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The
Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 3, No. 1

Fall 1982

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Louise Brooks
Actress/Author
Cherryvale, Kansas

The
Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 3 No. 1



Janis DeChicchio, Music Editor Gene DeGruson, Poetry Editor Shelby Horn, Nonfiction 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 1982



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The
Little Balkans Review

A Southeast Kansas Literary and Graphics Quarterly

Vol. 3, No. 1 Fall 1982
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Louise Brooks
1938



Preface

The beginning of the third year of the *LBR* is starting off well. First, there was word from Jack A. Reed, Executive Director of the Kansas Arts Commission, that the magazine had been awarded a \$6,500 grant for the four issues, for which we are most grateful. Although this grant will allow us to make many improvements during the year, one of its main thrusts will be to keep the subscription price down when our costs have been going up. It's just not those subscribers on a fixed income who have been hard hit: libraries, both public and academic which constitute a goodly part of our supporters, have been hit by inflation even harder than many individuals, who in turn depend upon their libraries more. Because of the additional paperwork involved in institutional members, many magazines charge as much as double for such subscriptions. From the beginning we determined that we would not charge them more, realizing their aims and function, as well as the unhappy fact that most are not as affluent as they were during, say, the 1960s.

Secondly, we have survived that period when most magazines of our sort die: the second year. To no small extent we have been aided greatly by the national reviewers who have spoken kindly of us to their multitudes of readers. Editor Joan Creighton of the *New Magazine Review* was the first to respond enthusiastically in January 1981. Her comment that those who appreciate fine literature should support and promote this journal was both heady and appreciated. Bill Katz of the *Library Journal* (and with Linda Sternberg Katz in *Magazines for Libraries*) encouraged us vastly at just the darkest times. And there have been so many more, the most recent being the *Christian Science Monitor*, whose Bruce Allen listed us among the three mainstream regional magazines especially worthy of note. We should not ignore the many local and regional newspapers that have been so supportive, whose editors and writers we hope sometime to acknowledge properly.

So on the eve of our third birthday, may we say to you all, "Read and enjoy with our thanks."

The Editors



Louise Brooks —and the Road to Oz

By Charles Cagle

Introduction

Film buffs around the world have long known the name of Louise Brooks—the little girl from Cherryvale, Kansas. They know that in late 1925 she went from the Ziegfeld Follies into a five-year contract with Paramount Pictures, subsequently making twenty-four films—one of which, under the great German director George Pabst (*Pandora's Box*, 1929), has established her as a cult-figure of silent films and an extraordinary and naturally-gifted actress. These same buffs know that because of Louise's independent nature and complex personality, her career was over when she was still a dazzling beauty of thirty-two, and that for over thirty years she was a forgotten recluse who came back into prominence only after the British critic, Kenneth Tynan, wrote a long profile on her for the *New Yorker* magazine in August 1979 ("The Girl in the Black Helmet"). Now her own astute essays on Hollywood and the film world have been collected in *Lulu in Hollywood* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982) and Walter Clemons has called her a "brilliant historian" (*Newsweek*, May 24, 1982). Louise lives now in seclusion in Rochester, New York, the victim at seventy-six of degenerative osteoarthritis of the hip and emphysema. It is only by watching the handful of old reels in the archives of the Eastman Museum in Rochester that we today can know the beauty, youthful energy, and superb acting ability of the girl who, like little Dorothy, set out for remarkable adventures in a place called Oz.

For Louise, the Land of Oz was filled with lights, cameras, and action. And it was a very long way from Kansas.



LOUISE BROOKS' PATERNAL RELATIVES OF BURDEN. Row 1 [L-R]: Uncle O.L., Grandfather Martin Luther, Father Leonard Porter, Uncle W.A.; Row 2: Uncle George Washington, Grandmother Elizabeth, Uncle Eseley.

Burden: "A Pretty Wedding"

The Brooks brothers—and there were five of them—came over to Kansas from Tennessee in the early 1870s to settle in Cowley County under a generous land grant which provided (for \$1.25 per acre for 160 acres) former Osage Indian land. All the new settlers had to do was "occupy and make substantial improvements" on the property. Thus, Louise's paternal great-grandfather, John Brooks, came with his family into the area, where he, along with his brothers, bought adjoining land adjacent to Grouse Creek and near what would become in 1879 Burdenville, later simply Burden—a hamlet then as now—sixteen miles east of Winfield.

The land was rich, and they prospered, enjoying among other crops huge peach and apple orchards. Although John remained on the farm, two of his brothers—Nathan and Andy—became bankers in 1883 with "a capitol of \$20,000 paid-up stock." In other words, the Brooks name was a respected and powerful one in early Burden. One of John's sons was named Martin Luther (b. 1842), and when he accompanied his father to Kansas, he brought his own family, including his wife, Elizabeth, and their two-year-old boy named Leonard Porter—who would become Louise's father.

If the Brooks brothers were successful and noticeably conservative, the other side of Louise's genealogical history more than made up for a lack of color. Her maternal great-grandfather was named Havilas B. Rude, a country doctor who settled in the Burden area in 1874. Born in Highland County, Ohio, in 1826, he married Elizabeth Miller (b. 1830 in Ohio) in 1850 and

moved to Iowa to study, then to practice medicine there and in Indiana. He finally moved to Kansas and settled in Greenwood County for two years before moving to Cowley County.

Dr. H.B. was typical of the country doctors of his time: hard-working and overworked, performing small daily miracles with primitive medicine and equipment, and going out at all hours and in all kinds of weather in a two-wheeler buggy and horse. It is little wonder that H.B. fell victim to one of the chronic dangers associated with the profession as practiced in those early days—morphine addiction. One eyewitness to this—a man in his nineties today and still a Burdenite—recalls seeing H.B. as an old fellow coming into the drugstore in Burden, slumped and exhausted, to buy fifty-cents worth of powdered morphine. “He could barely drag in,” the witness told me. “He’d fall down in a chair, take a cork out of the bottle, and lick the whole quarter-ounce of morphine off his palm. He’d settle back and presently begin to jerk, twist, and squirm. Then, in a matter of minutes, he would rise, straighten his back and shoulders, and walk out of the place like a twenty-year-old!”

On the other hand, Havilas was a fine doctor—and a successful one—who had one ingredient all good doctors need: a sense of humor. Once he rode out on his horse to a farm family with a very ill father and noticed the capsules he had left days before had not been touched. One family member asked when they should give Pa the medicine, and Havilas snapped good-naturedly, “When you get damned good and ready.”

H.B. died in Burden in 1911, at the advanced age of eighty-six.

If H.B. was a somewhat colorful character in early Burden, his son—Thomas Jefferson Rude—outdistanced him by far. While his main claim to fame, as far as this article is concerned, is that he fathered Louise’s mother, the beautiful Myra Rude, he is, in his own right, a man well worth considering.

Born in 1856 in Iowa (where H.B. was practicing medicine) Thomas was married in 1877 to Ella Rice, who died three years later. He then followed his father to Kansas where, in 1882, he married Mary J. Gentry, a quiet and refined girl from a prominent Winfield family. Having “commenced his classical education in Indiana and finished it in Hartford, Kansas,” he taught his first school in Cowley County, at Dexter, then moved at age twenty-six to Burden to become the principal of the public school, supervising “a fine edifice valued at \$1,500.”

Being a schoolteacher was hardly the path fate had in mind for Thomas. In a day when formal schooling wasn’t as important as the urgent needs of a community, he quickly took on the trappings of his father’s profession by “learning the trade” of doctoring secondhand. To meet the minimum state requirement, he did spend one semester at Rush College, Chicago, to get a certificate—then hurried back to Burden to set up practice. His house on Oak Street was something of an attraction. One resident remembers it looking a “mess,” with his office a wood-frame shack set a few feet back of the main

house, where also were stables and pens for horses, hogs, and cattle. In addition, there was "an open cave" in the front, unkept yard.

Tall and slender, bearded and wearing glasses, Thomas cut quite a figure on any one of the several fine horses he owned. A Burden citizen remembers him fondly but honestly: "Old Doc Tom was a great man, a bright man. He could sing in a good tenor voice and make a good speech. He liked to read books and study a lot, and had a knack for training horses. He could do anything but make money—and stay away from a bottle of whiskey."

If there was one theme I heard over and over from the residents of Burden—and later, Cambridge, a town eight miles away to which Thomas moved near the end of his life—it was Doc Tom and his whiskey. As one elderly Cambridge lady put it, "He was a good doctor, but you sure had to catch him when he wasn't drinking." And that wasn't easy, since it was rumored he took his first drink of the day before breakfast.

One Burdenite told me he thought the reason for the good doctor's alcoholism was a financial disaster incurred when he "bought a bunch of hogs" only to see them all die of cholera less than a year later—an event that "ruined him financially." Others speculated he had little money because many of his patients never paid him for his services. Whatever the reason—worry, boredom, or the pure pleasure of it—Thomas definitely enjoyed the bottles he, and others, could procure in the land of Prohibition by simply having four quarts of bourbon sent express-shipment by rail to "John Doe, c/o Burden."

And when deep in his cups, Thomas apparently became the ringleader for jollity among comrades. One such episode nearly killed him. It happened late one night at Ben Franklin's restaurant in Burden. Ben was asleep in the building, with a sharp hatchet used for opening crates by his side, when a gang of rowdy, happy—and very drunk—revelers began to bang on his door, demanding he open up and feed them. Ben was an uncharitable soul at three in the morning, and refused. Whereupon, Doc Rude forced his way into the place. His reward for such audacity was to have Ben throw the hatchet at him. Thomas was struck in the side of the face—it was a very serious and bloody wound—and when the scars healed, some say, he grew a beard to cover up his miscalculations of Ben.

Thomas's wife, Mary (she was "neither beautiful nor ugly," I was told), lived somewhat in the shadow of her flamboyant husband, contenting herself at being a good cook and seamstress, and a devoted mother to the six (of ten) surviving children: Richard, Eva, Robert, Pattie, Paul—and Myra. Like her mother, Myra grew up loving music and books, and one Cambridge resident remembers their home there being filled with singing, where "everybody was always welcome." Although Thomas wasn't a churchgoer, Mary was. She played the organ in the Presbyterian church and encouraged her daughters to play the piano in their home. Unlike the shaky financial existence in Burden, the last days of Thomas and Mary in Cambridge (he moved there because they needed a doctor, and his practice had fallen off in

Burden) were peaceful and happy. Thomas and Mary are buried side-by-side in the beautiful little country cemetery southwest of Burden, Thomas having died in 1914 and Mary two years later.



Myra Rude.

