, but it was done more or less privately. Grandmother Holley carried her pipe in her apron pocket, a long gathered apron worn over a long gathered skirt. Matches were used frugally and one was never squandered when the fireplace was burning, the only heat in the house besides the kitchen stove. Instead a live coal was taken from the fire and placed in the pipe, which she sometimes asked a grandchild to do for her.

George and Christina were called Pa and Ma by their children, and Mr. and Miz. Holley by the children's husbands and wives. Grandchildren called them Grandpa and Grandma. Nobody called them senior citizens.

Now and then my mother would say, "Jake, it's been a long time since I've been home." On a Saturday my father would hitch Fred and Prince to the wagon and we would set out for a visit to Grandpa and Grandma Holley. Papa and Mamma sat on the spring seat and Julia, George, and I on a quilt spread over hay in the wagon box. We rattled over rocky roads, passed through timber and arrived at the Little Pomme de Terre (pronounced locally pummel de tar). The first sign of the creek was a glimpse of white sycamores; then a turn brought us dramatically to the crossing. As he drove into the steam and stopped to allow the horses to drink, my father would point to the right and say, "In there it would swim a horse," and it was easy to imagine we were drifting with the moving water down to the deep hole and doom. The high drama of the trip was the long steep curving hill that took us down to the valley of the Big Pomme de Terre. Approaching it gave us the feeling of nearing the cave of a dragon.

We arrived unexpected, but were met with the usual "Get out and come in." The men took the horses to the barn and the women and children went into the house. The spring seat was carried in and placed in front of the fireplace, where a pot of beans was boiling.

Our arrival was the cue for other brothers and sisters who lived near to assemble for supper, some to spend the night. Soon the kitchen was filled

with women and words and the main room with men and silence. After the men exchanged news they found nothing worth saying and felt no compulsion to say it.

After supper the youngest uncles and aunts would play "blindfold" with the children. Our youngest uncle, Sam, who was a baby when my mother married, was so near our age that we thought of him as a cousin. What delight it was to play blindfold, the smell of coal oil burning, the flickering lights--children were warned to watch out for the lamp--flying shadows as players slipped to safety, squeals of excitement when one was caught, bursts of laughter when the wrong name was called.

Sometimes ghost stories were told. Nobody really believed in ghosts, but they had grown up with superstitions. They would have said it was nonsense, but why invite trouble by opening an umbrella in the house or carrying a hoe indoors. A good many planted and harvested and weaned the young, including their own, when the signs were right.

Stories were told about "death lights," about a girl who saw a ball of fire the evening a neighbor died, and about a family on the way to visit a sick relative who "saw the light" as they approached and knew the end had come. Some claimed to have seen blue lights over a new-made grave, and it was said that if one wore new clothes to a funeral, a member of his family would die within the year. In some homes where a person had died, mirrors were turned to the wall. Most women believed in pre-natal "marking" of a child, and every birthmark or "strawberry" was accounted for.

Children listened in shivering fascination and went to bed with visions of figures rising from their graves and lights and groanings and swishings of supernatural creatures. We pulled the covers over our heads, snuggled against each other and talked in whispers.

Housekeepers were never upset by overnight company. A dozen to twenty often slept at my Grandfather Holley's house. To begin with, each bed, like the amoeba, divided into two. The featherbed was laid on the floor to make a bed while the strawtick remained to do service on the bedstead. Pallets were spread for children, who could be placed sideways in lots of half a dozen.

After supper the women began planning who would sleep where. An elderly couple or one newly married was given the parlor bedroom and privacy, and the others arranged in the most practical manner--age and sex and size considered. Children played on the beds spread on the floor and were told to stay off those quilts with their dirty feet, or shoes, if it was shoe-wearing weather. If necessary, some of the women slept on the floor, but the men were given a bedstead, even though it was equipped with only a strawtick. Extra quilts and comforters were kept on a broken chair behind the parlor door and covered with a sheet.

Underwear doubled for sleeping, at home or visiting, though women and girls had nightgowns. I doubt that there was a toothbrush in the county, and none of us had ever seen a dentist. In those early years of the century most country homes did not have indoor privies, yet these needs were

managed with delicacy and decorum. As to conversation, no swearing or improper words were heard and this included mention of any garment not visible or any mention of sex, at least not within the hearing of the children.

A houseful of overnight company was fun, though I have sometimes been glad that I experienced it as a child and not as a housekeeper. But whenever I hear of company being taken to a hotel "because we don't have a guest room," I think of Grandma Holley spreading down beds all over the house.

Additional relatives might arrive for Sunday dinner, making too many to sit down at the same table. Children ate at the second table, sometimes the third. First to be seated were the men, beginning with the heads of family. The surest sign that a young man had reached adult status was to be seated at the first table, but a young woman waited for that honor until she was married. A newly wedded wife sat at the first table with her husband, often the only woman there. The women ate at the last table, lingering to taste and talk.

The life of a man might not be easy, but he had standing. No man was ever asked to eat at the second table or sleep on the floor.

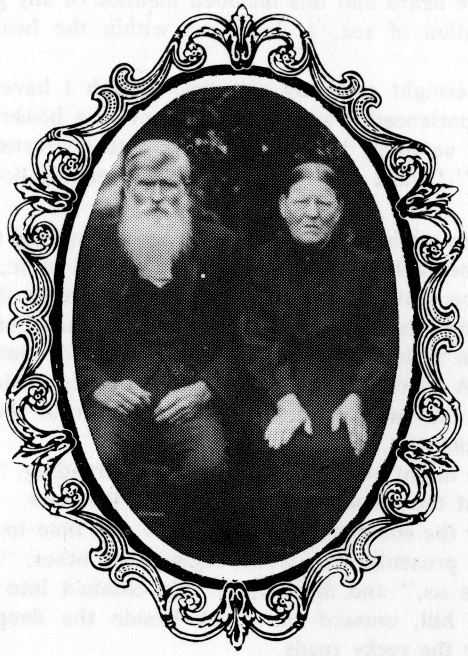
Soon after dinner the company began saying it was time to be thinking of going home, and presently they went, urging each other, "Now you all must come and see us," and meaning it. We climbed into the wagon, wound up the big hill, crossed the creek beside the deep hole, and rumbled home over the rocky roads.

After the death of my Grandfather Bennington a niece of Aunt Martha's, Cora Henderson, came to live with her. Two things I remember about Cora. She had a turned-up-in-front hat with a curled ostrich plume dripping over the brim and she swallowed a pin.

One cold day she wore the hat to Osceola, a town on the railroad about fifteen miles away. A trip to Osceola meant rising before dawn and setting out in the wagon at daylight. Aunt Martha urged Cora to wrap a fascinator around her head, but Cora said it wasn't cold; soon as the sun was up, it would be warm. She set the hat on top of her pompadour, secured it with a couple of long hatpins, put on her coat, mittens, and overshoes, and climbed into the wagon. There were two ways to get into the spring seat of a wagon. You could step on one end of the doubletrees or you could climb up over the wheel. Cora climbed over the wheel.

I was at Aunt Martha's when Cora returned in the early winter dusk. She walked into the house with a little moan, her hands over her ears, her face raw and red from the cold. She sat down in the hickory rocker, bent over and moved back and forth giving out those little moans. Aunt Martha put more wood on the fireplace and hurried to the kitchen to fix supper. No scolding, no clucking, no head-shaking, no reproaches.

The time Cora swallowed the pin, word spread quickly and neighbors came to offer opinions. They thought the doctor ought to be consulted and



George W. & Martha Holley

She is the Aunt Martha who was married to both my grandfathers, and she was a sister of my Grandmother Holley, Christina.

ZBG

somebody rode to town to talk to him. The prescription was a steady diet of mashed potatoes for several days. That taught us all not to hold pins in our mouths.

One day a strange shiny buggy drove up to Aunt Martha's house. Few vehicles passed along our little road and none did without being noted and discussed. Nobody knew whose buggy it was and the tension increased each time it made other trips and it was learned that it belongs to a Mr. Wash Kirby. The next thing the neighborhood knew, he had married Aunt Martha and taken her to his home in Fairfield.

Skipping over a good many years during which Grandmother Holley and Mr. Kirby had died, we find Aunt Martha being courted a third time--by my Grandfather Holley. News of their intention to marry set up a violent reaction among his stunned children. Marrying his dead wife's sister! Highly inappropriate, if not downright scandalous. But they were married and lived more happily than either could have alone.

When I was a grown woman and married I visited them. She did the cooking and housework and looked after the chickens, as she had always done.

"He's failing," she said to me. "A man with nothing to do fails fast."

She had traveled down to the grave with two husbands, had ministered to their needs, comforted them in pain, and softened the pangs of dissolution. I don't remember that I ever knew of her being sick, but one day word came that she had died.

Though she pulled her hair back in a tight knot, wore plain dresses, and never owned a beauty aid in her life, Aunt Martha was a memorable woman. At a time when it was conspicuous for a woman not to have a husband and at least one child by the time she was twenty, she went serenely on her virginal way until she was twice that age.

Her mother had died and left a large family of children and when her father brought home a stepmother with a brood of her own, things did not go well in the mixed household. Martha and an older brother rented a farm and made a home for their younger brothers and sisters. In time they all married and Martha was left alone.

Her three marriages were sudden and a surprise to her closest relatives, and a woman's kin, particularly her female kin, are not slow in getting wind of such plans. My great aunt by blood relation, she was married in turn to both of my grandfathers. All lie in the little graveyard at Shiloh church. She is buried beside my Grandfather Bennington, her first husband, though it says on her stone that she was the beloved wife of G. W. Holley--a husband always got his name of his wife's tombstone but her name did not appear on his. Grandfather Holley is buried beside Christina, his wife of many years.

Aunt Martha had no children of her own, but many children loved her. She was quiet and neat and frugal and faithful and industrious, and always saved the turkey wings to sweep the hearth and the tail feathers for a duster.

Mural Element From:
"Indian Immigration" ©1976
Courtesy of the State of Oklahoma

Charles Banks Wilson

William Stafford

Saving Things

In shabby boxes in the attic I have
saved old pictures, torn ones they threw
away when my mother died in "The Home"
during the war, a yellowed print
of my father--skinny, with sleeve-garters on,
like the others who worked at American Express--,
a large impassive woman holding
a watering can--Grandmother Mayher--,
someone holding a fish caught in Wyoming
at a picnic Uncle Bert had, the Super-Chief
when it carried President Harding to Newton,
and old Grandpa, hiding his evil thoughts
in his mustache, his face stealthily ready
to peel from the page and float down the stairs
and press every night its stern look against mine.

Coming Back to Kansas

1.

I smelled the river, no one there, a sound
like someone listening and sighing. I saw the clouds
becoming themselves because it was morning and a wind
spoke vaguely westward for rain. I heard stillness
under the earth, a dark, inward room
filled with ore and patience to be found. The whole
round world I felt, swooning through all of space
and held steady in the force of its being--a tremendous blind
dream that I had to ride in and understand.

2.

Friends, I dream about you. You change your
names, and I am afraid to ask about your wives
or husbands. Often I forget your names anyway.
Once a whole group of you turned old and began
to argue about war--you all liked it. Unspeakable
things happen sometimes--you know, what are called
realistic. We just laugh and go on. Once
my best friend of all--singing all the while--
was threatening to kill me. It seems our lives are too dull
and by dreaming we are trying to catch up with something.

3.

Trees trying to see which one can be stillest
wait by the meadow in the morning till a bird
says, "Now!"--and they all sing about today
but how nice it was before when your parents lived here;
and the colors then were even better. There is always
one tree happier than the others because more birds
alight there and pretend to be alive like leaves
in wind. It is good to be rich in the morning before
work, and to sing about breakfast. I like it then.

4.

Sometimes you'd die laughing. They have presented you
with a plaque that tells why you lived. You can't understand
it, but in trying to thank them you begin to remember old
stories--how you intended your days to be clear, straight-
forward,
and with people who loved you no matter what you were
like.
You put your forehead on the plaque, and the letters carved
there
burn into your brain. You begin to see both ways
through your eyes, and with that clarity you disappear
into their own idea of you: you look up and say, "Thanks."

A Memorial for My Mother

For long my life left hers. It went
among strangers; it weakened and followed
foreign ways, even honesty and courage. It found
those most corrupting of all temptations,
friends--their grace, their faithfulness.

But now my life has come back. In our bleak
little town I taste salt and smoke again.
I turn into our alley and lean
where I hid from work or from anything
deserving of praise: Mother, you and I--

We knew if they knew our hearts they would blame.
We knew we deserved nothing. I go along
now being no one, and remembering this--
how alien we were from others, how hard we chewed
on our town's tough rind. How we loved its flavor.