From this union as noted, came the mother of Louise Brooks. The early photographs of Myra make it obvious where Louise derived her own beauty. With soft hazel eyes and black curly hair and a bewitching smile, nineteen-year-old Myra was one of the prettiest young ladies in Burden or Cambridge—and if you added to that her other qualities, her sharp intelligence and musical talent, you had just the kind of girl to attract a shy but successful thirty-five-year-old lawyer named Leonard Porter Brooks.

One of the seven sons born to Martin Luther Brooks and his wife, Elizabeth Manley, Leonard had grown up on his father's farm near Burden into a quiet, serious young man who liked to play baseball with the sons of other farmers,

but who had little desire himself to farm. Before coming to Kansas, his father (who would be the last of the original Brooks brothers to die—in 1926 at the age of eighty-four) had enlisted “at the call of Lincoln” in the Union Army in Company H, First Tennessee Calavry, fighting at the battles of Shiloh and Missionary Ridge and entering Atlanta with General Sherman. He was, as his obituary put it in the *Burden Times*, “a brave soldier, a successful farmer and a believer in the church, the school and the home.” His wife would survive him by four years.



Leonard Porter Brooks

Leonard yearned for something beyond Burden and its small-town ways, and believed the answer lay in higher education. I have held in my hands a dusty ledger from the vault of the registrar's office in Winfield's Methodist college, Southwestern, with an entry indicating Leonard Brooks was a special student for one term there in 1890, taking an algebra course. There is also a photograph of “the Collegians and Faculty” (they numbered only seventy-seven) which shows a stern-jawed, rather Licolnesque, and deadly serious Leonard staring into the future. That future included entering the law school of the University of Kansas as a special student—where he was graduated on January 5, 1897.

Leonard returned briefly to Burden to practice law, but soon moved on east to the thriving town of Cherryvale, where he was employed as an attorney with the Prairie Oil and Gas Company (later Sinclair Oil). It was from this

good position in a growing town that he wooed and won the hand of Myra. They were married at eight o'clock, Wednesday morning, May 4, 1904, at the Burden home of Thomas and Mary Rude, with a Rev. G. W. Baker presiding. The Burden *Times* called it "a pretty wedding" and Myra an "accomplished daughter" who was "one of Burden's most popular young ladies both in social and church circles."

Directly below the newspaper account of the wedding (but not a *part* of the account) was a poem titled "What Happens." It read:

That pity is akin to love
Is very quickly proved,
For when engagements are announced
We're by that feeling moved.

"Poor boy! What could he see in her?"
His friends will mutter grim,
While hers will groan: "A shame to throw
Herself away on him!"

Little did the friends and relatives attending the wedding on the beautiful and happy day in May dream how ironic—and how prophetic—that little poem would be for Leonard Porter Brooks and Myra Rude.

Cherryvale: "A Blind Horse in a Clover Patch"

Cherryvale, situated in the northeastern part of Montgomery County, was a busy and growing town of nearly seven thousand people the year Leonard brought his beautiful young bride there to live in a white frame house at 531 East Seventh. Steadily growing since the day Ab Eaton and Thomas Whelan settled it in the late 1860s, Cherryvale leaped into real growth with the coming of the railroads in the 1870s and the discovery of gas and oil in the late 1880s. The Edgar Zinc Company, with its rows of smelter houses, company cottages, broad streets, and lawns provided Cherryvale with a second name, "Smelter Town." It had two banks, two daily newspapers, five churches, a telephone company, a park and an auditorium, several good hotels and restaurants, and an Opera House.

A history of Cherryvale, written only a year before Leonard and Myra set up housekeeping, described the location of the town as "a happy one...in a broad valley of wonderful fertility stretching miles to the north and south." Even the town's name (a tribute to nearby Cherry Creek) was a nice omen for the new couple, promising a blossoming of both prosperity and happiness. Leonard and Myra could buy their groceries at Homer Brooks' Cash Store (no relation), enjoy ice cream at the Owl Drug or its competitor, Squier & Frank, pick up some nice Bulgarian cloth or embroidery silk at the Magnet, shop for

a spanking New Mars Range stove at G.H. Sinnets', browse for books, sheet music, "Talking machines," and musical instruments at the Cherryvale Book Store on the south side of Main Street, bargain for some wood at Glen's Lumber Company, and arrange to have their lace curtains washed and stretched at the Cherryvale Laundry by simply calling number 198!

In the beginning, as a bachelor, Leonard had practiced law from his home on East Seventh, but with a wife—and the possibility of a family he so desperately wanted—he found an office on the second floor of the Central Block building at 106½ West Main. Myra, yearning for the relatively vast opportunities for culture which Cherryvale offered, joined a ladies club.



There is a photograph of Myra and a gaggle of Edwardian ladies on the front porch of the house on East Seventh, and below it in a scrapbook many years later, Myra wrote: "Cherryvale Group of Grand Dames." She probably attended many of the offerings of the Opera House—which included on one spectacular evening a lecture on "Jerusalem" by one Madame Lydia Von Finklestein Mountford, "supplemented with living picture tableau."

How happy and active Myra really was is mere conjecture, but it is a fact that one year after her marriage to Leonard she gave birth to her first child, a son named Martin. And then, a year after that—on November 14, 1906—she brought into the world a baby girl with the same dark hair and beauty as her mother. They named her Louise.

The two newspapers in Cherryvale noted the arrival of Louise Brooks with the sly journalistic humor characteristic of the day. The *Daily Republican* put it like this in a squib on its very last page:

Assistant Counsellor Is a Girl

A brand new baby girl is the attraction just now at the home of City Attorney L. P. Brooks. The daughter came this morning and Mr. Brooks thinks that he will be able to "revise" more ordinances tonight than at any previous session.

The Cherryvale *Daily News* was, on page one, more poetic:

A Girl

Attorney L. P. Brooks is stepping around today like a blind horse in a clover patch all on account of a young lady who came to his home this morning where she will reside in the future. All concerned are doing nicely.

When Louise was less than a year old, her parents bought a nicer, larger brick home right in the heart of things at 320 West Main. Purchased from W. G. Cook and his wife Anna, the house cost \$2,200 (with a mortgage) and the warranty deed was signed August 13, 1907. Both of the Brooks homes are still standing and occupied today, the first one the residence of Joe Fernandez and the second the residence of Eva Hills. It was in the new brick house that Louise's younger brother and sister were born—Theodore (1912) and June (1914).

The school Louise attended was only three blocks west of her home, the McKinley School, built in 1885 on the site of an even older school. Demolished in 1927 to make way for yet another schoolhouse, the old McKinley was an imposing stone and brick structure which housed all the grades for Cherryvale. Those who remember Louise best as a little girl spoke of both her beauty and vitality. One resident, who was a bit older than Louise at the time, vividly recalls how Louise "bounced around, spinning on her toes," and that she looked "like a little Madonna with black hair." In those long-ago and still-innocent days, Louise and her girlfriends would walk from school in the afternoons to the McGinley Drug (where Tru-Value is, presently) and have a soda or a piece of five-cent pie.

In the introductory chapter of *Lulu in Hollywood*, Louise writes: "From the time I was ten, when a Mrs. Buckpitt came eight miles by train from the town of Independence to the village of Cherryvale to give me dancing lessons, I was what amounted to a professional dancer." This teacher was Mae Argue Buckpitt, who will enter our story again later. Louise danced at civic clubs, such as the Elks and Eagles, and quite possibly for the Library Club, the New Idea Club, the Thursday Musical Club, and the Cherryvale's Violet Club. It is known she danced at a week-long gala held in March of 1917 at the Opera House, and one former resident remembers her "dancing across the stage of the Liberty Theater holding an American flag."

As for the parents of this budding, dancing beauty, those who remember their fifteen-year stay in Cherryvale, speak kindly and warmly of them. "They dressed a little nicer than most people, I think," one lady told me, "and they both looked like Italians. Like Italian movie stars, in fact." The high-school girl who was Leonard's secretary remembers him now as "a marvelous man with a happy family." Leonard was, she says, a very quiet gentleman who dressed immaculately, always wore a hat, and chewed gum but never smoked. "Louise was delicate and shy," she insists, "and Myra was very quiet."



Martin and Louise Brooks, Cherryvale

It was during the years Louise was growing up in Cherryvale that the industry most important in her life was also growing up: Hollywood. By 1915 (when Louise was eleven) there was no less than five movie houses in Cherryvale—named Star, Zim, Liberty, Snark, and Gem.

It is not too difficult to imagine Louise and her girlfriends sitting in one of those darkened theaters, listening to the melodramatic chording from a stage piano while such films as the Lubin five-reelers, *The House Next Door*, *The Enemies*, *Fate's Alibi*, and one which Louise probably insisted her parents let her see, *The Dancer*, starring Cleo Madison, flickered silently before their eyes.

Although Louise has written that both she and her mother hoped she would one day be a great dancer, it is largely because of her role in *Pandora's Box*, in which she played the non-dancing role of Lulu, that Louise's fame as a cult-figure of silent films is assured. And there is a curious coincidence in this. At the same time Louise was growing up in Cherryvale, there was another girl growing up there—a girl by the name of Lulu Brooks. In the 1913-14 *City Directory*, this Lulu is listed as a student; by the 1920-21 directory she is listed as being an assistant cashier at the E-Z Store. Then she disappears from the 1925 directory—the same year Louise signed her contract with Paramount. I was unable to gain any further information about this young Cherryvale girl with the singular name.

By 1919 Cherryvale had declined by almost four thousand inhabitants from its peak days, and it was either in the summer or spring of that year that the Brooks family left and moved the few miles west to the larger and growing

Independence—so that Leonard could continue working for the Prairie Oil and Gas Company, whose headquarters were located at Ninth and Myrtle. The family settled into a two-story home in a very good neighborhood at 707 North Penn Avenue. The best evidence suggests that they lived in Independence only a short time, perhaps only three or four months.

Independence: "You Never Saw Such a Girl"

When they arrived, Independence was a thriving city with a host of industries—including cement, brick, tile and pottery plants, an asphalt and rubber company, oil refineries, a window glass factory, flour and planing mills, and other works. It was also a busy juncture for the Santa Fe and Missouri Pacific railways and boasted an interurban line into Coffeyville to the south.

All of this, of course, was probably unimportant to the thirteen-year-old Louise, who enrolled that September in the Montgomery County High School. She already had her Dutch-bob bangs (her mother's idea), a hairstyle that was to help make her famous in films, and to provoke Kenneth Tynan to give reference to them in the title of his *New Yorker* profile some fifty years later. One woman in Independence remembers seeing Louise in the auditorium at school, surrounded by other girls because of her beauty and popularity, and thinking, perhaps with an understandable tinge of envy: "How lovely she is!" The woman also told me that Louise was a favorite, even then, of the boys, saying, "They were all crazy about her." Another former resident wrote to me about her clearest memory of Louise: "She taught me to roller-skate by wrapping and tying towels around my knees and a large bed pillow at both my front and back. What sight I must have looked!" This same woman says that she can remember "an antique, square spinet in one of the downstairs rooms" of the Brooks' home. Still another person who knew Louise at that time remembers her as "vivid and attractive."