A Return to Garden City

By now it's history, how they came in
talking and loud, and they closed the door,
suddenly turning toward me, quiet. Outside
the storm tore at us. You could feel shudders
begin and follow all the way over the roof.
One came forward, surprised--I couldn't tell
if welcoming: "You're back!" The others
looked at each other, and I felt tired--
the long journey in the cold, and now
their surprise. It is history. I hear the trees
leaning over and mocking my journey: "You're back."

That village closed around me and began
to shrink. A group like that--were they
my friends? Would I ally myself with them
against the world? A doubt dropped
its tonnage on my life, and I joined
that spun company, small numbers everywhere,
who find each other by rejection of all
that's just near and superficial. "Wherever you are,"
my thought ranged out, "there must be souls
more saved than this." You trees that lean
where trees are few, I've braced myself
like you for years against what came.

Missionary Meadowlark

Is there a world to
be lost in, but saved if we
listen, Meadowlark?

William Stafford

Weeping at the Brook: A Lebanese Folktale

Collected by Patty Kuhel from Flora Farris

This man and woman, they had a young daughter. And this guy, he liked her and came to call on her and court her, thinking she'd make a good marriage partner. And they talked about it--him and her folks, you know--until they got thirsty and found there was no water in the house. There was a kind of a brook on their property, so the daughter went after water. She took the bucket, and she didn't come back for a long time.

So finally her mother went to see what was keeping her. The girl, she was sitting there crying, and she said, "If I get married and have a child and he come down here, he'll drown." And she went on crying, "O, my poor baby. He'll drown!" And her mama started crying, and she stayed with her daughter and wept.

Well, the Dad went after her. And when he got there, he found they was crying, and he said, "What's the matter? Why are you crying?" The mother said, "Well, if our daughter gets married and she has a babv. when she comes to visit us her little baby might come down here and drown. O, my grandchild! Drowned!" And she wept, and the daughter wept, and the old man started the same thing.

Well, the suitor thought, "I'd better see what's wrong." So he walked down there and they was all crying. And they told him, "If our daughter and you get married and you have a child and he come down here, he'll drown. O, we lost our baby!" And the father wept, and the mother wept, and the daughter wept.

"Well," said the suitor, "I'll tell you: you don't have to worry no more, cause I'm going to get out of here and there won't be no marriage."

Papa In Fredonia

by Charles Cagle

A colleague of mine coined the word "sitter" to describe the kind of student Harry Oliver was--merely one who sits. The conjunctive adverb held no charm for such a plowboy of the Eastern Plains; the dangling participle was as remote from his lusts as cabbage, perhaps more remote. It was Harry Oliver, to make matters clear, who once came to my desk with this conundrum: "If you say, 'Did you both have a pizza?' does it mean two people had one pizza or two people had two pizzas?"

Harry was quite serious with his question. He was also a serious yawner. He yawned in the Communications 101 class in the spring of 1964 at Kansas State College of Pittsburg until I could have poured a vile distillation in his ear. But he came to my real attention--aside from sitting with yawning regularity in the second seat, third row--when he wrote his essay on "Soldier's Home." Some Boston editor had tucked the Hemingway story away in our anthology text between Barth and Updike, but I found it anyway, thinking the absence of what Hemingway once termed "two-dollar" words would be a distinct advantage for my freshmen. I quote Mr. Oliver's essay in full:

> Krebs was a character in the short story by Mr. Hemingway. He didn't have any excitement in his life, and had no future. The fun and excitement he had planned for wasn't there. He made friends with some German girls which made his return hard.
>
> When he got home his outlook on life was blank. He didn't want a job, and didn't date any. He didn't want to go to school either. He said he didn't want a girl because he didn't want to spend a long time trying to get any. His problem was he didn't really know what he wanted out of life. This is why he went to the Pool Hall and the Greek Ice-Cream Parlor. He had nothing to look forward or backward on.
>
> His father and mother worried about him. They hated to boss him, and his mother told him, "I know how weak men are." His

mother asked him to get him a nice girl, but he didn't want to bother. She wanted him to go to work, but he said a job wasn't exciting to him.

And there the essay ended, with a kind of Sartian tone of absurdity, hopelessness, nausea--at least on my part. It was the kind of essay a teacher picks up like a dead rat from under his desk--carefully, distastefully, but dutifully. But it was also the kind of essay one has no trouble in criticizing from the structural and mechanical viewpoints. And structure and mechanics are the last bastions of the academic scoundrel who doesn't want to talk to a Harry Oliver about content.

So I told Harry to make an appointment for the following week by checking the office hours posted on my door. He picked Wednesday morning, and faithfully arrived with his biology book under his arm (they mean business over in Biology) and a blousy, healthy-cheeked, growing-boy look that I had to credit him for, despite myself. They come in from the farms that way sometimes in the small colleges of the Midwest, like six-foot Russian peasant boys down from the hay wains for a dipper of water and a mop of the brow.

"Sit down, Mr. Oliver."

He sat, boldly rippling the metal buttons open on his jean jacket and balancing the biology text on one leg. His eighteen-year-old face still had a bit of baby fat, and his eyes were as blue as any madonna's cloak--and almost, I was sure, as innocent. Eight cans of beer on Saturday nights and possibly going all the way a couple of times with a high school sweetheart does not a jaded youth make.

"Your paper on Hemingway," I began, opening his folder and poking among the red-marked contents until I found the offending evidence, "needs a little work."

He leaned forward as if he actually had it within his power to revise a composition successfully.

"First of all," I said, my face straight, "there's the matter of structure and mechanics."

"Yessir," he said, giving me those blue eyes.

"Spelling," I said, "and sentence structure--you know, the way one puts sentences together. Clauses and phrases in their proper places. You know what a clause is, don't you?"

"Yessir."

"What?"

"What?"

"What?"

"I--I thought I did. Ain't a phrase a kind of clause?"

"No."

"Oh. Is a phrase a word?"

"No."

"I reckon I don't know."

I knew that, of course, but these demanding little tribal dances are a

pattern in the English Department, something to keep the natives from getting restless (I refer to chairpersons and deans). And so, with it accomplished, I got down to what I was sure Harry Oliver would refer to later in the dorm as the grammar bullshit.

I gave him twenty-five minutes of my time, and then dismissed him. It was as he was going out the door that he did two things which amazed me. The first was to bring up the subject of content on his own by saying, "Did I do okay in the essay? I mean, were my ideas and stuff okay?"

"Well. . . it needs better focus, of course."

"I just wondered, because I really tried hard on it. Dad looked at it and liked it. Dad told me to tell you he knows Hemingway." That was the second thing.

"What?" I said.

"He knows the guy who wrote the story."

A pause from me, then: "Hemingway is dead, you know."

It was obvious Harry didn't know that, and he looked a bit flustered--as if I had accused him of the murder. "Oh," he said, numbly, "Dad didn't say anything about that. He said he knew him overseas in the war. They were real close."

"Which war?"

"The Second World War, back in the nineteen-forties."

"Your dad met Hemingway in Berlin or Rome?"

"I think so, yessir."

"Which?"

"Berlin."

"That's very interesting. I'd like to meet your father sometime."

"I'll tell him the next time I go home. We live in Fredonia."

Ah, yes, I thought, fabled Fredonia--no doubt another Unmovable Famine. "And when do you go home again?" I asked, thinking more of Wolfe than Ernest.

"Maybe next weekend, if I can hitch a ride. I hitch a ride to Parsons sometimes with my roommate; then dad meets me half way. It's about eighty-five miles to Fredonia from here."

"Ask your father what Hemingway was doing when he met him in Berlin," I said. "Ask him if Hemingway was shy then about being so bald."

"Yessir, I'll sure ask him."

I was amused with myself for laying such a simple trap for Harry Oliver. I had needed to do that for some time, I told myself, not having had proper practice since the time I baited poor little horn-rimmed Miss Watkins who had turned in a Capote short story ("Miriam," I think) as her own. I had run the plank very far out for that lying, plagarizing little bitch before pushing her to the sharks.

You have to do that with students from time to time, I've always thought.

The Hemingway matter didn't prey on my mind, but it lingered there making a slow little safari in and out of my subconscious. For the following week I alternated between ignoring the yawning farmboy in the second seat, third row, and in concentrating on him almost entirely, wondering if after every class period he might come forward with another dimension of his lie. It had to be a lie, and I knew that even when I dropped by the registrar's office and peeped into his file: his father, Harold John Oliver, was a native Kansan, a wheat farmer, and in his mid-forties. There was nothing in Harry's file, of course, about his father's background, how he might have fought hand in hand from Rambouillet to the Place de Concorde, dodging shells from a German 88, and then sharing a bottle of Calvados with his pal, Ernest Hemingway.

One day Harry did stop by my desk as he was leaving, wishing to have the assignment explained to him personally, since the three in-class attempts I had made had not registered.

"Did you ask your father about Hemingway?" I asked.

"Who?"

"Ernest Hemingway, the writer. You said your father knew him."

"Oh, nossir. I guess I forgot."

"But you will ask him? I'm very curious to know about Hemingway's bald head."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot."

End of conversation. But not the end of the matter, merely the end of something, as Hemmy would have said.

The next weekend, as I later surmised, Harry had hitched a ride to Parsons with his dorm-mate, and when he came up to my desk after the Monday morning class it was obvious he had not forgotten his professor's request.

"Dad said you and him must not be thinking about the same Hemingway."

"Oh?"

"He said the Hemingway he knew wasn't bald. He said he did have a moustache, and maybe that's what you were mixed up about."

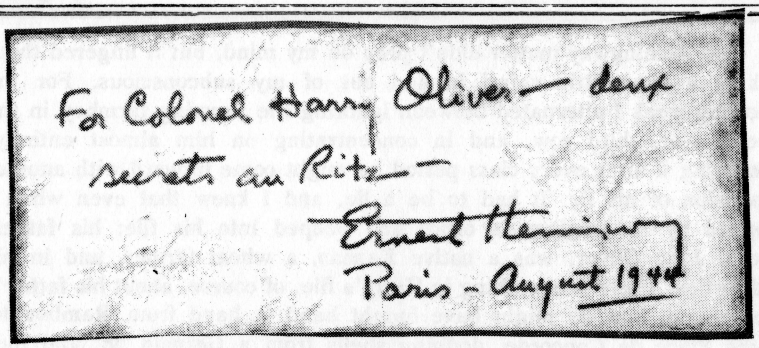
"Moustache, eh?"

"Yeah, and he wore army glasses, dad said."

"Steel-rimmed ones, you mean? Round eye pieces?"

Harry shrugged and shifted on his big, boyish feet. "I dunno. Dad just said army glasses. He said Hemingway was a big guy. And dad told me to show you this."

With that, Harry handed me a small piece of thin cardboard, tattered around the edges and soiled--as if it had been carried in a billfold for a long time. It was a rectangular piece of cardboard on one side of which were a couple of printed words in French, and on the other side something which absolutely electrified me, a written message which signaled to the holder of it the same supernatural magic as the fingernail parings of a saint:



I stared at the scrap of cardboard, memorizing the large, open hook of the Y in Harry, and the single line through the T of Ernest and H of Hemingway.

I finally glanced up at Harry Oliver, Jr. "Where--I mean how--"

"Dad said Hemingway wrote that for him in a hotel. Oh, yeah, it wasn't Germany. Dad said it was in Paris, France, close to the end of the Second World War."

"Your father was a colonel?"

Harry grinned. "Nossir, he was a corporal. He said he guessed Mr. Hemingway just had a sense of humor."

I glanced again at the cryptic message written in French in Hemingway's measured hand. "Do you know what this says, Harry?" I held it out for him to read. He shook his head.

"It says two secrets in the Ritz," I said. "Do you know what the secrets were?"

"Nossir, I don't."

"Do you mind if I keep this until class tomorrow?"

Harry looked only momentarily dubious. "Nossir, it'd be okay."

After class I took the piece of cardboard by the Dean's office and used the Vari-fax to run a copy of it, then back upstairs I put the original in a safe place in my desk and tucked the copy into my own billfold. Then I called Ralph Hooten over in the library and asked him if he could scout up an example of Hemingway's handwriting. I told him a signature or anything else would help--but I didn't tell Ralph why I wanted it. Already in the back of my mind was a bubbling pot called publish or perish. I had been perishing for the past two years; the only thing I'd been able to get into print was a book review for the local paper and one lousy poem in the Kansas Quarterly. But here was something promising, a little bit of Papa Hemingway in Fredonia, and I knew it would make some kind of an article for somebody. I didn't want to blow any whistles or light any bonfires until I was very sure of both the authenticity and source of the note, and until I had found out what the titillating secrets were.

When I saw Harry the next day in class I already knew the truth: it was Hemingway's handwriting and his signature. I detained Harry at the door to return the cardboard. "When do you go back to Fredonia?" I asked.

"When I can hitch a ride to Parsons," he said.

I swear to God there was a tremble in my voice as I said, lying magnificently, "As it happens I have to run over to Parsons myself next Saturday morning--could I give you a lift?"

"Hey, you sure could. Would you wanta talk to Dad then about Hemingway?"

"It's a thought, Harry."

That evening I told my wife Katie about the prospects of publishing a small bit of literary Americana.

"What would a wheat farmer know about Hemingway?" she asked, blunting my dream as easily as she tossed the salad.

"Why not? Maybe he's a literary-type farmer--like Thoreau."

"Sure," Katie said. Nice, nice Katie.

The following Saturday morning I got up early and gassed the car. Then I drove by Trout Hall to pick up Harry. I had asked him to meet me in the lobby, but he wasn't there. I asked the sophomore at the desk to page him in his room, and the answer wasn't long in coming. Harry Oliver had not yet arisen. I cooled my heels for thirty minutes in the lobby on an imitation leather sofa with broken springs. Appropriately enough, I read a battered, six-month-old Field and Stream, throughout which some adolescent pornographer had scrawled penises on every figure in the magazine, and even on some of the fish.

When Harry appeared, sleep-puffed with a baseball cap on top of his thick brown hair and a scratched tin suitcase in one farmboy hand, he seemed only distantly aware of the inconvenience he had caused me. He did mutter hello, however.

Then it happened--or rather, it happened thirty miles into the fifty-mile trip to Parsons. Harry had napped a little, his mouth open, his strong young fingers curled together in his lap. Then, when he roused, he off-handedly broke the news.

"I called home last night. Dad ain't meeting me in Parsons. Mom said she would."

"Oh," I said, trying to keep the rage out of my voice.

"Is that okay, sir?"

I shrugged. "Well, I did want to talk to your father about Hemingway, of course."

"But you said you have to go to Parsons, anyhow."

"You're right."

I had a Machiavelli on my hands, I decided.

When we got to Parsons, I had a cup of coffee with Harry in the cafe where his mother was due to pick him up. I did manage to get a little background on his father. Harry told me how his mom and dad were already married when his dad went off to the army during the Second War, and how he, Harry, had been born while his dad was still overseas. His dad had been in the Normandy invasion, or some segment of it, and he had fought in both France and Germany. When he had come back from the war, he'd gone right back to work on his dad's farm, and now it was

his farm--and last year they did a pretty good year with wheat, oats, and soybeans.

"Does your father read very much, Harry?"

"Nossir, he reads the newspaper on Sundays."

"But no books?"

"Mom does. She belongs to the Reader's Digest bookclub."

We were interrupted a few moments later by a tall, pallid woman who came up to our booth. It was obviously Harry's mother--same blue eyes, same nose-curve, except that the years had elaborated on that small sullenness which was only hinted at now in Harry's youthful face. His mother had it all right there, pinched and slightly beaten into the expressionless humor of her mouth.

I clambered out of the booth when Harry made awkward introductions, and I offered to buy Mrs. Oliver a cup of coffee. I could tell she didn't really want anything to do with me, that she was a little frightened of me, but she sat down on Harry's side, shy as a fawn.

I got very little out of Harry's mother. Each time I directed a question toward her, she smiled uncomfortably and looked at her son. This both annoyed me and gave me courage, and before the end of the visit, I simply told her that I would like very much to meet her husband and talk to him about his wartime meeting with the great American writer, Ernest Hemingway--and if my wife and I might come by their farm some weekend when we were out driving. I didn't mention the secrets.

"It's eighty-five miles to Fredonia from Pittsburg," Harry gallantly reminded me.

"You'd be more than welcome," Mrs. Oliver said--modestly, but I believe sincerely.

"Would next weekend do?" I asked; then to clinch it I offered to give Harry his needed hitch--this time all the way. I did say that if it would be interfering too much with Mr. Oliver's farm work, then to forget it.

"Harold likes to have company sometimes," Mrs. Oliver said, then added, "you'll be welcome to eat dinner with us, if you want."

When I told Katie later that day she was less than enthusiastic. She very nearly backed out, but I told her how it was her damn duty to further my career. I told her she could keep Mrs. Oliver busy while I got Harold Oliver alone for a talk.

"So he can tell you his secrets," she sneered.

"Maybe he will, and maybe he won't."

"He won't, because he won't have any secrets to tell."

"Intuition?"

"Crass logic."

"We'll see, dream-breaker."

The next weekend was ideal, one of those Kansas spring days when the sky is a glaucous blue and the green buds are rioting. But it was also a day when I woke up with a sadness in my gut, something about the tragedy of Hemingway hanging over me like a pall. I wondered how many thirty-two-year-old English professors like me had cut their teeth on those

Michigan woods stories, who had sat as I had sat when I was Harry's age in a literature class (the University of Oklahoma for me) and had assigned to them The Sun Also Rises, and who found a new green-breasted world in the sharp, crisp, personal-impersonal prose, who began at that moment a barrel-chested romance with another man, and who felt like an orphan on that day in June of 1960 (at still another University, this one Iowa, working on a Masters) when the radio voice said that Ernest Hemingway was dead at sixty-one. An accident involving a gun. I didn't believe it then, and nobody else I knew believed it: there was no accident involved when a man like Hemingway loses his entire cranial vault to a shotgun. That would have been fakery, mockery.

He was on my mind that morning as Katie and Harry and I drove west toward Fredonia, and I even brought along a college bookstore copy of the just-published A Moveable Feast to give to Harold Oliver, and empty gestures be damned.

We didn't go through Parsons; instead we drove north to Arma, then west for a straight shot to Fredonia. We passed through the little towns that had the same foreign ring as the villages and hamlets Hemingway put into his fiction--St. Paul, Urbana, Altoona--and periodically I tried to kindle some of my spill-over enthusiasm in the brain of Harry, lounging in the backseat with his tin suitcase beside him.

"Hemingway was about your age and size, Harry," I said, calling the information over my shoulder while I drove and while Katie browsed over a short story in an old New Yorker.

"He was, sir?"

"I mean when he lived in Kansas City, and worked for the Star as a cub reporter. He went from there into the Italian army to drive an ambulance. He got wounded when he was about your age. That was in the First World War, Harry."

"I'll be dang," Harry said. "I'd like to see the world."

"He carried some of the shrapnel with him to his grave," I said. "He said he used to have to write standing up because the old war wounds gave him trouble."

On that Katie gave me a dull look that told me I was romanticizing again. Katie had never cared for Hemingway. She said he knew about as much about women as a camel driver, and cared less. She had once told me that anybody who would talk about somebody he was supposed to love the way the narrator had talked about his wife in "The Snows of Kilamanjaro" was either a nance or a first-class bastard. It didn't do any good to remind Katie that fiction was fiction. She told me that nothing Hemingway ever wrote was fiction. And I told her that's what she got for being an English major for only two semesters.

"Maybe that's how come Dad met him," Harry said.

"You mean because Hemingway had a soft spot for Kansas?"

"Yessir."

"Could be, Harry. We'll ask your dad about it."

Both of the Olivers came out on the porch of the white farmhouse to greet us, and it was the sight of Harold John Oliver that provided me with my first disappointment of the day. I had expected, I suppose, Ernest Hemingway himself, a strapping, imposing man with broad shoulders and a Teddy Roosevelt smile. Instead, I saw a short, somewhat stoop-shouldered man with thinning red hair and a heavily lined face. His forehead was white as milk, and the lower part of his face--the part exposed to the sun--was burned a marvelous Titian brown, with splotches of rose at the cheeks. Looking back on my first impression of him now, I think I was shocked by how old and Gothic he looked, and how small and insignificant he seemed standing beside his overly-healthy teenaged son.

We shook hands all around, and then Mrs. Oliver said, "You folks come on in and wash up if you want to. I've just got a little more to do in the kitchen."

We hit it off very well, I thought. Like her son, Mrs. Oliver seemed more at ease in her own territory, and I could have awarded Katie a bronze star for mixing in as craftily as she did. She was off in the kitchen with Mrs. Oliver in a flash, leaving Harry and his father and me together in the comfortable but unpretentious living room.

We talked about the weather, of course--that seemed as obligatory on my part as anybody else's--but before anybody had time to yell dinner, I brought up Hemingway.

Mr. Oliver chuckled, flushed a little, and glanced at this son the same way his wife had done that day in Parsons. "Harry give you that piece of paper I dug out for him, eh?" He chuckled again, actually covering his mouth with a rough hand of work-hardened fingers.

"Yes, sir, Harry did. I can't tell you how exciting that was to me. I'd like to write something up about your meeting Hemingway."

He nodded, measuring me. "That happened when I was in the army, y'know. I don't remember a whole lot about it."

There was something about the way he said the last sentence that spelled a dodge to me. I remembered the book I had brought along for him, and I excused myself. I was half startled when he turned up at my elbow just as I was closing the car door.

"I thought you might enjoy this," I said, holding Hemingway's memories of Paris out to him.

He took the book with a distracted glance. Something was bothering him. "While the boy is back inside, professor, could you and me talk?"

"Of course."

"I reckon I made a mistake, letting Harry bring you that piece of paper. What you said back in the house there--that about wanting to write up something--?"

"Oh, that. Well, I only meant--"

"I don't want nothing wrote up about me."

It was my second disappointment. "You don't?"

"Naw."

I wasn't going to let him get away with that, so standing there by my

car in the perfect Kansas sunlight--and with Harry as my ace--I pushed him a little.

"It might mean something to Harry."

He grinned sheepishly, then gave me another one of those measuring looks. I had the distinct impression he was trying to see how much of a regular fellow I was.

"It ain't Harry; it's Helen. It's Harry, too, but not for the same reasons. I worry about how my wife might take it. Helen is real religious, you see."

I felt my heart pound. "There's something you don't want your wife to know about Ernest Hemingway and you?"

"That's right, yessir."

"I--well, Hemingway was--is--a famous man," I said, idiotically.

"That ain't it. I don't care about that part."

"Something just personal, then."

He nodded again. "That man and me traded secrets, that's all. For life. But the boy said you told him he was dead now."

"He died three years ago. He killed himself."

I watched him consider that very seriously. He looked once back toward the farmhouse, as if he expected to see something changed or threatening. But the white, two-story frame house merely glinted in the light. He looked back at me. "I reckon him being dead makes it all right to tell what he told me not to tell?"

It was a moral question, and I took a chance. "Hemingway said someplace that what is moral is what you feel good after doing."

He didn't smile at that, and I didn't, either.

"But I don't want it wrote up," he said, softly. "I'll have to ask you to promise me that much."

Reluctantly, I promised.

After a good chicken dinner, Mr. Oliver let Harry use the family pickup to go into Fredonia to see his girl, a girl still in her last year of highschool. Then, when Katie and Helen Oliver settled down to do the dishes (Katie's idea), Harold and I took our stroll. We walked down to the barn and surveyed some of the Herefords corralled in a half-shaded area near the back of the large, neat barn. Then Harold suggested we go into the barn itself and sit awhile on some bales of hay stacked there. We did, and it took him a long time to tell me what follows.

He went into the army late in 1943, and received the quick infantry training everybody else was getting before being shipped overseas for the invasion of Europe. He was nothing spectacular as a soldier, just did his job and made no trouble. He told me he could have stayed out if he had really wanted to; he was in essential work with his dad, farming, and besides he and Helen had been married almost a year and she was pregnant with Harry when he went in. He'd never been out of Kansas when he became a soldier. He said he just woke up one morning with the desire to do something besides farm before it was too late.

He went through the invasion of Normandy, but not the bad part. The

Germans had high-tailed it, he said, before he really got there, and Paris had surrendered. He didn't know whether he was lucky or not to have been stationed a couple of weeks in Paris instead of being run through like most of the other combat troops. But stationed there he was, and it was only the second day in Paris he met a girl named Nenette Menier (he pronounced the name Knee-net Men-year, with accents on both first syllables). He told me matter-of-factly that it had been easy to pick the girl up and that she had taken him home with her that first night. They slept together in a little attic room above her parents, and he had been a very uncomfortable Kansas farmboy trying to make raw but polite love to her when he knew her mother and father were sleeping down below. But he was also like any other soldier, a stranger in a strange place, and he tried not to think of the Meniers as real people: they were French, and he had the American Army latrine philosophy about the French, believing the girls would do anything with anybody for a few francs.

He said Nenette's father, Jules Menier, seemed like an old man to him, although he was really not quite sixty. But he was sick and coughed all the time as he smoked his pipe; he read the French papers a lot and sometimes played chess with another friend of his. Old Jules spoke not a word of English, nor did his wife, Marie. The mother was a short, fat, good-natured woman who seemed more like a servant-cook in the poor household. She was pleased to have him sitting at her table in his American soldier's uniform, even though she communicated to him through Nenette's very bad English that she was sorry they had nothing but soup and sausage, and that the cheap wine was the best they could manage.