It was during this brief time in Independence that Louise renewed—or continued—her study with Mae Argue Buckpitt in her dance studio on the top floor of the YMCA building on East Myrtle. Ms. Buckpitt ordered the very latest dance routines from Chicago, and one contemporary dancing student of Louise's time recalls that Ms. Buckpitt would often compliment Louise on the original costumes she wore to class. It was Myra who had designed and sewn them. Apparently, Louise was quite taken with her teacher, because even after the family had moved from Independence, Louise returned—in May of 1921—to perform under Buckpitt's direction a Spanish Dance in something called "Pageant of Childhood," presented at the Beldorf Theater and the Elks Country Club. One girl who was in the same program now remembers how "outstanding" Louise was with her dark bangs and ivory-white skin—but that she was also oddly "reserved."

By another small irony, the very date Louise enrolled for school—Monday, September 8, 1919—there appeared in the Independence *Daily Reporter* an

article titled "Movies Make Beauty"—and, again, one can only wonder if Louise (or perhaps Myra?) read it. The article quotes a Chicago sculptor, Lorado Taft, as saying: "Girls will be psychologically affected by moving pictures...They see beautiful women on the screen; then they go home and practice for hours before the mirror. The outcome? Graceful walking, pleasant faces, fine complexions and vivacity. It is the movies that are molding ever fresh types of native beauty—new American types."

Whether or not the youthful Louise contemplated—or even dreamed about—a movie career at this time is not known, but the movies were there, hovering in the background of her Independence sojourn like beckoning spirits from afar. That fall of 1919, between classes and dance lessons, she could have enjoyed the National Paramount Art Craft Week (ten cents a ticket) which included Dorothy Gish in *Boots* and Vivian Martin in *You Never Saw Such A Girl*.

Obviously, the boys at Montgomery High had never seen such a girl, either. But they had to look fast—because by January of 1920, Louise Brooks had vanished completely from their fascinated and flirtatious glances.

Wichita: "In My Dreams I Dance"

The final move in Kansas for the Brooks family was from Independence to Wichita—where Leonard had accepted a position as corporation lawyer for the Sterling Oil & Refining Company. The family now occupied a spacious home (fourteen rooms) at 924 North Topeka Avenue. Louise enrolled in the Horace Mann Intermediate School, then a new building at 428 South Broadway. She would attend the eighth and ninth grades—from Spring 1920 to Summer 1921—and take the normal course loads for such levels. She was a "good, average student" in English, math, Latin, and social studies.

Her heart however, was in her dancing.

She studied dance at the Wichita College of Music, under the direction of Alice Campbell. It was by now that Louise's personality—her artistic temperament—was beginning to unveil itself in sometimes unpleasant ways. Myra worried about it enough to tell Louise: "Now, dear, try to be more popular—try not to make people so mad!" Despite this, Ms. Campbell dismissed her from the dancing class, saying she was "spoiled, bad-tempered, and insulting." Predictably, Myra came to her daughter's defense with alacrity: "Yes, Louise is hard on everyone, but she is *much* harder on herself." Yet Myra was quite upset about Louise's dismissal, although Louise herself was not. The event "left me with a curiously relieved feeling," Louise wrote in her schoolgirl diary. "I must study, and that means away to broader fields. I've had enough of teaching my teacher what to teach me."

Those "broader fields" opened up in November 1921, when the famous dancer (and Independence, Missouri-born) Ted Shawn and his company came to Wichita to appear at the Crawford Theater. Following the



Louise Brooks at fifteen.

performance, Myra steered Louise backstage to meet Shawn, who cheerfully confided to them that he was opening a new studio in New York and that he would welcome Louise to enroll in the summer course of 1922. The tuition fee was a hefty \$300. Louise wanted to go—and Myra confidently promised to “wheel” Leonard out of the money.

For his part, Leonard had never been very enthusiastic about a dancing career for his older daughter, calling the idea “silly.” Oddly enough, Leonard had his own aesthetic streak, manifested in his reading the classics and in his making and playing of violins (he was self-taught). It took all of the winter of 1921 and the spring of 1922 to talk him into the idea of “sending a little fifteen-year-old girl way from home” to gigantic New York City. But Myra finally persuaded him, and Leonard surrendered with only one firm stipulation: that Louise be accompanied by a mature chaperon. One was found in Alice Mills, “a stocky, bespectacled housewife of thirty-six.” What Leonard probably didn’t know was that Alice *wanted* to go because she had “fallen idiotically in love with the beautiful Ted Shawn at first sight,” and wanted to study dancing with him herself!

Thus it was that on a nice summer’s day in 1922, Louise and her new “roommate” left the Union Station in Wichita to start an adventure that would, in sixteen fleeting years, see the beginning and the end of Louise’s glorious—and to Myra, bitterly disappointing—stage and screen career.

She left Wichita an innocent girl (Myra had allowed Louise to subscribe to *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vanity Fair*, but had told her nothing about sex), but when she returned to Wichita in 1938—broke and her movie career in shambles—she was no longer sexually innocent. Not only had she had affairs with a number of men—including a pleasant one with Charlie Chaplin—she had been married (and divorced) twice. She told Kenneth Tynan, without a trace of self-pity, that she had “fled” back to Wichita from Hollywood, and that her decision to do so had “turned out to be another kind of hell,” since the “citizens of Wichita either resented me for having been a success or despised me for being a failure.” Added to the problems was the curious new relationship between Myra and Leonard. At the beginning of their marriage, so Louise claims, Myra informed her husband that she was using him to “escape to freedom and the arts.” She did so by leaving Leonard in the mid-1920s to make her own career as a Chautauqua lecturer and author. She also boldly capitalized on the fact that her daughter was the beautiful and successful movie star, Louise Brooks, “admired and acclaimed by thousands of movie fans.” Myra penned a book titled *Health, Beauty, and Psychology* (I was unable to find a copy) and was the associate editor of *The Golden Rule*, published in Chicago. But now, in 1938, Myra was back living under the same roof with charitable, patient, meticulous Leonard—and beginning to suffer from the emphysema which, a few years later, would kill her.

Those who remember the six years during which Louise lived for a final time in Wichita have disparate views of her, ranging from “mean” and “obnoxious” to “wonderful” and “not at all conceited.” Others remember



The Wichita home.

her fighting with Myra and her brother, Theo; being drunk and standing on her head in public; cursing and drinking heavily, and being savagely sarcastic to old school chums. Yet one woman who knew Louise well during this time, told me she was “a charming and delightful woman” with “all the charisma in the world.”

What nobody could deny was Louise’s beauty and her dancing ability. One friend remembers seeing her walking down Topeka Avenue at high noon in a black pants-suit and high heels (daring for the time) and looking “like the most elegant thing I’d ever seen.” As for her dancing, Louise and a promising young Wichita male dancer named Hal McCoy opened a studio (financed by Theo, Louise’s brother) in the Dockum Building at 110 North Hillside Avenue, where they taught rhumba, tango, and foxtrot lessons to adults. The venture ultimately failed, due in part to a personality clash between the partners and the fact that, as Louise told Tynan, “it didn’t make any money.” The Dockum building is still there—and the room which was once Louise and Hal’s studio is now filled with hardware supplies.

A year after the studio closed (1943), Louise left Wichita for New York. She never returned—even for Myra’s funeral in April of 1944. As for Leonard, he continued to write Louise letters filled with “fatherly advice,” and in the meantime achieved long-sought political eminence as an Assistant Attorney General under two Kansas governors. He died, age 92, on October 15, 1960. Again, Louise did not come home for the funeral. Myra and Leonard lie together now in the Brooks family plot in the cemetery northeast of Burden.

Louise’s love-hate relationship with Wichita—and Kansas—is probably explained by the youthful culture-shock she received by going to New York at such a tender age. It was there she became aware of her “hated Kansas

accent" and her "Kansas corn." In one absurdly inaccurate interview in a 1978 edition of the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, Louise is quoted as saying she was born in Wichita, "a place she says she detests almost as much as her 'dull' name." In this same article, Louise—disabled, old, and alone—told the reporters in a poignant moment: "In my dreams I am never crippled. I dance. . . ."

It is also possible that Louise occasionally dreams of her youth in Kansas—of the buggy races in 1919; and her grandfather, old Doc Tom with his horse, Tony; and her fifth birthday party in Cherryvale when Myra delighted her little friends by cooking toy rings and whistles into the iced cupcakes; and of helping wash the dishes with Venus Jones, the sister of Vivian Vance of *I Love Lucy* fame; and the warm applause from the audience of Wichita's Miller Theater where she danced—before she had ever heard of Ted Shawn. But more importantly, perhaps Louise at times wonders if her Kansas background did not, after all, provide her with the single quality the film critics have admired most in her, aside from sheer beauty: that sunflower-simple honesty in her voice and manner that placed her apart from so many other film actresses of her time who were false and affected on the screen.

There is a last small irony to frame the life of this remarkable personality, Louise Brooks. It is a poem which can be found today in a crumbling copy of the Burden *Eagle* at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka, and it was printed the week Louise was born. It could have been composed as both a tribute and a warning to the baby girl Myra was holding in her arms that very day over in Cherryvale:

A Prophecy

A dream of happiness

Sweet dream!

Those eyes:

A thought of blessedness!

Is this

That dies?

Yet tho ne'er again

Those eyes

Are seen

Life's star till its end

Will be

That dream.



The two people who could have contributed most to my research, Louise herself and her sister June, did not answer my letters. However, I am thankful to a host of others who were all most helpful: Tessiana Blakeslee Callahan, James Card, Sarah Estes Cole, Audrey Crowder, Gene DeGruson, Earl Dyer, Joe Fernandez, Mrs. Bob Francis, Gertrude Hankins, Eva Hills, Wilma Jennings Hill, Louise Kaufman, Steel Lewis, Lucile Lundy, Thelma Mergredy Martin, Mildred Meier, Robert Melton, Hal McCoy, Grace Newton, Daniel Nutter, Elizabeth Blakeslee O'Connor, Mike Printz, Lola Raffington, Klara Spemeier, Venus Jones Spears, Edra Thornton, Ross Wilkens, Cheryl Voigtlander.

And a special thanks to tireless Wilma Wood Schweitzer of Independence; to that grand old gentleman of Burden, Ralph Henderson; and to Louise's charming sister-in-law, Margaret Brooks, of Wichita.