He took the hint, of course, and the next day he brought them a big sack of things he'd bought at the army supply. That made him a legitimate part of the family, and for the next week he slept every night with Nennette up in the attic, growing less and less uncomfortable about whatever noises they made during the long sweet nights.

He said he didn't feel any more guilty than the next soldier about using a French girl that way; he said he knew lots of fellows who did those things, and most of them in a very crude way--just picking up a different girl every night. But in his own mind, he was substituting this French girl with her dark hair and violet eyes for his wife, and he even had the kind of relationship with her that allowed him to feel married. And then, because he was still very young and very far away from his Helen, he fell in love. He said without being able to help himself he decided he didn't want to live without her, and when his unit moved on from Paris he went AWOL. He didn't tell the Meniers about breaking the army's law, he just moved in and became a real part of the family. He figured that whatever it was he felt for Nenette would wear itself out in time, and then he'd catch up with the military, although at the time he simply didn't give a damn about anything but the girl.

Two weeks after he moved in, in late August of 1944, the Hemingway thing happened. He said Nennette's father had been looking at him

strangely for several days, muttering to himself at times and at other times talking furiously and sometimes angrily with his wife. Harold took it personally. Then one day Nenette took him aside in the little garden behind the house and told him what was bothering her father.

The old man had read in the French papers that the famous American writer, Ernest Hemingway, was living at the Ritz--and Jules Menier had something of Hemingway's that he wanted to return, something he had had in his possession for twenty-two years. It was a small valise Jules Menier had stolen from a train compartment at the Gare de Lyon late in 1922, while he was working there as a porter. He had seen the young, well-dressed American woman have her bags carried on, and in an unguarded moment which could not have been more than a few seconds, he had taken the smallest, most important looking valise and smuggled it out of the train under his long coat. He was not a thief, not by heart, but he was a poor man and his wife was at home pregnant, and he needed the money.

There was no money in the valise, only some manilla envelopes filled with papers--typewritten things in English, poetry and prose. The writings of somebody named Ernest Hemingway, worthless to him. He would have thrown the valise away and burned the evidence of his theft, but he made the mistake of letting his good Catholic wife know what he had done, and Marie Menier wept bitterly about it, for his shame and hers and the baby she carried, and so at last he promised to return the valise when he got the chance.

There was an address on some of the envelopes--a flat in the rue du Cardinal Lemoine, and after a time, when he got his courage up, he went to the address and asked about a Monsieur Hemingway. To his vast relief he was told that the young American couple had moved, possibly back to America, and would not return. So he gave up as quickly and easily as he had transgressed, and returned home with the valise. But again his wife prevented him from destroying the manuscripts: a sin greater than stealing, she said, to destroy the work of an artist. And so, with a philosophical shrug, Jules shoved the valise into the attic and let it remain there. His wife could do with it as she pleased, he told her, when he was dead. As for him, his conscience was clear enough--he had done that small criminal act out of love for his wife and the child she carried, and it would all be understood by whatever gods there might be.

But now, more than two decades later, the wheels of time had turned Jules Menier into a different sort of man. He was dying, Nenette said, with a trouble of the lungs--and it had been worse during the German occupation because there was no money for a doctor and no hope of recovery even with a good doctor--and her father had come to know that he, like all men, must die. He wanted to make his peace with Ernest Hemingway, a name which had haunted him all those years, and had become like the voice of God Himself as, bit by bit, newspaper by newspaper, year by year, he had learned that this man was a great man, a winner of the Nobel Prize. It was as if Jules Menier had stolen the soul of

a fellow creature, and he could not have that on his conscience any longer. He wanted the young American soldier to return the valise for him, and to tell the great writer that a nameless old Frenchman begged his forgiveness.

I can't, of course, even begin to tell you the effect this story had on me as I sat on that bale of hay in the shadowy barn. What Harold Oliver was revealing, aside from the personal side of it, was an illuminated page of literary history. I knew all about the missing manuscripts, how Hemingway's first wife--Hadley Richardson--had loaded up, in the winter of 1922, everything her young, unknown husband had written, carbons and all, and had entrained for Lausanne where Heminway was covering the peace conference for the Toronto Star. And how the valise had been stolen even before the train left Paris, and how poor Hadley had made the journey rigid with terror at having to face her Ernest with the news. She had cried her eyes out before telling him, and he had returned to Paris himself not believing she could have put everything he'd written--stories, poetry, a Chicago novel--into one small suitcase and then allowed it to be stolen. But it was true, and the shock of it had driven him to think or almost do something in the middle of that night so terrible he would never reveal it. I knew all of this already, but it was even fresher in my mind because Hemingway had re-told the story in the very book I had brought as a gift to Harold Oliver.

Harry's father gave me very little time to reflect, however, because in his soft, drawling voice he was already telling me about that journey to the Ritz one hot August day in 1944. He had gone very reluctantly, not because of the stolen valise he carried, but because he was an AWOL soldier in uniform, and he knew what it would mean if they caught him. He was doing this thing only for Nenette.

It wasn't easy to see Hemingway, he told me. Nobody would help him at all, and he conveyed to me the boredom and resentment he felt at trying to reach somebody he had never heard of and didn't care about, a man who had written some books he would never read. But he didn't want to risk two trips into downtown Paris, and so he waited until late in the afternoon with still no success. Finally, he scribbled a message on a piece of paper and paid the elevator boy to deliver it. He wrote: I got something which is yours. And foolishly signed it Cpl. Harold John Oliver, Fredonia, Kansas.

To his surprise, Hemingway immediately sent for him and he rode up in the elevator with the valise gripped in his hand. He was shown the room, but even before he could knock the door was yanked open and two men stared out at him. One was a sturdy, dark-haired man who said something in French to the other man beside him--a full-bird colonel. The sight of the colonel scared him more than anything else.

"What do you want, corporal?" the colonel demanded.

"I got something here for Mr. Hemingway, sir."

"Something? What is it?"

"I was told to give it to him, sir."

It was then the broad-shouldered man in army glasses poked his head

between the two and said to the colonel, "What is it? What does the Kansan want?"

"He's got another war decoration for you from Congress, Ernie," the colonel said, grinning. "You want it on your nipple or your butt?"

The big man grunted at that, and looked at Harold for the first time. He took him in with squinting eyes, valise and all. "What have you got, corporal? Never mind these bastards."

"I've got some writing for you, sir," Harold said.

"Christ," the colonel said.

Hemingway looked at the colonel and grunted again, half in amusement and half in mock disgust. "You sound like a goddam editor. Let the boy come in--come on in, corporal."

Harold said he felt very uncomfortable entering the room, and that when he handed Hemingway the small valise he merely glanced at it and put it down on a table, saying, "You drink, corporal?" Then without waiting for a reply, he poured a cognac and handed it to him, then watched how he drank it.

"You did that right, corporal, " Hemingway said. "Anybody but a writer would sip the goddam stuff. Colonels sip their cognac."

"Screw you," the colonel said, smiling.

It went on like that for a few more drinks, Harold said, and he was too much out of his element to refuse the drinks the big man kept pouring for him. He said Hemingway was wearing an open army officer's jacket with the Fourth Infantry Division shoulder patch of four ivy leaves, and that everything about him looked larger than life except his hands. Harold said his hands were small and soft and nervous. Also, he said, nobody paid much attention to him after a few minutes, that he was just part of the room--a sparse room that had only a bed, a couple of chairs, a picture or two, and a GI stove in the fireplace.

Then, finally, the colonel and the Frenchman left. Hemingway saw them to the door, chatted for a few seconds with the Frenchman in French, then closed the door and turned back to Harold.

"Now what the hell are you writing, Mr. Kansas," Hemingway said, a bit gruffly. "If you're not writing about Kansas, then you're wasting your goddam time. Are you writing about Kansas?"

"No, sir, I ain't. I brought you some stuff you wrote."

Hemingway didn't say anything for a moment, then looked at the valise on the desk. Then he slowly put down his cognac glass, sat down and took the valise in his lap. He opened it and took out some of the old manilla envelopes. He looked at the contents of only one envelope before shooting Harold a look that was cold and startled. "Where the fuck did you get this?" he whispered.

Harold told him everything but the name of Jules Menier.

Hemingway listened, turning the manilla envelopes over in his hands looking at this one and that, reading a page now and then, his face sober and ashen. "My God," he said, finally.

"We got drunk," Harold said, shifting his glance toward the barn door as if his wife might have materialized there, the same look he had

given his house earlier out by the car. "He had some champagne, I remember, and we finished that off. He wouldn't let me leave. I didn't wanta get drunk, but I guess I did--and like a goat he got my secret out of me. I've never seen a man so mad, either. He called me names some soldier boys I knew would have killed a man for. But I took it. I knew he was right. I had no business going AWOL. I was afraid he might call back that full-bird colonel."

"And his secret?" I asked, somehow dreading the question.

"It's what I promised not to tell for him, about what he done with the stuff in the suitcase. He burned all of it, right there in the GI stove. He was drunk, I think, but he knew what he was doing--and he wanted me to watch him do it."

I felt a sinking thrill in my stomach, the same feeling I had experienced when the radio announcer told about the thing happening in Ketcham.

"He burnt up everything, and then he wrote down his name on the back of the hotel menu and give it to me. It was later I cut it down to a size that would fit into my billfold."

I was too numbed by the story to say anything, to even consider it possible, and all I could think to ask about was the old Frenchman.

"He said for me to tell the old man to forget stealing the suitcase, that he understood. But he said he didn't ever want to meet him or see him."

"That was all?"

"We drunk a little more, and he wanted to make a toast to Helen. He said he had two boys, and that he hoped I'd have a boy, too."

I thought of Harry.

"But it's something I can't let Helen or the boy know," Harold said. "I mean about Nenette." He paused a second, his mind drifting back. "It wasn't easy, leaving her like that. I got out right in front of the MP's, so nothing really serious ever come of it. It wasn't right for Nenette, though. I just walked off one day."

"She was in love with you?"

He looked away shyly. "She said she did. We both said a lot of things up in that attic. I guess you know how that would go. But I reckon she married somebody after I left. I hope so."

It was on the way back up from the barn to the house that he told the final thing which made me cold again.

"I remember something now, something else. He told me he almost done a terrible thing way back yonder when he was young and that suitcase was stole from his wife. He said when he took a train back to Paris and found out that she really put everything he'd wrote into one suitcase, he said he thought of killing hisself."

"Shooting himself, you mean?"

"Nossir. He told me he got out a butcher knife in the middle of the night. He said he started to castrate himself, y'know. To kill hisself that way to get back at his wife, he said."

"My God."

"Well, he kinda laughed when he told me that, just to see how I'd act, maybe. Right after that he wrote me that note. He said he knew the baby was gonna be a boy, and that he'd grow up to be a colonel even if I hadn't."

The rest of the day was like coming down from outer space for me. I felt a shortness of breath, an intensity about everything I saw and touched, and I'm afraid I made a very bad guest. To be truthful, I have that terrible occupational hazard of the lover of literature, a tendency to feel irrelevent in the presence of the real thing--as opposed to the feeling of importance one gets in the classroom, standing as a chieftain before the printed page. There was something about the very ignorance of Harold Oliver--a man terribly unqualified to have been present at such an event that day in Paris--that made me feel humble and envious and lonely. And I wonder if I could ever have explained that to him. I know it never entered my mind to try. I also will never have the chance to tell him that I have kept all the secrets, and that what I have written after all these years is fiction, just as fictional as anything Hemingway ever wrote. But if I were inclined to speculate, to recapture the past and shape it into someting full of irony and pity, I would add that Harold Oliver died of cancer in 1969, five years after our talk in the barn. His wife Helen continued on with the farm for a little less than a year before selling out and moving to California, to live with her sister. The imaginative speculation, the rounding out of the story with only small omissions (and Hemingway said it was okay to omit something if you knew what you were omitting) would have come from Harry's highschool sweetheart and fiancee, who supplied me with information about the Olivers; we met after she came to college and became friends with Katie and me--a friendship cemented by a mutual interest in, and loss of, Harry.

As for Cpl. Harry, he was killed in 1965 in Viet Nam by mortar fire. He had gone into the army at the age of nineteen, after dropping out of college, and the loss must have fallen like a shadow over that sunlit farmhouse in Fredonia. I wondered what Harry Oliver must have thought in those last months when he was lying in a hospital bed in Kansas City, waiting for the glands and membranes and the skin of his mortal body to yield to a greater secret, just as it had done in another faraway country where French was widely spoken, a country full of monsoons and tropical death--a country of towns with strange names like Vung Tau and Nhatrang?

I never got to tell Mr. Oliver either about that sharpest memory I had of his son, how he ripped open the bright buttons of his jean jacket that spring morning in my office, his biology book balanced on his knee, not knowing or dreaming that Hemingway's old whore was out there, waiting for him in a green jungle.

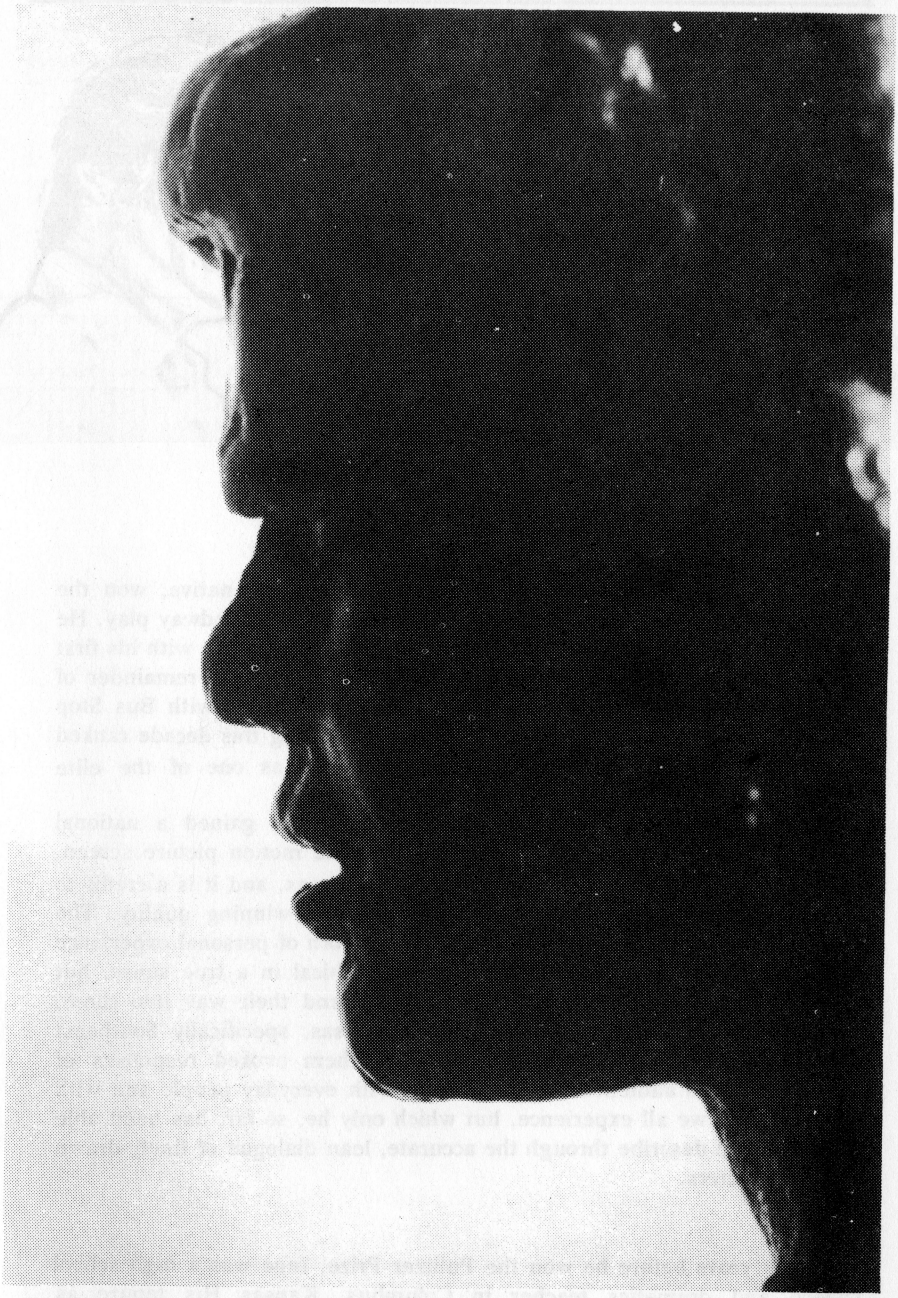
Sending No Postcards Home

We haven't seen Max
since he left for Albuquerque
in the rain.
He was on some grand experiment
to see if he could survive
without knowing.

Brownie, with her canine sense of loyalty,
went along for the ride.
She returned some months later
acting tired or sad--
we couldn't tell which.

We knew she'd lost Max--
but had no way of knowing whether we had.
In such a grand experiment,
we probably won't.

Karen Laskey



Youth
[Clay Sculpture, 1963]
Bruce Daniel, Photographer

William Inge

William Inge: A Year in Columbus

by Shelby Horn

William Inge, playwright and Independence, Kansas, native, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1953 for Picnic, his second Broadway play. He had already captured the attention of the theatre-going public with his first major effort, Come Back, Little Sheba, in 1950. During the remainder of the Fifties, he continued to experience Broadway success with Bus Stop and The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. His work during this decade ranked him with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as one of the elite mid-century American playwrights.

Not only was Inge a force on Broadway, but he gained a national audience when his plays were translated onto the motion picture screen. Movies made from his works were popular successes, and it is a credit to his original writing that they were also of award-winning quality. The plays and screenplays, for the most part, were born of personal experience and observation. They may not be autobiographical in a true sense, but bits and pieces of Inge's Midwestern roots found their way into them. Several of the plays were actually set in Kansas, specifically Southeast Kansas, which Inge knew so well. All of them evoked responses of recognition from audiences, for they dealt with everyday people and with emotions that we all experience, but which only he, so far, has been able to expose and describe through the accurate, lean dialogue of finely-drawn stage characters.

Fifteen years before he won the Pulitzer Prize, Inge was a high school speech and dramatics teacher in Columbus, Kansas. His tenure as educator there was brief; he had not wanted to become a teacher and was never really comfortable in the profession. An inner creative drive--over

which he had little control--pushed him in another direction. Yet once he accepted the teaching position, he apparently threw himself into it with determination.

Inge was born in Independence, a small city in Montgomery County, in 1913. As a child he attended the Independence performances of various show troupes, and like many of his peers became a devotee of Saturday movie matinees. But something resulting from the interaction of stage and screen characters appealed to his nature, and, from childhood on, his dreams centered around a career in the theatre. It isn't certain how early he made a choice between acting and writing. At an early age, he began both to write and act in his own one-act plays, usually crudely produced in the family's garage before an audience of neighborhood children. His enthusiasm for theatre continued unabated through grammar and high school, and by the time he left Independence for college he was certain enough of his interest to undertake a serious study of drama.

Had the family fortunes been greater when he was graduated from the University of Kansas in 1935, he likely would have gone immediately to some large city to find work on the stage, but necessity took him instead to Nashville, Tennessee, for post-graduate work at George Peabody College for Teachers. He had received a scholarship that was too good to ignore.

Inge later said that at about the time he entered Peabody he also entered a period of confusion concerning his future. He had never considered any career except theatre, and suddenly his plans and dreams were disrupted. Although his teaching career was to be little more than a short episode in life, in his naturally impatient youth he could not see beyond the present. It, to him, appeared rather bleak.

This confusion lasted well beyond his departure from Peabody. He did not complete his studies there, but left a few weeks before he was to have received his master's degree. Illness is the recorded reason for his early departure, but his emotional attitude probably contributed to it.

From Nashville, he returned to Kansas and Independence. Times were hard in the Thirties. From limited employment options, he took a summer job on a State Highway Department road gang--a job too physically demanding to allow much time for philosophical reflection. He regained his sense of direction during the summer, however, and in the Fall of 1936 became a news announcer for KFH, a Wichita radio station. He was thus employed until the following August, when he moved to Columbus to become teacher of English, speech, and dramatics at the Cherokee County Community High School.

Inge's record at Columbus does not indicate a lack of interest in teaching. The number of school events in which he played an important part is too impressive. At a small town high school, before large audiences and to mostly excellent reviews, he directed (and sometimes performed in) at least seven one-act plays, three three-act plays, several special programs, and one large-scale operetta--all within the span of eight months!

Columbus, seat of Cherokee County, could easily be the setting of an Inge play. It's one of those friendly little places in the Midwest where everyone knows nearly everyone else. It has never suffered growing pains, remaining roughly the size it was fifty years ago--about 3,500 people. Other than savings and loans, the most stable business is Columbus Grain, Inc. Its elevator dominates the skyline, and though its height wasn't meant to be symbolic, it is. Without farmers, the town would languish.

The Columbus streets are virtually free of noise and congestion. Two or three traffic lights are all that are necessary to keep things running smoothly. Rush hour has no meaning, except perhaps when the schools dismiss classes for the day. (In Inge's day, small grade schools were scattered about the prairie. Eventually consolidation did away with them, and the younger children were bused to schools in Columbus as high school students had been for decades. The majority of Inge's students came from the surrounding countryside.)

When he arrived in the Fall of 1937, the economy of the area, like that of the nation, was not in the best of conditions. World politics were in a shambles. But on the high school campus there was evolving a new, optimistic spirit. It's difficult to pinpoint its source. Perhaps numbers had something to do with the mood. That year the student body, normally consisting of about 500 pupils, experienced a sudden growth. By the end of enrollment in late August, the count had reached an all-time high of 750. Although the figure was later reduced by fourteen, the final total was still a record. Such large numbers meant a great deal of campus activity--and corresponding noise. Aided and abetted by cheerleaders and the school bands, students staged pep rallies throughout the year. Some included a parade through town and a bonfire at night on the high school campus. The townspeople saw exuberant cheerleaders doing the Big Apple and other energetic dance steps on the city streets. Some staid folks didn't think that was becoming, and said so, but not many complaints were lodged.

The faculty was well equipped to deal with the teeming crowd. Led by a new principal, Lloyd Brown, it boasted sound educational credentials. Of a teaching staff of twenty-six, eight teachers held master's degrees and eleven others had done post-graduate work. Only eight were new enough,

professionally, to have only a basic degree. The new teachers made up for what they lacked in education and teaching experience with unabashed enthusiasm.

W. D. (Bill) Carter, a senior guard on the championship basketball team of 1938, remembers the spirit--academic and otherwise--that prevailed that term in Columbus: "It was an unusual year," he says, "with lots of activities and chances for involvement. The teachers were all fine; the young ones were exceptional. If I had to 'sum up' the year in only a few words, I'd say there was a happy marriage of talent among the younger teachers--something special--and their talent created enthusiasm, which spilled over and charged up other faculty members and students alike."

Carter had transferred from nearby Cherokee at the beginning of the year in order to take advantage of better athletic and music programs. One of the exceptional young teachers named by him was Inge, whom he held in high regard, but with whom he had little direct daily contact. His personal favorite was another new teacher, Paul Cumiskey, at whose home he lived while attending school. To him, Cumiskey was both music teacher and surrogate guardian.

With complimentary interests and similar levels of energy, it was foreseeable that Inge and Cumiskey would strike up a friendship and soon be pooling talents. Inge's included the ability to improvise comedy routines, while Cumiskey could provide impromptu background music for anything. During the year they became somewhat celebrated as a team and were often called upon as last-minute fill-ins for Rotary, Lions Club, and Chamber of Commerce programs.

A young man of astounding energy, Cumiskey was one of two music teachers, sharing departmental responsibilities with Emile Carrier. Although young, he had had years of musical experience. An innovator by nature, he made several important changes in the school music program. As director of the school band, he added a spark to its performances by introducing jazz numbers into its repertoire. He played an important part in the maintenance of spirit in sports by organizing a swing band to help create pep at rallies and games. Another idea was to expose students to the work of professionals, which he accomplished by asking associates and friends to play with the pit orchestra.

Cumiskey has warm memories of his friendship with Inge and recalls the first time they shared a laugh (somewhat at Inge's expense). Sundry details had to be finalized for the coming year at the first faculty meeting. The principal, assuming that a speech and dramatics teacher would be adept at public speaking, asked Inge to serve as announcer during football games. The assignment, Brown explained, included use of the public address system for a review of completed plays--the precursor of television's instant replay. Inge had only recently left KFH and was therefore well versed in the use of electronic sound equipment. He had no fear of speaking before large audiences. Still, the request caused a loss of composure.

"Not me!" he blurted. "I don't know a punt from a forward pass!"

Everyone laughed.

Inge really didn't know much about games. Generally uninterested in team sports, he was oblivious to their rules and terminology. He did attend the games, but he was not like some for whom the school year didn't officially begin until the football season's kick-off.

While Columbus had its football fans, Cherokee County High's 1937 campaign was anything but successful. The Titans tied one game--and lost the rest. Paul McCoy, another of the new teachers, was coach. His technique brought the Titans within a ball's toss of victory a few times, but passes that everyone knew "should have been" were always intercepted. The fans didn't mind too much, however. Frontenac was held to a 7-0 score--far better, after all, than the 68-0 defeat the year before. Too, there was consolation in watching a superb Titan defense in the tie game against heavily favored Independence. A win or two would have been welcomed, but it looked as though next year would be better. Despite the season's record, McCoy retained his popularity, and some former students credit him with doing much to elevate school spirit.