Reclaimed

Wind comes to the rock house
curling through the emptiness of rooms
leaving no path across the pasture
no message on the fence;

the creek lies dead beside the bones of trees
wires release the gate
a door blows shut.

Walls settle
toward a memory of earth—
the letters of the name
above the arch
creep back into the shelter
of the stone.



Barbara Shirk Parish

A Fall Day near Trading Post

(John Greenleaf Whittier, writing of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre near here, called it a "stain that shall never bleach out in the sun!")

Off the white highway through trees
burning blood, tombstones stand,
dark soldiers at parade rest.
Only a mockingbird "on the lintels
of Kansas" chips away at silence.

Nothing moves here.
Beneath a cloud-hung sky, snakes
asleep underground, a bronze bell,
stilled in its arc, tied back, never
to toll the Trading Post warning.

As the past dragoons the clear air,
nothing moves here
but a traveller's passing thought.

Alice L. Price





Goodness

By Joan Ritty

He planned to kill her in the vicinity of Bakersfield when he had no more use for her. He would find a remote desert spot and pile the sand around her body. He had not yet decided how she would die.

She climbed in the cab of the camper on the passenger side and slammed the door hard.

"Don't have to take the door off, Petunia," he said, not smiling. He pulled away from the diner where he had met her and bought her a meal of pork chops and mashed potatoes. He drove onto Route 70 outside Hays, Kansas. The sun was edging hotly upwards and the woman rolled down her window, fingers of perspiration circling her neck and running down her cheeks from the line of gray hair about her ears. Too squarely built to be called fat, she was not young, nor good-looking, nor even quite clean. Certainly not what he usually looked for in a woman.

"Been on the road long, Petunia?" he asked, eyeing the soiled jeans and T-shirt she wore.

"Ever since my man threw me out." Her voice came flatly, like the words, and she leaned her face towards the hot wind whipping past the window.

"Why'd he throw you out?"

"Lost my job at the factory."

"In Hays? What kind of factory?"

"Factory in Kansas City," she corrected, looking at him. Her eyes were blue. Tired-looking eyes. She wore no makeup and her skin was mottled and bumpy with whiteheads.

"And you want to go to California?"

"My daughter's there," she said. "By my first husband," she added, as if it were important that he understand that.

So she had a daughter. He wondered if the daughter was expecting her. He felt the poison of his increasing bitterness spread through him towards the woman and glanced at her.

"Where in California?"

"San Diego."

"I'm going farther north," he said.

"I can get out anywhere," she said. "Anywhere in California will do."

He nodded. I'll see to that, he thought. A desert grave just because. Through this woman he would have revenge on Thelma. The saint. The good woman. His wife for thirty-five years. Never a word of complaint despite all his other women. He had filed for divorce when he had had enough of that goodness which made him feel so guilty. Resentful, even frightened. Helpless—he could not combat such goodness. Even during the ugly divorce proceedings, she had remained ladylike, composed despite the wrangling over the house and her parents' money. She had been generous in the settlement, so he bought the camper and set out two days ago, leaving Ohio behind—children, brothers, sisters—nothing mattered any more. Nothing and no one. Not even his job in computers. He had gone to college nights to learn computers. Now it was all over. Maybe he would never work again.

The woman went to sleep quickly, snoring a little, slack-jawed. Let her sleep. Tonight she could cook and clean up and be ready for him. She would earn her keep and then he would dump her. A blow on the head maybe, or his belt around her neck. Maybe just his fists. For Thelma.

He had found her leaning against the doorway to the diner at the truck stop. She asked him if he were going west, and when he assented, she asked if he would let her ride along. He studied her broad, plain face and saw the patience, and something more enduring than mere endurance. Goodness again, he thought, and said yes, feeling the renewed anger come to life in him.

"Hungry?" he asked, holding back his rage.

She nodded but avoided looking at him directly.

"C'mon," he told her. "We'll eat. Then we'll hit the road."

She thanked him at the end of the meal, walking behind him towards the camper. He shrugged off her thanks and unlocked the door on the passenger side. She had a small duffel bag he put in the camper before climbing behind the wheel.

"My name's George," he said. She did not answer and he slipped the vehicle into gear and began to fight the glare of the pavement. All

around them was the brown of that summer's drought. The camper was not air-conditioned and the wheel soon grew slippery under his sweaty hands.

She slept almost to the Colorado line, her head bouncing to the bump of the wheels on the highway. She woke when he pulled in to gas up and ask directions to a campground. Alone, he would not have worried about a campground, but this way it would be better to have facilities handy. The sun in their faces was stubborn, reluctant to give up its hold on the day, and they drove into the camp site while it was still strong.

She got their dirty clothes together and held out her hand for coins. Apparently she had no money at all. He put what change he had in her outstretched hand and noticed the broken nails dark-lined, against his own pale, neatly filed nails: the nails of the computer room.

While she was gone he had a cold beer and a nap under a tree. She wakened him when she came back. The clean clothes were dried and folded over her arm, and she apparently had taken a shower. She wore a faded flowered wrapper tied at the side and her hair was wet and plastered to her scalp. She looked different that way. More vulnerable, he thought, hating the word. He growled at being disturbed.

"Supper?" she asked.

"There's stuff in the refrigerator. Fix what you want to."

She brought him another beer and then he smelled ham searing, and heard the popping sound of potatoes frying. This was going to work all right. He would drive and she would cook while he rested. Another couple days would do it. Around them families were checking in, laughing, children quarreling, dogs barking. Almost like home, he thought grimly. He was glad they had stopped early.

She carried their plates outside and they ate in the shade of the tree. She was careful when she sat down wearing the loose wrapper. She had made coffee and they drank it silently. When she collected the dishes for washing, he pinched her thigh.

"That was good, *Petunia*," he said. He got up and strode down to the showers, taking some of the clean clothes along. *Petunia*. He had always called Thelma *Petunia* when he was courting her. She was like a little flower then. And he had called all the women since *Petunia*; it saved trouble and concentration. Most of them liked it.

He put on the clean clothes and was satisfied with his bargain. What if he did have to feed her a few times—her presence took no more gasoline. She was a convenience and she was doing her part. She seemed to understand what was required of her. Even after it

grew dark and they went to bed in the back of the camper, she accepted him passively. No objection, but no participation either. Her staunch body tolerated him. Then he rolled over and left her alone and slept. It had been a wordless encounter, sex without sex, if that was possible, he thought. Well, the desert floor was waiting for her. He would find someone along the coast, maybe in Santa Barbara. He had heard Santa Barbara was a nice place. Maybe Fresno. He had time now and enough of Thelma's money. He could look around.

He had never been in the mountains before. When they started the ascent, he grew nervous. He was unaccustomed to the camper, and the altitude affected him. The woman sat still, indrawn and silent, looking fearfully at the depths below. Just after they passed the Continental Divide, the right rear tire blew and the truck gave a sickening lurch towards the canyons. Edgily, he nursed it along to the first wide place and pulled over. The woman was willing to help and squatted down with him alongside the damaged tire, a question in her eyes. Suddenly he struck her a sharp blow with his fist just under the cheekbone, and she tumbled into the dirt. She sat up crying.

"Why did you do that, George?" It was not a critical question; she asked it mildly, holding her hand to her face.

"Because I felt like it, Petunia." His voice silenced her and she crawled a short distance away while he changed the tire. When they climbed back into the cab he noticed that there was a red mark on her face, with a deeper area turning dark. Now and then she rubbed it. Another good woman who won't complain, he thought, the old fear coming back. He had never struck Thelma.

He wanted to see the Great Salt Lake so they took a brief trip north before dropping back down to Provo. The nights were all the same—the woman cooked, the man used her and she held still. Outside Las Vegas they stopped briefly for lunch, and later walked around the city looking at the casinos.

"What's the matter, Petunia," he asked, "can't you keep up?"

"My feet hurt," she said. "The sandal straps cut into my feet." They kept walking until he was satisfied and she was limping. In the truck, she removed her sandals and rubbed some cream into the sore places on her feet, smearing the dust into streaks. He began driving again, almost madly. It would not be long now until he would be rid of her. He would keep his eye out tonight and tomorrow for a likely place to bury her.

He saw that the bruise on her cheek seemed to have taken on more color. She and Thelma deserved whatever they got. He felt no remorse, only apprehension. His enemy was without form. That night

he could not get to sleep but the woman snored softly with her mouth slightly open. He felt like punching her again but he sat up and smoked a cigarette and finally dropped off to sleep.

They hurried through breakfast in the morning. He wanted to reach Bakersfield. Glancing at her placid face, the bruise, he remarked to himself on her peacefulness. There was something nearly beautiful in the quiet of her countenance when she met his eyes.

"Last day, Petunia!" he exclaimed as they drove south.

"I really am grateful for the ride, George."

"No problem," he said. Wait until she found out what he had planned for her—would she be grateful then? Would she fight then?

"Desolate country, eh, Petunia?"

"George, don't call me Petunia. My name is Thelma."

Thelma. Her name was Thelma. The incongruity of the coincidence stunned him.

"Thelma?"

"Thelma Blake."

He did not answer. How could he kill a Thelma? He knew what goodness was. He had seen it in his wife and he had seen it in this woman. He did not dare to kill a good woman named Thelma, he thought, shuddering. He was tormented by fear and confusion. He could not understand how this had come to be. Another Thelma. He drove onward past Barstow towards Bakersfield. Faster now. Almost frenzied, ignoring the woman. The road seemed to push ahead faster than he could gain on it. His hands grew cramped on the wheel. His whole body stiffened.

Approaching Bakersfield, he stopped and bought gas, and asked directions to the Bakersfield bus station. There he handed Thelma her duffel bag.

"Here's ten dollars," he said. "For your food till you get in touch with your daughter." He asked the ticket agent the cost of a single to San Diego, paid for one fare and handed the ticket to the woman. Thelma's money. Thelma was still following him. Good women drove him crazy.

He strode out of the station without saying goodbye. He drove into the bright street feeling lonely, desperate. He had to find a woman who was not good.

"One generation kills its reformers and the next makes heroes of them."—J. A. Wayland, Girard, Kansas, 1912.

An Examination in History

June O. Underwood



I. Preface

A. She shoves her glasses

back,
up,
over the ridge of her nose,
rereads the yellowing, close-printed page,
sighs,
and sips her lukewarm coffee:

B. "Emmelina Harrington Perkins Myers,

born 1847;
passed to her rest,
September 27, 1929."

"John Stotler and Christine Grafenstein

were married on January 20, 1883.

Miss Grafenstein

was the daughter of William R. Grafenstein.

Six children

were born of this union."

"Bart married Estella Crum. They had two girls also."