Despite his scant interest in contact sports, Inge was an avid tennis player who showed no lack of physical coordination or ability, remembers Paul Gibson, the new mathematics teacher and Inge's frequent tennis opponent. "Ace," as Inge came to be known in Columbus tennis circles, could rarely be beaten at the game. Adding to the still-current legend of Inge's neatness, Gibson says, "He looked as clean and neat after a hard match as he did when we went out on the court. I, on the other hand, had fought so hard that I usually looked a mess."

(The first thing Columbus acquaintances say when asked to describe Inge is that he was always 'immaculate." Their second most common statement is that he was shy, which seems at odds with his ability to perform before large audiences. The term is probably used to mean that he was not effusive in actions or speech, no doubt resulting from his deep sense of social propriety. Even after developing a friendship, they recall, he was still "quiet.")

A teacher's life could be very limited in 1937. With monthly salaries ranging from $120 to $135, luxuries could not be afforded. Thus single faculty members were often boarders or--like Inge--roomers. Families were willing to rent a bedroom to one whose lifestyle could best be described as subdued. Not only were most evenings spent in grading papers, planning classes, or attending school activities, teachers lived by a strict moral code. They were expected to be pillars of propriety, and most were. Inge rented a room in the home of Hugh Makinney. In some ways it was ideal. Two blocks south of the campus on the northwest corner of Mulberry and Vermont streets, it was within walking distance of school--an important consideration to a young man without an automobile. Too, the Victorian structure must have reminded Inge of his parents' home in Independence. Its most prominent feature was a large front porch like the one at home,

The Hugh Makinney home at 419 S. Vermont [currently the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Jon Holt].

but curving around the left corner of the house instead of the right.

A negative aspect of his living arrangement was that the Makinneys could provide only room. Meals had to be bought in downtown restaurants, which proved to be inconvenient, expensive, and lonely. His occasional date, Lois Hunt, had both room and board at the Wilbert Jones home on South Florida. She learned that he was forced to eat in restaurants and must have felt a bit sorry for him. She helped him make arrangements to eat with the Jones family in the evenings--not too difficult a task once Mrs. Jones met the handsome young man. She, like Lois, found him to be everything a gentleman should be.

A quality in his features--perhaps in his eyes--made some think he had an inner sadness. These people say he was a "loner." Others, however, tell of the many visits he made to their homes or to those of others. Perhaps the most accurate description of him during this period would be "enigmatic." Few really knew him.

But Inge did make friends in town who were as close as any could become in only a few months. Paul Elleman, an attorney of approximately his age, was a frequent companion. While Cumiskey may have been his closest friend on the faculty, Paul Gibson, his tennis opponent, can be classified as more than a mere acquaintance. Paul and his wife Charlotte lived south of the school in a neighborhood near the Makinney home. They often invited Inge and other unmarried teachers to dinner. Mrs. Gibson,

who liked to learn the favorite dish of her guests and serve it when they came, soon discovered that fried chicken, peas, and carrots were Inge's favorites. He was invited so frequently that he showed up once with his own dinner contribution--an uncooked chicken.

After hearty dinners, the Gibsons and their guests would lounge in the living room and talk. During one relaxed discussion Inge told of his desire to become a serious writer. Nobody laughed. Something in his manner said that this was more than just a passing fancy or dream, and, futhermore, none of those present doubted his ability. The Gibsons were pleased for him, but not at all surprised, when years later they read of the success of Come Back, Little Sheba.

His lifestyle in Columbus indicated that he may have found background there for his later dramas. As a perpetual table guest, he observed families and formed impressions that may have surfaced later in fictional form. His life as a high school teacher parallels that of the teachers in Picnic. As a roomer, he must have well understood the existence of Rosemary--the play's unforgettable spinster--and that of others like her, waiting for deliverance from a confining, solitary room and the equally confining classroom. He could see drama in the simplest situations.

One day when school was dismissed early, he and several of the teachers took a leisurely drive to Oswego. From the back seat, where he had lazily stretched his lanky frame, Inge related a few details about his KFH job. Suddenly his imagination soared, and he said, "I wonder what the reaction would be if an announcer walked up to the microphone and, instead of giving the news, said the most vulgar thing that popped into his mind. Can you imagine the reaction? What people would do and say in homes across the country? Why, that would make a good idea for a play!"

It might have, but the announcer would have had to have been someone else. Inge was too polite. No one can remember his uttering even the most innocent oath while in Columbus.

Although unmarried teachers were alienated somewhat by their roomer status, Inge was luckier than most because of his good looks, intelligence, and talent. His abilities led to requests for appearances, not only as part of the Inge-Cumiskey team, but singly as well. He could give spell-binding dramatic readings--sometimes entire one-act plays--in a rich, well-modulated baritone. His first solo presentation took place at a September program in honor of the new teachers. He gave two readings, though he was himself one of the teachers being welcomed.

Tennis was as close as Inge came to frivolity at Columbus. No one ever saw him in a bar or club. He was not the type to enjoy boisterous people or places. Socially, he preferred the companionship of those with background, interests, and intellect comparable to his own--but he was not a snob and treated everyone with respect.

There were subtle distinctions between his private, public, and classroom personalities. He could show warmth toward friends, but was somewhat reserved in public. In the school setting, he approached

formality. Although not much older than his students, Inge always maintained a certain distance in dealings with them. He was not an unsmiling ogre, and could befriend them, but he could never be a buddy. Even today, most of his former students refer to him as "Mister" Inge.

A less talented and dedicated young man might have experienced a measure of difficulty in assuming leadership of dramatics at Cherokee County High. Inge followed in the footsteps of Howard Jones, who had the kind of personality which allowed him to relate freely to students. Jones could joke and talk on the teenagers' level and was something of a school hero. Some of the girls developed "crushes" on him during his final term. Inge's style was much more restrained.

It wasn't long, however, until students learned that he was as effective as Jones had been. Testifying to his teaching skills, Virginia Suttee Begando, class of 1938, says, "His lectures were fascinating as well as enlightening experiences. In my opinion, his expertise was felt immediately. I know I wondered why this obviously talented gentleman had come to our small county seat type community. A William Inge doesn't surface too often!"

Although he was a bit aloof, his basic sensitive, caring nature showed through. He didn't lecture in the classroom merely to go home and forget, but took an interest in students' lives and plans. Those he considered talented in music or drama were encouraged to enroll at the University of Kansas--not because he was prejudiced against local colleges, but because he was more aware of the University's capabilities.

It was through the classes and plays—rather than social contact—that most of his former students feel they came to know him at all, and most agree with Virginia Begando's assessment of his classroom style. As impressive as his lectures may have been, it was his work with dramatics that seems unique. At some time between his Peabody year and the beginning of the Columbus term, he must have entertained the thought that high school dramatics could be a learning experience—not only for students, but for the teacher as well. One can imagine the excitement he might have felt at the revelation. It is safe to say that he began to enjoy the experience, at least as a partial release for some of his creative energies.

If Inge had been able to choose the locale for his only high school teaching experience, he could not have made a better choice than Columbus. The school was the home of a student body uncommonly interested in dramatics. There had always been a scramble for parts in Howard Jones' plays, and not even the toughest football player considered acting a "sissy" pastime. The best example of the Columbus students' view of acting is related by Dick Cooper, class of 1938. In order to appear on stage, Cooper once had to settle for the role of a dead body—in every other presentation of the play. For to get the role, Cooper had to agree to alternate with one of the football players. No, Inge did not have to go begging for actors when he cast a play in Columbus.

It was relatively easy to distinguish those students who were really serious about acting: they were members of the Masquers Honorary Dramatics Club, a school thespian group organized three years before Inge's arrival. Entry was gained by invitation, which was not extended until a student had demonstrated a genuine and active interest in drama. By 1937, a few old hands—Verna Lee Turner, Wilbert Jones, Jr., Bob McCormick, and a few others—had a surprising number of performances behind them.

Inge began at once to choose plays for his drama class, the junior and senior classes, and the Masquers. The class period would allow only work with one-acts, but the Masquers, juniors, and seniors could present three-acts as an extracurricular activity in addition to shorter plays. The Columbus Daily Advocate, in a story captioned "Dramatics Group is Busy" (September 22, 1937), reported: "William Inge, dramatics coach at the community high school has announced that there will be several productions this year at the school. He has a group working on a one-act at the present time, and is planning several major plays later in the season. Dramatics, always a popular course at the high school, is expected to present a sizeable portion of the activities at CCCHS this term."

The one-act play Inge's class was working on so early in the year was Breakfast at Eight. There was no delay in presenting it. Staging was accomplished in only about three weeks, and it was given at the first P.T.A. meeting the first week in October. The presentation was probably repeated on the evenings of October 18 and 19 at Scammon's school gymnasium during the nearby town's annual All-School Carnival. (Available papers merely say that "a one-act play" was presented.)

While Inge was rehearsing Breakfast at Eight, Paul Cumiskey was busy with his boys' glee club's minstrel to be presented at the school in late October. The minstrel was the first opportunity Inge and Cumiskey had to work together on a school project. Inge served as end man in the show—complete with blackface makeup. At least one person in the audience recognized him, however: Emile Carrier's young daughter, who was fond of Inge, yelled from the audience, "I know that's you, Mr. Inge!" The audience liked that as much as anything in the show on stage.

The most important Inge-Cumiskey collaboration was actually a school-wide effort: the operetta, Hollywood Bound, which required a cast of one hundred. Of the several directors required for the show, Inge was to coach the speaking parts. One of the Masquers of many talents, Bob McCormick, would direct the dancers. Because of the enormity of the Hollywood Bound project, months of rehearsal were necessary. Although planning began during the Fall semester, performance would not take place until January. In the meantime, other projects occupied Inge's time.

In late October he directed Verna Lee Turner and Bob Jackson in a Masquer one-act, Etiquette, a two-character play set on a quiet end of the Atlantic City Boardwalk. But before taking it to the District Teachers Conference, there was work to be done on other presentations and contests.

Columbus teachers did everything they could to make the school year varied and interesting. One stimulation for young minds was an area-wide practice—the holding of academic contests. Not only were spelling bees prevalent in Cherokee and other Southeast Kansas counties, but so were competitions in mathematics, science, social studies, etc. Paul Cumiskey often entered the band and Inge would take one-act plays. In most of these tournaments, Columbus students earned respectable rankings. While there is little available documentation on the outcome of the contests in which Inge entered plays, Paul Gibson (who took his math students to most of the festivals in which the dramatics class participated) says, "We got used to his winning things, and it's difficult to remember particular ones . . . there were so many. We all were interested in contests as a learning tool, and everybody participated."

On November 14 Inge took a one-act play to a contest in Joplin, Missouri. It was not uncommon for school activities to spill over into Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri, since Cherokee County is in the southeastern corner of Kansas, but the Joplin contest was unusual in other respects. The plays were broadcast on WMBH Radio over a span of fifteen weeks. Air time was sponsored by area DeSoto dealers.

Money Shouts was chosen as the Columbus entry, and a supposedly "all-school" cast acted it, but cast members' names are ones that appear often in 1937-38 play programs—Bob McCormick, Wilbert Jones, Jr., Verna Lee Turner, Eileen Reeves, and Marjorie Davis. Naturally, Inge chose his most seasoned actors.

A cash prize of fifty dollars was awarded to the play receiving the most votes from the radio audience, and Inge urged everyone in Columbus to vote. Some believe that Money Shouts won, but no record has been discovered to verify it.

School plays were chosen to fit the actor and audience, and were mostly comedies. Inge might have preferred more serious fare. Enough acting talent was available, but tradition and time dictated that most productions have light, easily followed plots.

Although most of the year's plays were comedies, Inge's approach to their production was serious. There was never much time between performances, and rehearsals had to remain on schedule.

Casts sometimes clowned during practice. Funny lines led to funny ad libs, which led to horseplay. Cast members were, after all, youthful. Some belonged to the Terrible Nine, a group of boys who had called themselves the Bachelors' Club until the onset of puberty, and who stealthily removed a young calf from a pasture and released it in the home of Andy McClure, the assistant football coach, on Halloween night. Inge was too self-contained to let horseplay cause him to lose his temper. When irritated, he drummed the wooden auditorium seat in front of him with a pencil. That usually sufficed to communicate his displeasure.

He gave direction in the same calm tone used in the classroom, sometimes from the rear of the auditorium where he positioned himself to test the projection of voices. If rehearsal showed that stage movements or

lines of dialogue were awkward, he halted practice and made script alterations. He once stopped an early rehearsal and switched Virginia Suttee from a minor role to that of female lead.

The junior class play, Kempy, had already been chosen by the time Etiquette was presented at the District Teachers' Conference. Kempy fit the usual comedy format, and was the story of a young plumber who, when called to the home of a rather madcap family, won the heart of the daughter of the house. It had been a success on Broadway in 1922.