"Mary Moberley Pike,

Daughter of Barney J. Moberley,

Wife of William Robert Pike,

Mother of Oscar William Pike,

Born near Bakersville, Ohio,

Died at Cottonwood Falls, Kansas."

Lies buried beside her loved ones.

C. The glasses slip back down her greasing nose.

The storm windows catch her shadow,
doubling her blurry image.

The acrid smell of iris grazes her nostrils.

In her ragged sneakers, her feet sweat.

She puts the book back on its jumbled pile and gets a fresh cup of coffee.

II. Introduction

A. A visit.

She wraps the carefully neutral, slightly long
skirt around her,
and pulls a proper shirt, a bit faded,
from the closet.

Shoes. . . ?

She'll have to walk in the pasture,
examine some spirea,
stare into a silo—
brown leather, wedge heels.

In the makeup mirror, her lip gloss shines softly.
Just right.

B. Some evenings:

The three-inch heels she wears strangle circulation,
invite analysis.

They pull at her upper thighs, her back, her breasts;
these parts of her body respond to her shoes.

The glass door reflects her,
edged against ferns,
sleek and taut.

C. Mornings:

She lies in bed, alert, making lists,
The City Club dinner—6:30.
Write Bart.
Mother's Day baskets—get construction paper.
Library—the Wyandotte Convention.

Up briskly, pull on slacks, lace oxfords,
a long-sleeved shirt, a pocketed vest, hair in a bun,
kiss the children, arrange the lunches,
throw out the iris, bring in a peony.

Bicycling to work, the seat is warm on her bottom.

D. And after work . . .

Jogging, thumping through the streets,
Suddenly she reaches out and soars—
elegance in canary yellow shoes;
her shadow stretches and flows in front of her;
her hair curls with sweat.

In a passing car, a startled lady in a flowered hat,
gazes, then smiles.

She waves back,
arms flung wide.

III. Body

A. In the classroom, she lays out her lecture:

"The Kansas woman's suffrage movement
[yawning girls, cackling hens]
Was in fact conservative rather than liberal.
[behind their screens, the women spoke]
An examination of the arguments made by the suffragists
[the road to hell is paved with good examinations]
Indicates that in 1859
[Seneca Falls ten years festering; bleeding Kansas an open
sore]
The women leading the constitutional discussion
[Mesdames James Meyers, John Stotler, Bertram Crum]
Argued that the vote would give women greater domestic power—
[daughter, wife, mother]
Greater power over the children,
Greater power over the schools,
Greater power over alcohol.

"This call for suffrage actually reinforced the concepts of
woman's proper sphere,
tied them to the kitchen stove,
swaddled them like their babies, in smothering
protectiveness."
[Lunch money in the teapot]

B. After her bath,

pink and yawning,
she slips into a brown silk nightgown,
and sprawls on the bed.
With her eyes she traces the ripples of his back.
He sees her watching him in the mirror,
winks,
and pounces.
Her toes curl and tingle.
His smell and hers haunt the room.

C. Later, she pulls his socks over her cold feet, tucks the chenille robe around herself, and sits in the rocking chair.

She dreams of flowers,
moss rose, petunia, geranium, pansy,
buttercup, peony, phlox, periwinkle.
Her reflection in the window slips in and out of shadows.



Photograph by Dimitre Barde

She wakes and stares at a wilting coleus.
 She thinks about the WCTU and the *Pioneer Mother*,
 of raw whiskey in rain-soaked saddies,
 of wedlock and gaunt women,
 of babies named *William* and *Bart* and *Oscar* and *Barney*.

IV. Conclusion

Day after day,
 week after week,
 the sun bursting through the leaves into her bedroom
 or the rain slipping down the leaded window,
 She chooses her clothes.

She peers in the mirror, runs a comb through
 her hair.
 She touches her mind and her day,
 caresses them gently,
 then chooses the silk shirt waist or the levi suit.
 She thinks of herself,
 of her body in space.
 She chooses her shoes to fit the flex of her soul.

Sometimes she thinks, "It is not now, as it was then, with
 one mother hubbard and a black wool Sunday dress."

Shoes litter her closet floor:

sandals, some with flapping soles,
a pair of work boots beside her spike heels,
six broad-toed pumps of varying colors,
three pairs of sneakers,
wedgies, joggers, flats, loafers, saddle oxfords.

Historians, deliberating over the evidence, could say

her shoes hurt her feet—
or—she ran barefoot through fresh plowed earth.
They could say
her heavy work boots caused callouses—
or—she wore out the soles of her Italian *Pedrinos*.

The last choice will come. The last words will be said.

But they won't be hers.

She has read the *County History* and the *Federal Papers*;

no warm bicycle seats there;
no ragged sneakers, not a single sweaty curl.

Disguised in her last disguise, mingled with all the others,
mysterious only in her lack of distinction,
her shoes to the Salvation Army.

Woman.

Born of this union.

Married to that man.

Mother of these children.

Died, nineteen-hundred-and-so-and-so.

Lies Buried Beside Her Loved Ones.

On the Death of Calvin Coolidge

“We’re so unused to normal people these abnormal times that when Cal Coolidge came our way and acted out the tight New Englander he was with morals, rectitude, piety, laconic speech (“I do not choose to run,” he said and stuck to it), when he forgot to put on airs, but acted as he would if on his grandpa’s farm or in his father’s small town store, the nation was perplexed. The magazines wrote articles about this strange anomaly. We couldn’t understand plain common sense. We put a halo on it, discussed him as a mystery.”—Margaret E. Haughawout, *Diary*, January 6, 1933.

G oing Around His Head for Years

—For Berkeley Brown

There's a main character in your life
called the dreaming pig. He's the one
who disappeared around the corner, nonchalant
as a phone booth, passing you first & last, the roustabout
who threw off the lie detector test
in an insulted sort of way.

The dreaming pig's driving the bus
or sitting near the backdoor in a beautiful sag,
those little tunes he's humming, they've been going
round his head for years. That's
the way he is, sometimes filling up the whole theater
with a squeel of pig delight.

Also in the dream, the back of a pig
pig shoulders slumped over a drinking fountain
in the nearest park. But this doesn't disturb you.
You know that pig's a fake.



Marianne Boruch



Leon Trotsky, portrait from life, made at Brest Litovsk, January 1918 [artist Hans Stabcer].

Trotsky in Girard

By E. Haldeman-Julius



First let me say that Leon Trotsky was *never* in Girard. He never got west of the Hudson River. The story—and it promises to live eternally—that he worked in Girard on the *Appeal to Reason* was a hoax. I tell it here because it belongs among the classics of credulity. Through the years, whenever Trotsky jumped into the news in any special way, that old Girard story was revived—and I suppose it'll never die!

The date of the Trotsky hoax was shortly after the Bolshevik revolution, at the time of the Brest-Litovsk peace conference. The original news dispatches stated that Trotsky had been late at one or more of the conference meetings, and the Girard-Trotsky story pointed out that he was up to his old tricks, for he had kept irregular hours when on the *Appeal* staff, not showing up one day till 4:30 p.m., and quitting right in the middle of a sentence when the five o'clock whistle blew.

This is the way the story came to be written: one day, as John Gunn and I had an idle chatty moment in the editorial room, we were remarking on the odd yarns then current in the papers—just what they were I don't now remember exactly—describing Trotsky's apocryphal adventures in America. I think one story was that he had been a waiter in an East Side restaurant, possibly another was that he had run an obscure bookstore in Philadelphia—perhaps some roles more bizarre. Anyway, I casually, humorously remarked that it would be easy to start a story about Trotsky having worked on the *Appeal* that if such a story were even hinted at, probably it would spread and grow and be confirmed and believed most wonderfully.

My light remark prompted John, in a day or two, to compose a tale of Trotsky's supposed Girard sojourn, in a fashion which mingled soberness with some absurdities, such as the foolish line that Trotsky had left Tulsa because he was "bored with the oil business." It was stated that Trotsky was continually embroiled with other members of the editorial staff, arguing about revolutionary aims and methods—particularly, it was said, he and the managing editor were always at it hammer and tongs. An epigrammatic denunciation of wage slavery was ascribed to Trotsky: "The tick of the time

clock is the swan song of liberty." He was portrayed as a hell of an eccentric fellow; for instance, he liked to mystify others about his movements, giving out that he was going to spend the weekend in Pittsburg but instead sneaking off to Fort Scott. John showed the tale to me, and I read it with much chuckling, and probably touched it up a little.

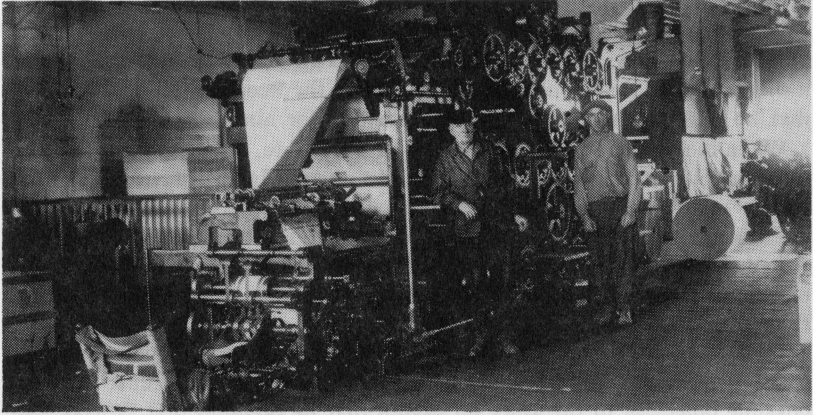
Then arose the question of how to get the yarn into circulation. We hit on Uncle Jimmy Cassin as the intermediary. He had a willing self-conceit, gentle and harmless but suggestible, that made him seem an ideal agent. John took Uncle Jimmy into a booth in Kloeb's restaurant and, swearing him to secrecy, unfolded this strange and confidential tale, explaining that for reasons of state, as it were, he knew the *Appeal* editors and management wouldn't reveal the story and might even deny it; but it was true—strange, strange, but indeed true—and then John handed him the manuscript, suggesting that the Pittsburg *Sun*, Democratic morning paper, would be a good medium through which to let the public have the story (Uncle Jimmy being a Democratic politician and we assuming, it may well have been, that the *Sun* would be an easier mark than the older and possibly more cynical *Headlight*).

Uncle Jimmy read the story and believed it or pretended that he did, was much impressed or appeared to be. "Just to think," he remarked in something like an awe-struck tone, "that Trotsky (heavily accenting the *sky*) actually walked these streets!" Well, John let Uncle Jimmy take the manuscript and a day or two later the story appeared as the leading editorial in the *Sun*, headed "Trotsky in Girard," taking up a column and a half or two columns. Then came the confirmatory reminiscences, the choice ones being still clear in our memory.