Bill Finley, one of Cumiskey's music students, played the part of the young plumber. Inge met him one day in the hallway and asked him to come to play tryout. The boy had never acted in a play and was surprised when he won the lead. He didn't think he was suited for the part, but the director did, and Inge was astute at character analysis. Finley and the rest of the cast received good notices, although the Columbus Daily Advocate reported that the December 7 crowd was merely "fair-sized" for Kempy's performance. The High School Record, the school's weekly paper, reported "heavy applause and gales of laughter" from "a moderately filled auditorium."

December activities included work on Hollywood Bound, which was to be presented on January 10. After New Year's, only a few days were available for practice, so there must have been many hours of Christmas vacation devoted to the study of music and dialogue.

The season afforded Inge the opportunity to again display his individual skills. He read The Finger of God at a Tuesday Study Club meeting at Lloyd Brown's home and The Gift of the Magi in the school Christmas program. He spent the Holidays with his parents in Independence.

After vacation, the High School Record devoted much space to coverage of Hollywood Bound. Its January 7 issue reported that the cast of "over a hundred" had been practicing strenuously under the direction of Carrier, Cumiskey, Inge and McCormick. The Record admitted that the production was "more like a muscial comedy than an operetta."

The story was about a young inventor who had perfected a new color process for the movies. When his test of the process was sabotaged, the president of Quadrangle Pictures withdrew support and ordered him out of the studio. Bob Kent, the young inventor, received help from several friends and filmed his own show, using Vericolor (his invention), to prove that the process worked. After many difficulties and setbacks, Kent succeeded, and won in love as well. Several ethnic characters were included in the plot--Chinese, English, and French--adding stereotyped humor. It was perfectly tailored for the high school audience.

Hollywood Bound was pronounced "a dramatical, musical and financial success" by the school paper. The Record's criterion for dramatic and muscial impact was enthusiastic audience response. Financial success was attained when box office receipts reached $119.02. (Matinee tickets were 10 cents. Evening admission was 15 cents with activities cards, 25 cents without.)

A Stranger Passes

George Hood, Jr., Bob McCormick, Eileen Reeves, Verna Lee Turner, Wilbert Jones, Josephine Zitnik, Robert Jackson, George Archer, Virginia Suttee, Dick Cooper, Myra Lou Larson.

January was a month for outside activities. The day after the operetta was presented, Inge took five members of his speech class to debate in a contest at Riverton, where he served as one of the judges. On January 22, he led a round table discussion at a West Mineral meeting of Cherokee County teachers. The topic was "How Can Good English in the Classroom Be Made to 'Carry Over' into Everyday Life?"

While Hollywood Bound was being rehearsed, the dramatics class--many members of which were in the musical--had been simultaneously preparing several one-acts. The plays were selected for performance at the school, before civic clubs, and at rural schools. The class presented Among Us Girls on January 27 and February 3, while working on three others, His First Shave, Paste Pearls, and The Maid Problem. (The latter may also be called Maid Service in Record articles.)

The Masquers Club's annual three-act was one of the year's highlights, rivalled only by Hollywood Bound. The operetta's size made it outstanding. The Masquer's play was noteworthy for another reason. It was Inge's first opportunity to coach Columbus actors in a serious drama. He chose A Stranger Passes, a play which afforded a role for every member of the club, and which also made a dramatic statement. The plot was concerned with the profound effect a mere passing stranger could have on the attitudes and lives of members of a misguided family. It provided a moral with which a relatively unsophisticated audience could identify--the change of personal character from bad to good. The stranger, played by Bob McCormick, was much like Picnic's Hal, who--in the course of only a day or two--altered the life of another family.

By March, Inge's abilities were well known. Play attendance had steadily increased, so that there were few worries about empty seats. The Daily Advocate helped build interest in A Stranger Passes by a more lengthy than usual March 2 article. Inge solicited criticism from the faculty before the play's performance, as if to ensure that no part of it would offend anyone's sensibilities. The faculty's attendance at dress rehearsal could have otherwise served little purpose.

The Advocate's March 8 column read: "An excellent performance was given last night by the Masquers club of the community high school when it presented its annual three-act play, A Stranger Passes. A large crowd attended. A Stranger Passes was the first serious play of the year, but it appealed to its audience as having an optimistic outlook, featuring the effect of one person upon many with whom he comes in contact...The production showed thorough rehearsal and excellent coaching. Wm. Inge, dramatics instructor, should receive credit for his untiring efforts and dramatic ability."

Many said it was the best high school play they had ever seen. Today, Paul Cumiskey says, "It was as near professional as I've ever seen in all my years of teaching. Inge got every ounce of energy out of Bob McCormick and into the part."

Inge couldn't rest on his laurels, however. He had to concentrate immediately on the senior class play, scheduled for April 21. Its rehearsal overlapped with still more one-acts. Maid Service, one of them, was presented on March 21 at the home of Mrs. Emery Youngman, and sandwiched somewhere between were rehearsals of Fame and the Poet, the dramatics class' entry in an April Pittsburg contest. Though good practice, work on Fame and the Poet was wasted effort, in one sense--the last few entries were eliminated from the contest and it fell into that group.

March was a whirlwind of activity. It was the month the basketball season ended with the Titans' first trip to Topeka for a state basketball tournament. Paul McCoy coached the team to a 19-5 season. That record was so good that it hardly mattered when the cagers lost in the state semi-finals to Winfield.

Two things make the Spring of 1938 noteworthy to some Columbus residents. They can long recall that the town was the temporary home of William Inge, a later winner of the Pultizer Prize and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Best Screenplay "Oscar," (Splendor in the Grass, 1962). They also remember that Spring brought the greatest tragedy in the town's history. On March 30 a tornado ripped through Columbus' northwest section, leveling thirty city blocks and taking at least ten lives. Tornadoes are not as common in Kansas as many are led to believe, and the ones that do touch down can be expected to do so during the summer months. Before clean-up could be fully accomplished, the confusion wrought by that storm was compounded. Nature seemed to realize her mistake, and, as if to correct an embarassing error, returned to

Tornado Aftermath - March 30 1938

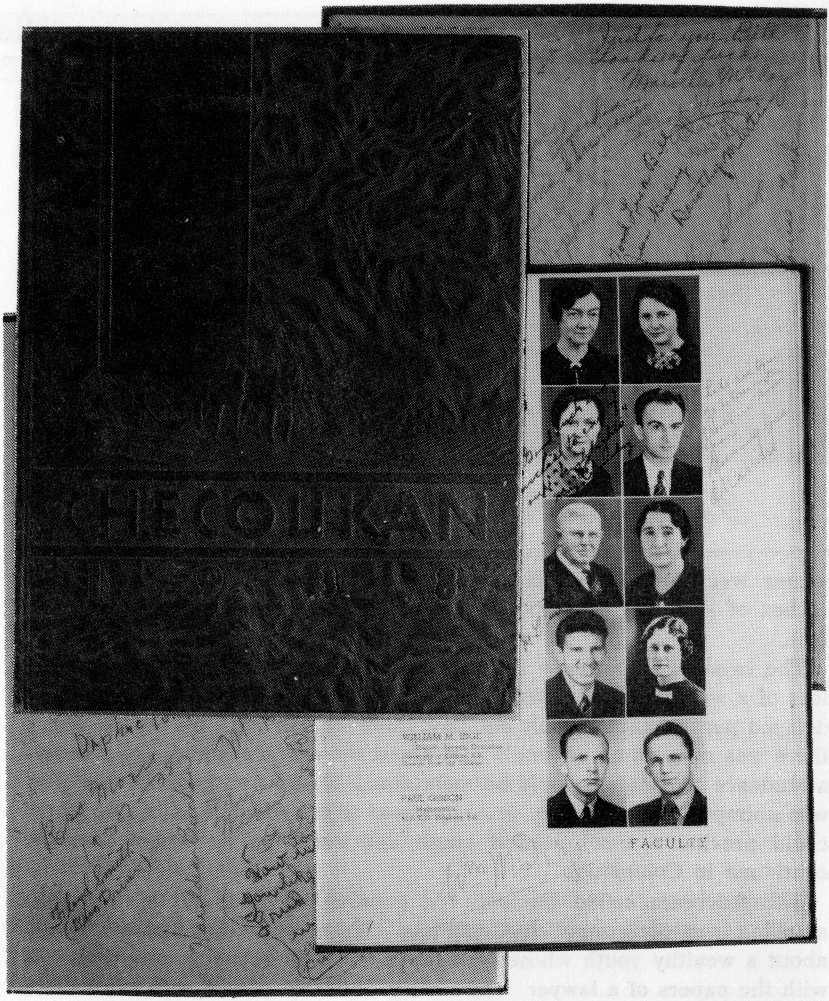
winter weather--but over-compensated--and on April 8 dumped twelve inches of snow on the disheveled town. Drifts reached a depth of five feet.

The twister, followed by the worst late snowstorm in years, forced the loss of a week's preparation of A Full House, the senior class play. Inge delayed performance by only one day, however. He knew his actors, and if there was concern on anyone's part about the cast's readiness or whether attendance momentum could be maintained, it was unnecessary. The play was unimportant, of course, in comparison to the recent loss of life, but it could provide a much-needed laugh and serve as a symbol that life continued in Columbus.

The Advocate called the play "a genuine hit and one of the most amusing ever performed" in Columbus. Written by Fred Jackson, it was about a wealthy youth whose love letters to a chorus girl were switched with the papers of a lawyer, which were switched in turn with a briefcase of jewels that had been stolen by a burglar. With each of the characters trying to recover his own briefcase, there was much stage action--just what the Columbus audience liked. The Record reported that "a full house" at each of two performances was "kept laughing almost continually."

A Full House was the year's last major presentation. During the term Inge had shown what could be done with high school dramatics. He had, of course, had unusually good high school actors, and the reputation built by the hard work of both casts and director ultimately attracted good audiences.

Many who witnessed Inge's work in Columbus soon believed that his talent was too great to be contained within the boundaries of a small town. Reflecting on his accomplishments, Paul Cumiskey says, "He may not have known a punt from a forward pass--but could he ever direct a play!"



WILLIAM M. INGE

English, Speech, Dramatics

University of Kansas, A.B.

George Peabody College

Wm M Inge

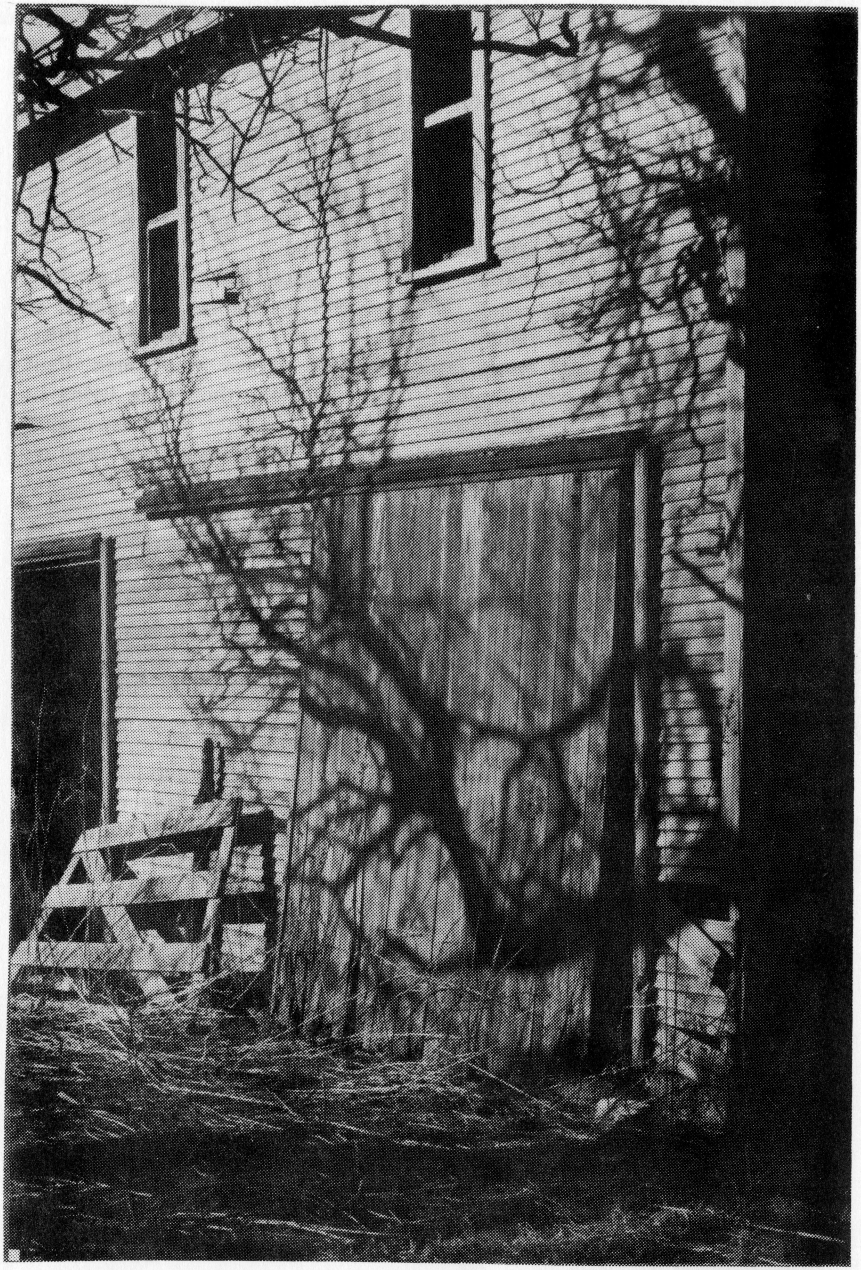
During the Summer of 1938 Inge completed his master's at Peabody. He didn't return to Columbus in the Fall, but went instead to teach drama at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. Some of his Columbus students felt that he was more suited for college teaching, though they were unhappy at their loss. None of them cried, as many did a few years later when Paul Cumiskey left for Oklahoma. Their relationship with Inge had not been like that, but they missed him, just the same. Someone said they would probably never have another teacher like him. (The Masquers Club lasted a year or two afterwards, then folded.)

Few Columbus acquaintenances saw Inge again. Bill Carter saw him once or twice in Columbia when Carter visited his fiancee, a student at Stephens. Paul Cumiskey visited him in St. Louis sometime after 1943. Inge was then drama and music critic for the St. Louis Star-Times. Paul and Charlotte Gibson received a visit from him while they were living in another Kansas town. But he came back to Columbus only once--just passing through on his way to Independence. He had time only to drop by the high school and see the room where he once held classes.

In 1973, after major Broadway and Hollywood success, and some failure, Inge died in California. Perhaps he never knew the impression he had made in Columbus.

Jay Cobb, class of 1939, speaks for many when he says, "While I to some extent disdain nostalgia, I experience a profound joy in recalling my all too brief encounter with William Inge, someone who was not only a great talent, but a fine, sensitive man. I have not forgotten him--and I shall not forget him."

Perhaps it's easy to remember a man who achieves such fame, but Inge would have been remembered had he done nothing more outstanding than his year's work in Columbus. He, like the visitor in A Stranger Passes, came for only a brief visit, but left behind in Columbus a large "family." The lives of its members were positively affected--and forever enriched.



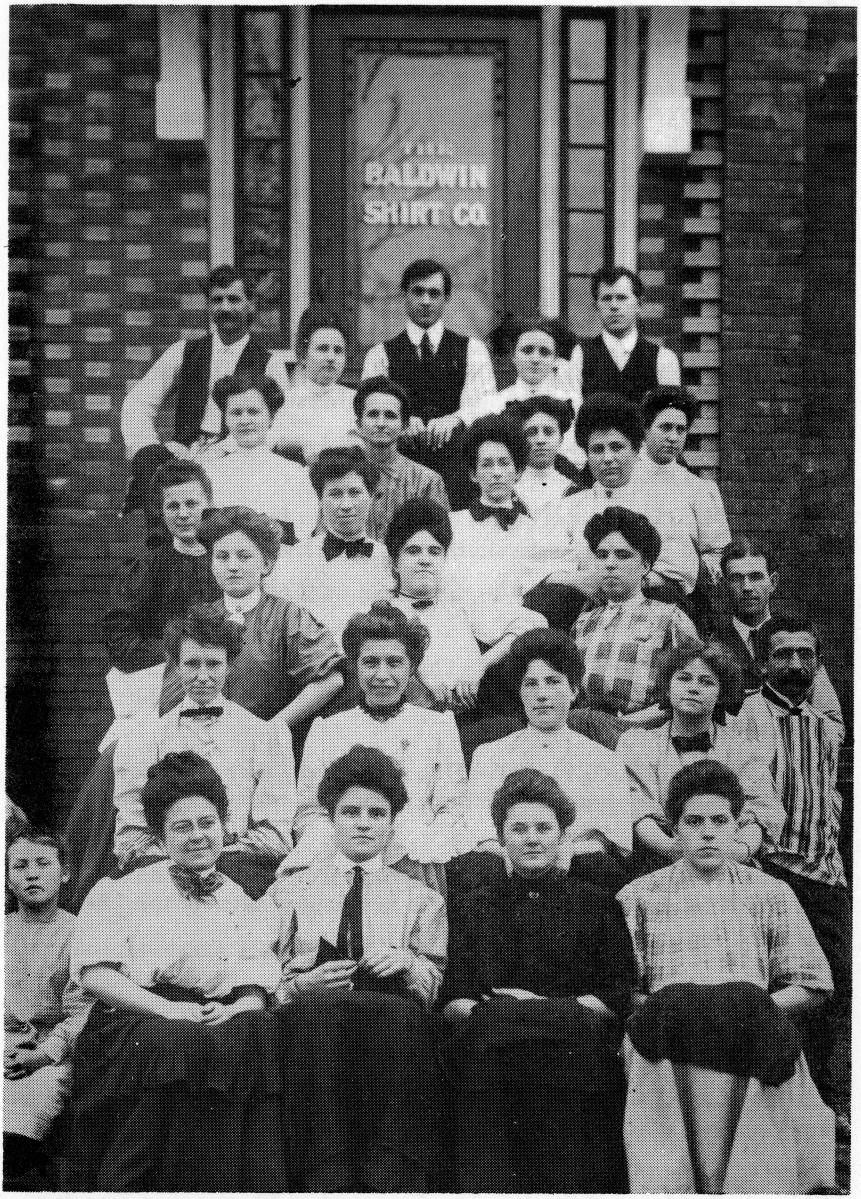
David Tate, photographer

Indian Fighter

Old Daddy McClaron was an Indian fighter and
a carpenter who walked to church
three miles there and
three miles back.
Through rain, snow, August heat, and
sleet, old Daddy McClaron walked
to church and back.
Granny McClaron would ride and
wave as she went by, but
"I walk," he said, "because once
we was ordered to ride down on this village and
kill everyone that was there:
men, women, kids, dogs, horses--kill them all.
Then bury them and
burn everything that's left.
I never killed any women or kids but
I buried a bunch. As
I walk," said old Daddy McClaron, "I
recite all the Indian names
I can remember."

Bob Green

The Allie Leach Graves Collection
Shaking The Mop,
Mulberry, Kansas, 1909.
Unknown photographer.



Mr. and Mrs. Carl N. Hunter Collection
Pittsburg State University
Employees of The Baldwin Shirt Company,
Parsons, Kansas, ca. 1900. Oates, Photographer.

Contributors

THOMAS FOX AVERILL, 1046 Pennsylvania, Lawrence, KS 66044, teaches English at Washburn University.

BERTIE COLE BAYS (1899-1972), poet laureate of Kansas from 1937 until her death, resided with her pastor husband in Parsons, Fort Scott, and Hugoton.

CHARLES HARMON CAGLE, 113½ E. Williams, Pittsburg, KS 66762, teaches English at Pittsburg State University.

BRUCE DANIEL, 1503 S. Olive, Pittsburg, KS 66762, is chairman of the department of physics at Pittsburg State University.

BILL GLASS, JR., Star Route South, Box 39B, Locust Grove, OK 74352, is a professional sculptor and ceramist.

MAX GOOD, 3931 Main, Parsons, KS 67357, is a free lance photographer, specializing in wild life, agricultural, and industrial photography.

ROBERT GREEN, 1024 E. 7th, Pittsburg, KS 66762, is a student at Pittsburg State University.

ZULA BENNINGTON GREENE, 1205 Mulvane, Topeka, KS 66604, is known to thousands of loyal readers as "Peggy of the Flint Hills" of the Topeka Capital-Journal.

WAYLANDE GREGORY (1905-1971), a pioneer in the development of ceramic sculpture, was born in Baxter Springs, reared and educated in Pittsburg.

SHELBY P. HORN, 615 Kansas, Oswego, KS 67356, is an attorney, consultant for Fuel Dynamics, and the non-fiction editor of the LBR.

EVA JESSYE, 102 E. Madison, Pittsburg, KS 66762, is Artist-in-Residence at Pittsburg State University.

PATTY FARRIS KUHEL, 1150 E. 1st, Pittsburg, KS 66762, is a graduate student in English and history at Pittsburg State.

KAREN LASKEY, 171 E. 10th, Pittsburg, KS 66762, is a graduate assistant in English at Pittsburg State.

MICHAEL McCLURE, 264 Downey Street, San Francisco, CA 94117, is Writer-in-Residence at the American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco.

AL ORTOLANI, JR., 601 W. 3d, Pittsburg, KS 66762, teaches English at Pittsburg High School.

WILLIAM STAFFORD, 1050 Sunningdale, Lake Oswego, OR 97034, is professor of English at Lewis and Clark College, Portland.

DAVID TATE, 1224 W. 3d, Coffeyville, KS 67337, is manager of Wal Mart in Independence.

JAMES TATE, 16 Jones Road, Amherst, MA 01002, is an associate professor of creative writing at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

TED WATTS, Box 303, 807 W. 4th, Oswego, KS 67356, is a sports artist and graphics editor of the LBR.

CHARLES BANKS WILSON, 101½ N. Main, Miami, OK 74354, is a professional painter, muralist, and lithographer.

ART COUNCILS OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS

Affiliates of the Kansas Arts Commission, 112 W. 6th, Suite 401, Topeka, KS 66603

Bourbon County Arts Council
711 Fairway, Box 491
Fort Scott, KS 66701
Doris Cantrell, Executive Director

Chanute Arts Council
P.O. Box 65
Chanute, KS 66720
Rev. Robert Ehlenius, President

Coffeyville Cultural Arts Council
1302 West Second
Coffeyville, KS 67337
Kenneth Burchinal, Executive Director

Fredonia Arts Council
Box 355
Fredonia, KS 66736

Friends of Art
P.O. Box 148
Columbus, KS 66725
Evan Goettel, President

Independence Arts Council
P.O. Box 198
Independence, KS 67301
Mary Callison, President

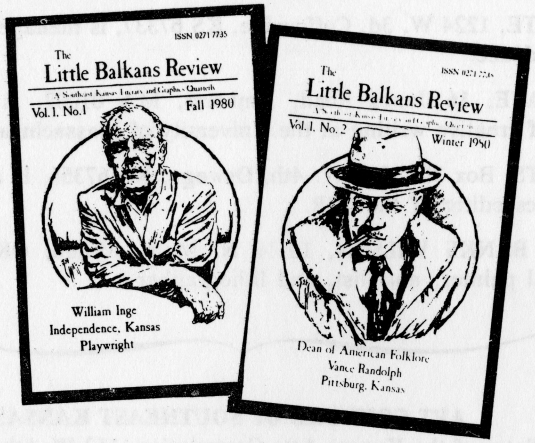
Iola Arts Council
Bowlus Fine Arts Center
Iola, KS 66749
George Foreman, Director

Neodesha Art Council
R. R. 2
Neodesha, KS 66756
John Deer, President

Oswego Arts Council
R. R. 1
Oswego, KS 67356
Nancy Korinek, President

PAACA/Pittsburg Arts Council
503 North Pine
Pittsburg, KS 66762
Robert Tindel, Executive Director

Invitation To Submit



The LBR cordially solicits manuscripts, photographs, and art work for publication in forthcoming issues. Under our current editorial policy, each issue of the magazine will have approximately ten pages of poetry, ten of graphics, thirty of fiction, and thirty of non-fiction. Contributions should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

ARTS, GRAPHICS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS. Mail to Editor Ted Watts, P.O. Box 303, 807 W. 4th, Oswego, KS 67356. Works of local and regional artists are especially desired, as well as vintage photographs depicting the life and social customs of the Little Balkans. Prompt acknowledgment of receipt is assured, as well as return of the original work.

FICTION. Mail to Editor Stephen Robbins, 2001 Arapaho, Garden City, KS 67846. Works by Kansans and former Kansans are given priority, as well as work set in the Little Balkans. Manuscripts should not exceed thirty-five double-spaced typed pages.

NON-FICTION. Mail to Editor Shelby Horn, 615 Kansas, Oswego, KS 67356. Currently contributions are restricted to subjects related to the Little Balkans. Manuscripts should not exceed thirty-five double-spaced typed pages.

POETRY. Mail to Editor Gene DeGruson, 601 Grandview Heights Terrace, Pittsburg, KS 66762. Prime consideration is given to works by Kansans and former Kansans. At least half the poetry of each issue will be devoted to poets who have had limited previous publication.

We promise to report our reactions to you within six weeks. At this time we can pay only with copies of your issue.

$3.50

The Little Balkans Press, Inc.

601 Grandview Heights Terrace
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762