There was the candy-ice cream merchant (Henry Decker) who—voluntarily, of his own initiative—told John that he remembered Trotsky. He said you could tell right away he was a Russian, he was a giant of a man, his face all covered by a big, bushy, black beard.

Then a barber (Art Mason) told John that he remembered the man, too, and that he was a short, slender, dapper gentleman, very fastidious, and that Art shaved him regularly. Then John and I began to tap Old Chap's rich and varied vein of reminiscences, interviewed him (he ran the Goss rotary on which the *Appeal* was printed) for as long as we could keep straight faces, then retiring to the editorial office for the relief of uproarious laughter; and then, again and again, we would go out to the big press and get Old Chap to talking once more.

It was Old Chap who told us that once when some building caught fire, Trotsky railed at the volunteer fire fighters, saying that as workers they shouldn't try to save bourgeois property; and that on another occasion, as a large group of *Appeal* employees were at the Frisco station waiting for a train to take them to some trade union celebration in Pittsburg, a girl started singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee" and Trotsky interrupted the singing with a long atheistic tirade.



John A. "Old Chap" Chapman [1849-1923], left, stops printing the Appeal to Reason of May 15, 1920, for just a moment to pose with Edward N. Shivner. Chapman was pressman for the Appeal since it started in 1895.

But the beautiful, brilliant prize among Old Chap's recollections was that of the day he saved Trotsky's life. As he told it, on a Sunday afternoon he was asked to accompany Trotsky to one of the nearby mining camps. The Russian explained that he was to attend a secret meeting, and that the Italian fellow conspirators with whom he was to meet were excitable, dangerous fellows and life itself might be in peril. Old Chap was instructed that if at the end of a couple of hours Trotsky had not issued forth from the house it would mean the worst and something should be done. Apparently the revolutionary exile left that up to his companion's wit, and Old Chap proved resourceful and worthy of the trust.

During the meeting, Old Chap passed the time agreeably in drinking beer in a house across the way; at the expiration of the two hours, he crept up to a window of the opposite house and saw that Trotsky was surrounded by a group shaking their fists and looking menacing.

Our hero rushed back to the beer joint and, borrowing a miner's large dinner bucket, he had it filled with foaming beer and returned quickly to the scene of danger. He had remembered an old Italian custom that when anyone entered a house or a room with a can of beer, it was the custom for the company to stand up; so, knocking on the door, Old Chap was admitted and at his entrance all the conspirators arose and in this polite diversion Trotsky slipped out with a whole skin.

Old Chap's memories furnished several other, shorter yarns for the *Sun*, which were published as news stories, and by that time the story was on the wires and appearing in papers all over the country, J.I. (Jake) Sheppard didn't want to be left out, so he was quoted in an item in the *Kansas City Star* as saying that Trotsky, having come as far west as St. Louis, had written a letter from that city asking for a job at the People's College in Fort Scott, a school then being run as a sideline by Jake, who was a prominent lawyer with

a large practice. Just what disposal was alledgedly made of the letter, or whether Trotsky was represented as having changed his mind, I can't recall; it was not stated that he had joined the staff of the People's College, but only that he had inquired if there was a position for him there.

When the story was clicking along at a lively rate, I said to John that the weak line in the chain was Charles Lincoln Phifer. As an old member of the *Appeal* staff, he could—if he chose—denounce the tale as a fabrication. One afternoon, as I was leaving the plant, I met Phifer entering and I decided to cast the die. I boldly put the question to him, as one, of course, who was merely an innocent inquirer, "What truth is there in this Trotsky-in-Girard story?"

To my delighted astonishment, the old fellow replied that there was "an element of truth" in it and he immediately supplied a defense for one possible objection to the story by saying that he doubted that Trotsky had worked on the *Appeal* very long—probably not more than a few weeks—and that he doubted if his name would be found on the *Appeal* books, as J. A. Wayland often would hire an editor, tentatively, for a few weeks and pay him out of his own pocket with no records made of the transaction.

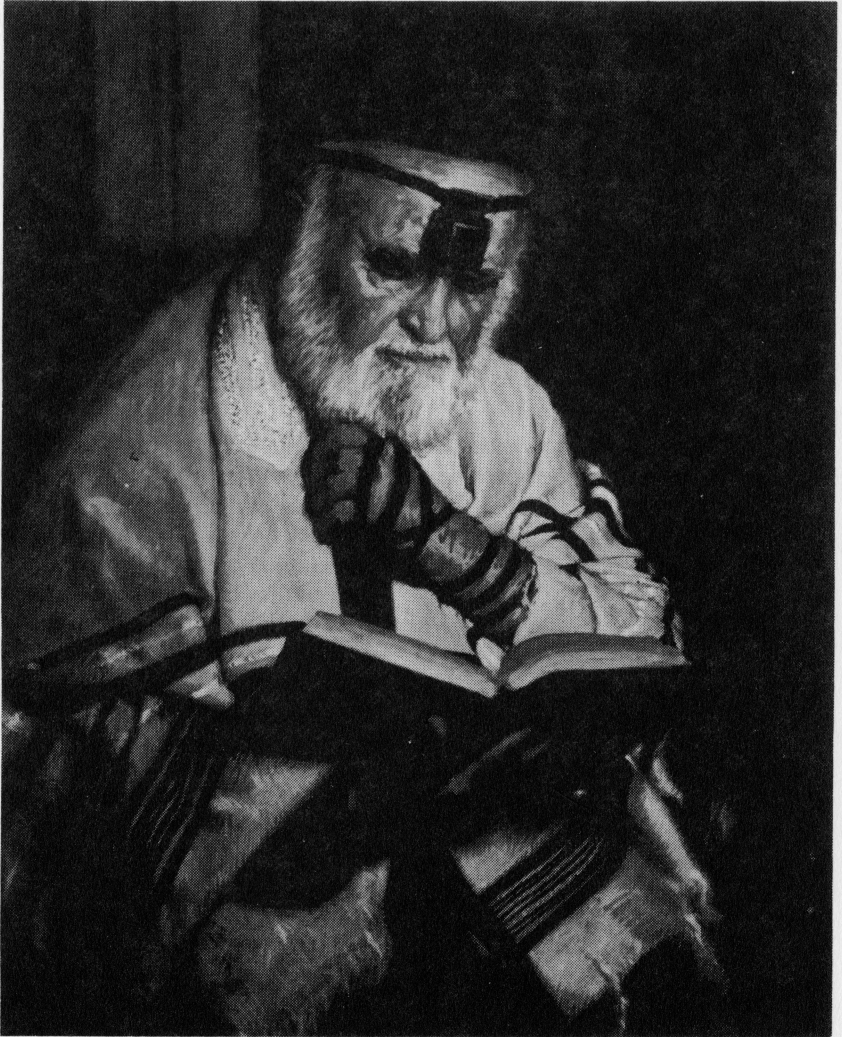
Thus the story became invulnerable. If anyone brought up the subject of payroll records, we could cite Comrade Phifer's glib and plausible explanation. Several years later, when Phifer was publishing his Spirtualist-Socialist *New World* in Kansas City, Kansas, he brought out a picturesque story of his own, not only recalling Trotsky-in-Girard but bringing in Rosa Luxemburg as having been a member of the *Appeal* staff in the brave old days.

I once told John, some time in the '20s, that the advertising manager of the New York *Times* was showing me the paper's remarkable morgue (reference room and library) and, saying that they had a complete record of me and the Little Blue Books and the *Appeal*, he pulled out a section of a filing cabinet and out fluttered a clipping—the Trotsky story.

More than twenty years after the story first saw the light, John was riding from Fort Scott to Girard and overheard two farmers talking in the seat just ahead. They were discussing Communism, and one of the old fellows solemnly said: "You know, all that was started right down here in Girard." "Is that a fact!" exclaimed the other. "Yes," was the reassurance, "that man Trotsky started it all when he was a writer on the *Appeal to Reason* a long time ago."

Uncle Jimmy never peeped about his share in the matter. His silence can't be interpreted, in itself, as meaning either belief or disbelief. If he believed the story was true, he might have taken pride in disclosing his important role in bringing the truth to light. If he didn't believe it, he could still have pretended to do so and enjoyed the same glory. He knew, and he alone among outsiders knew, that the Trotsky story came from the hands of a member of the *Appeal* editorial staff—and he kept mum. The only explanation is that Uncle Jimmy was a man of honor. The whole thing was presented to him in confidence, and he kept the faith.

The Faces of Rodney J. Roberson



Abe Sector, 1980



The Faces of

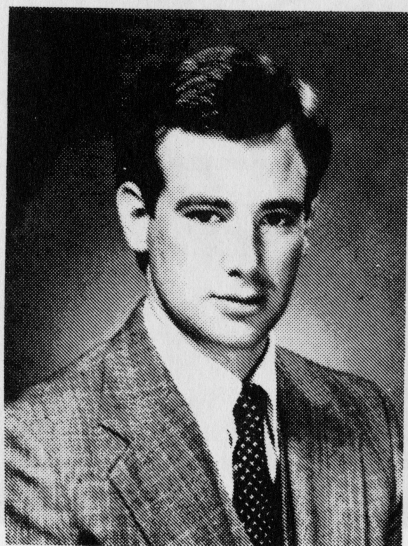


Mrs. Joe Reynolds, 1981



Debbie Oliver, 1979

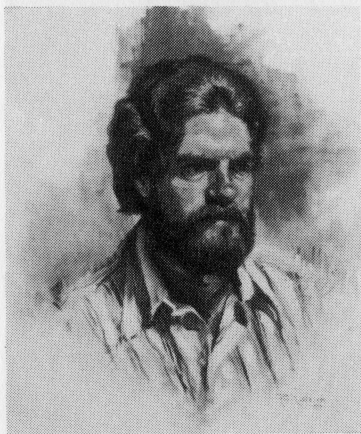
Born in Joplin, Missouri, on October 26, 1954, Rodney James Roberson received his first awards for drawing and painting during his eighteenth year.



Rodney J. Roberson

A member of the Portrait Institute of New York, he was a finalist in the 1980 International Portrait Competition. His work has been compared to that of Frans Hals by one judge and to that of "the young Rembrandt" by National Portrait Seminar chairman, John Howard Sanden. Acknowledging his leaning towards the old masters, Roberson states, "My job is a historic profession; my purpose is to bring pleasure. This I attempt to do by combining a knowledge of the effects of light and shade with a mastery of the techniques of the oil medium to produce the fullest possible character and realism." A few photographs of paintings from his portfolio are here reproduced for your pleasure, works done during the past four years in the Joplin-Pittsburg area.

Rodney J. Roberson



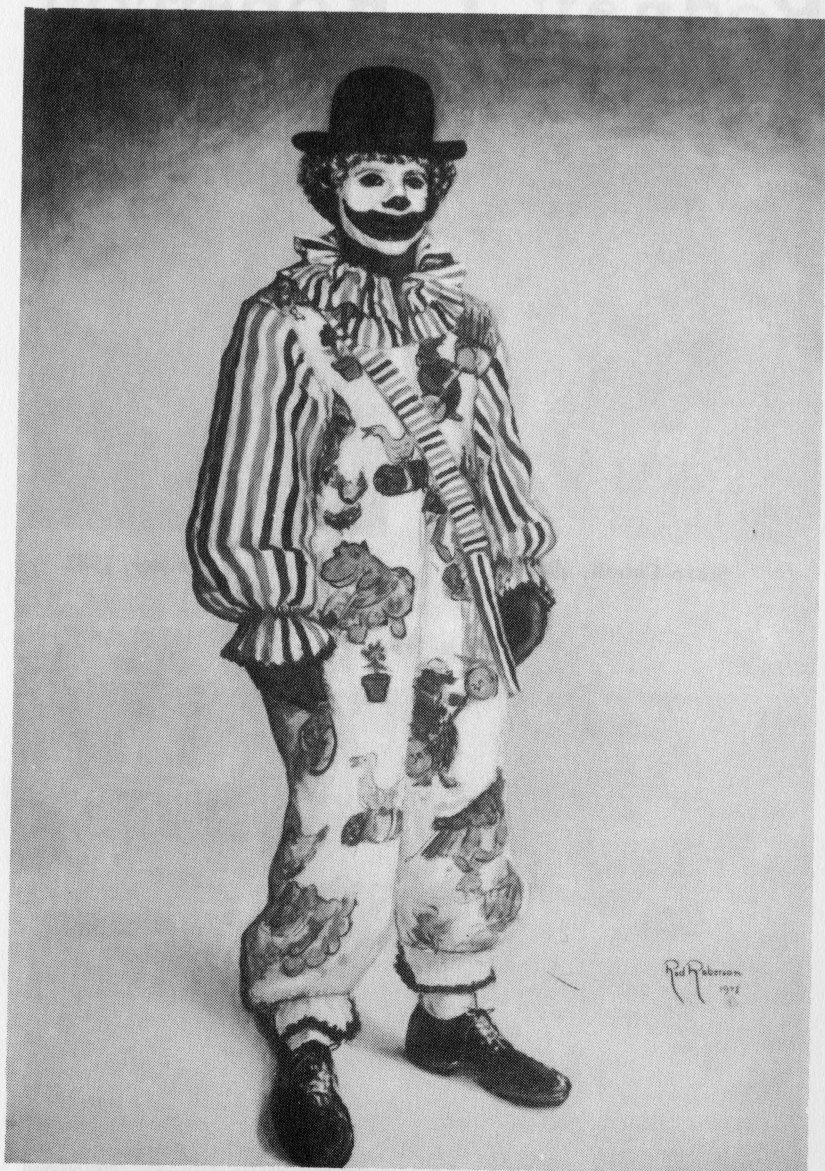
Steve Cotrell, 1980



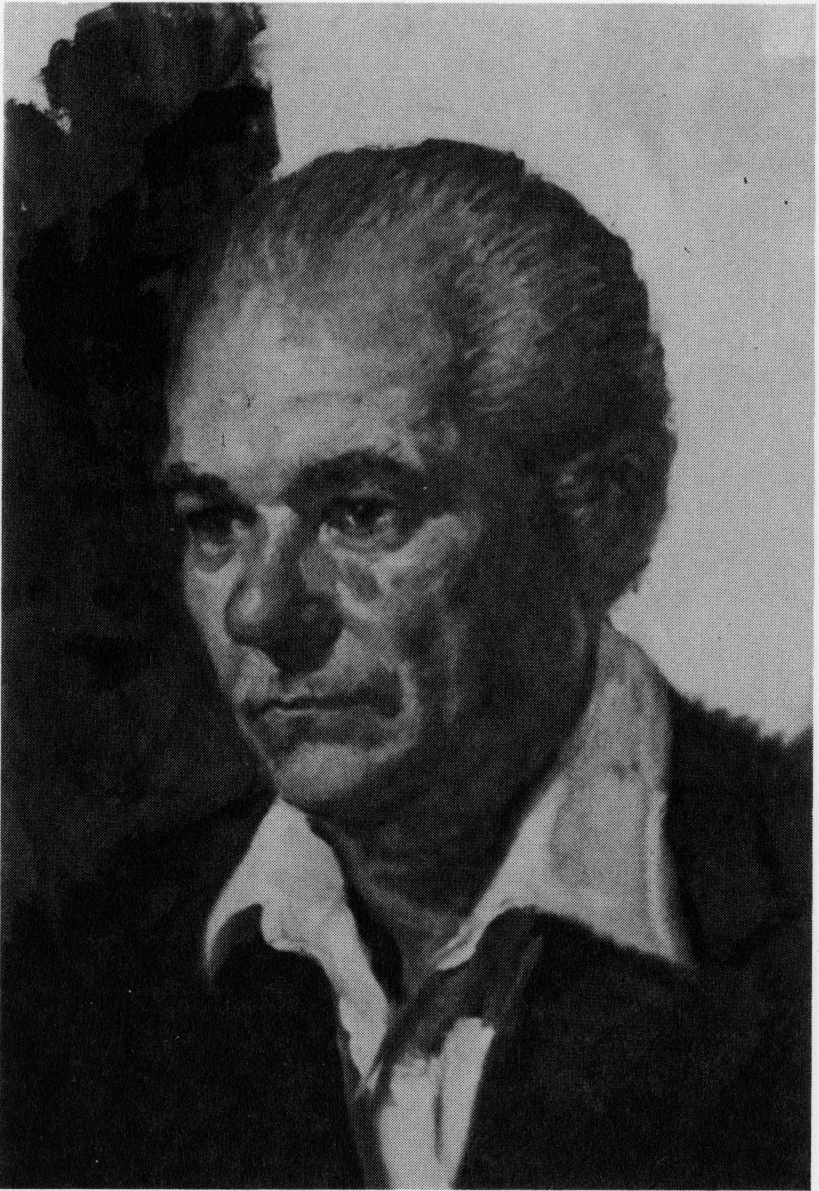
Annabelle J. Turner, 1982



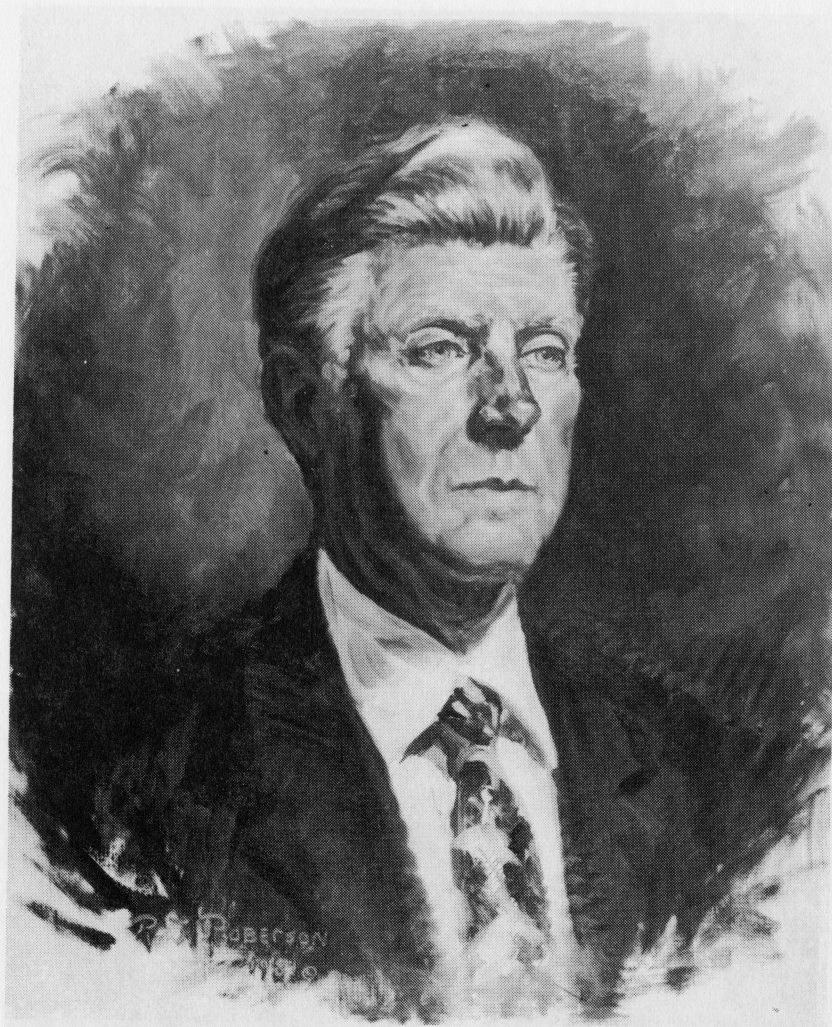
First Street Viaduct, Joplin, Mo., 1981



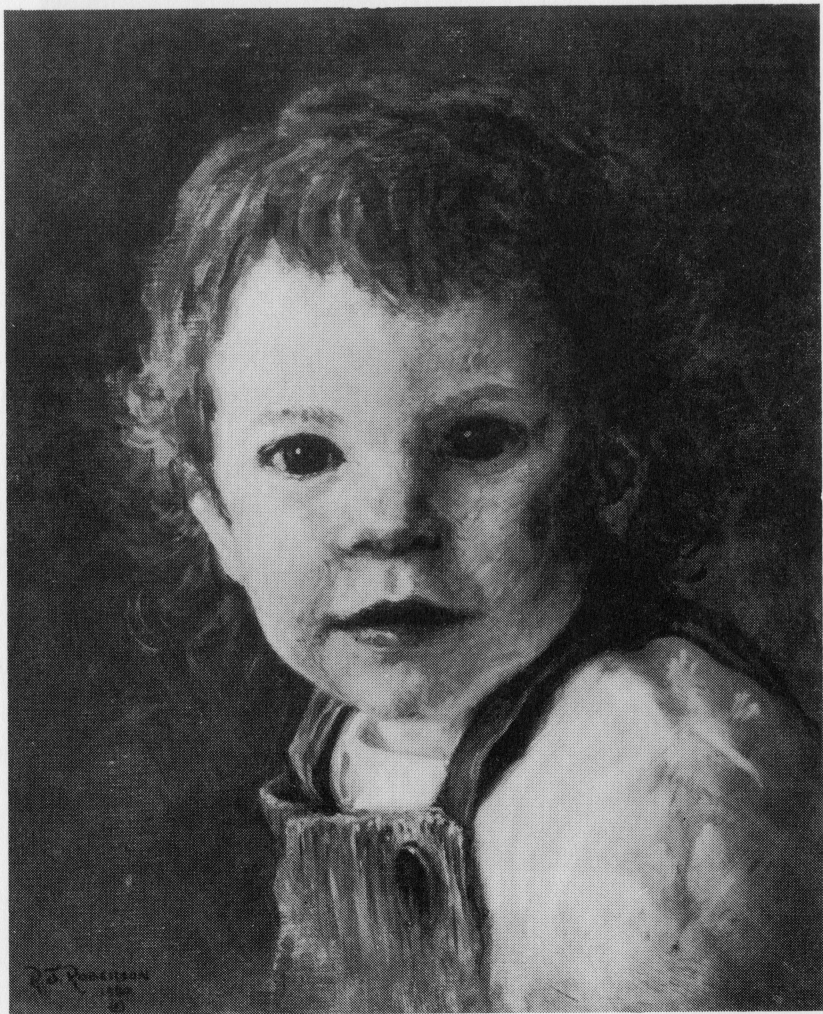
Willie Shields, 1979



Charles Cagle, 1982



Fenton L. Huff, 1981



Cora Nichols, 1981

"For four summers I needed a fly-swat, but could never remember when at the store to buy one—and need a folded paper. Then I bought one, and immediately the Expression brought the lane and the hat to my door to sell fly-swats!"—Margaret E. Houghton, D.D.



Eva Jessye, 1982

“For four summers I needed a fly-swat, but could never remember when at the store to buy one—and used a folded paper. Then I bought one, and immediately the Depression brought the lame and the halt to my door to sell fly-swats!”—Margaret E. Haughawout, *Diary*, November 13, 1930.

On the Death of the Farmer Poet of Lone Star Township

Knowing but one language, he tended it,
And liked to say his formal, furrowed lines,
Rooting for rhymes that made us blink or blush,
Implacably transplanting to the page
What flowered only in *his* gut and ear.
The rosy baldness of his poetry
First flustered us like chickens in the road,
But who could criticize such truth as this:

My sow lies dead.

My eyes are red.

Her fat farrow

Was my marrow.

Raw Hans, clodhopper of mournful works,
Gone cold to words, his spading fork in hand,
What blight can wither now his fertile tongue?
Not any word of mine: I sow his song.



Elaine Emmett

Winding a Biscuit

An old farmer
asked me the time
while I waited
for a bus
in Booneville.

"Say that's a nice biscuit.
If ya got a minute
I'll show ya how to wind her."

He cradled my watch
in his left hand.
His right thumb
and forefinger
spun the stem,
in a brisk
back and forth
motion.

"That way ya don't put
stress on the springs.
I'll bet they don't teach
that in college, but
any old farmer'll tell ya."



With that
he sauntered
down the sidewalk.
I glanced
at my biscuit:
the bus was late.

Charles Wagner

Bird

your voice is bread
to this pale body

for Norberta Wachter

bird

how shall we play the play
when your eyes float the
deepest regions of dream

graceful in red dress
your scent drips
from crucifix

shouting: "murder the equations."
"murder the equations"

see bird i'm still alert
even after death
i push you around the maypole
into infinity

clear streams
green green kansas grass

why only last night
in the woods

you & i were kneeling
in church together

the sacred heart beating
in our hands

today I saw your shadow
fall from a mirror

i love you bird
my simple hunger
bottomless

blue



John Knoll

Night Driving



At Truck Haven off I-35 the midnight kids
from town trade obscenities and cigarettes.
Their laughter cuts through cook's "Order
Up!" as the truckers chew at the counter.
The Wurlitzer guesses at life, its tunes
sad as old men who can't reach their shoes.
I think I could forget where I was going,
just continue from haven to haven,
florescent beads along the black road.
Wanda asks, "Do you want any more?" as
Tex Ritter sings "Hillbilly Heaven."
I shake my head, toss down the rest
of the coffee, and make awkward gestures
getting out of the booth. The register
rings me out into the cool dark
where trucks chuckle under stars.

Steven Hind

Going Home

By Gary D. Wilson

Her face feels mush rotten from the inside. They are trying to save it, to firm it up again with gauze and stitches. She doesn't know whether they can. She doesn't care. A raw oyster of blood and mucus slides down her throat. Her stomach pitches. She closes her eyes, but they hurt too.

She had a wreck and doesn't want to talk about it.

Rodney does.

"Vera, for the love of—"

In the side mirror, if she leans just right, she can see herself. Sunglasses cover eye slits, but there is nothing over the smashed nose, the bloated mouth, the cheeks that have taken on the sheen of burnished steel. They should have made her a mask. A skin one. From somebody's skin.

"I mean, you were drunk," he says.

Yes, she was.

"So drunk that two hours later you still couldn't walk straight."

Yes.

"And blind stumbling on your ass at three o'clock in the morning you decide to drive home."

That's what she was doing.

"Goddamnit, Vera there were people in that car!"

The Cadillac surges, levels off. He resets the automatic speed device.

"Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

She sighs.

"You could've killed them."

The air conditioner sends her breath back. It tastes of rust. Like a junkyard smells. Oil-caked dirt, leaking batteries, stagnant water, moldy upholstery, rust. Like *his* junkyard, the one that made them rich. He won't call it a junkyard. It's a salvage lot.

On good days it's Pritchard's Automotive Recycling and Redistribution Center. She has watched him take visitors on guided tours. They arrive like moths, attracted by bright murals on the whitewashed fence. Waving his walking stick to and fro, he shows them through the

gates. He halts. He pushes back his felt hat. He combs his fingers through gray thatch, as though deciding how best to proceed. He explains how he has set aside blocks of and for General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, American Motors and foreign products. Within each block the wrecks are further organized by make, model, and year. He leads them past rows and rows of cars, along paths between the rows, down small streets between the big blocks where trucks can go in and out and a person can walk anywhere in the yard and know exactly where He is going. But no matter how excited Rodney gets about what he has done, no matter how enthusiastically he discusses it, the fact remains that he deals in junk.

Her tongue eases in and out of the space where her front teeth used to be. She practices the words before saying them.

"Where's my car, Rodney?"

He pushes his stiff leg to the floorboard. His body shifts. A bristled ear cocks toward her.

"My car. Where is it?"

The electric window opens. A gob of tobacco juice hangs in the air, shoots past.

"We got it. It's down by the old house."

She sees it there, a brilliant yellow sun next to the gray boards. The towtruck left it by the porch. It is parked at an odd angle, as though halfway down the drive she suddenly remembered something and hurried back to get it. The car is fine, except that the protruding V in front is now deeply inverted. The hollow headlight sockets are drawn in toward each other like blinded, crossed eyes.

"But I wouldn't worry about it if I was you," he says. "You won't be driving it or anything else for a good spell."

"That must make you happy."

"Don't see why it should," he says. "When you figure out what this damn deal's cost—"

"Because you've got me exactly where you want me."

"You're talking crazy, woman."

"I can't go anywhere now unless you take me. You or somebody."

"Who's that 'somebody'?" he says.

"There's the bus, I guess. I could take it. But that's not the same as being in your own car, going where you want to, doing what you want to do. I want my car back, Rodney."

"Your car you got," he says. "Your license you don't."

"It's not fair," she says.

He clamps his great hands over the steering wheel. "Fair? Fair, you say? Well just let me tell you a thing or two about fair. This isn't

fair.” He slaps his lame legs. “Neither’s this.” He thrusts his head to one side to show the scar running the length of his jawbone. “Nearly cost me my head. You know. You were there.”

She was. Twenty-four years ago. It was the kind of evening when you would expect the phone to ring. Everthing was too calm. The hot Kansas wind had died. Cicadas were screeching in the elms by the house. Mosquitoes were rising from the grass. The cat lay on top of the wringer washer on the porch. The dog drooped beside the steps where she was sitting. Rodney was off baling hay for Milo Rawlins. He was late, but that happened sometimes. The baler might have broken. They might be trying to finish a field in case of rain or to get up the windrows before dew settled on them.

She had learned to cook things that could wait to be served. The food didn’t concern her. The phone ringing in her mind did. It meant something was wrong. He had been run into head-on by a half-ton truck less than a mile from home. They used a torch to cut him free from his car.

“I don’t see any of that was fair,” he says. “But it happened and instead of going around moaning and groaning I tried to make the best of it. I’d say I did a pretty damn good job, too.”

She listened beside his hospital bed. Even there he was handsome. He was big and rugged, with dark skin browned by the sun. His eyes were so deeply black they appeared as wide holes opening into his soul. And she loved to hear him talk. His voice was firm and resonant. Like a preacher’s the way it carried right through her, excited her.

He was going to turn misfortune into fortune. He explained that running a salvage lot was like being an undertaker—both disposed of things nobody else knew what to do with. When you did it right, you make a profit. But an undertaker made a profit only once. A salvage man—even then he wouldn’t say “junk”—could make a profit over and over until there was nothing left of the car. Every wreck was a gold mine in parts.

Some mornings that summer she would awaken and find him propped against pillows. A cigarette would be suspended between his thumb and index finger an inch or so from his lips. He would be gazing off, smiling as though he were reading a joke someone had written on the far wall. When he noticed that she was looking at him, he would stub out the cigarette and roll over to stroke her bare back and to tell her all that they were going to have and see and do.

But the salvage lot seemed more than dreamy talk. He told her it would make them rich. She didn’t doubt him. Paul Olfield’s insurance company was already willing to pay Rodney’s medical bills and even

some extra for his leg. Bill Winkler, their lawyer, told them the insurance people would chip in another good chunk since Olfield was so far in the wrong, barreling down the road like something was after him, and on Rodney's side to boot. Bill said all Rodney needed to do was mention "lawsuit" and they'd come around fast enough.

"You're going to junk it, aren't you?" she says.

He glances in her direction. That is all he has done for days. He never fully meets her eye. Not that he could. Not that she cares.

"Haven't decided yet," he says.

"It isn't wrecked that bad, is it?"

"Not totalled, if that's what you mean. But there's no way to drive it and no way to sell it in that condition without taking a beating. Can't afford to fix it, either, just now. May never be able to when they're finished with us."

"Couldn't you set it way out back and let the weeds cover it up?"

"Bury it, huh?"

"Sort of," she nods.

"But you don't want to see it go piece by piece, right? A generator here, a tire there. The wheel covers are a big item. They move fast. We could parcel it out the way we got rid of the furniture from the old house. Sure, we'd save a thing or two back—maybe a headlight rim or the steering wheel. We'd put them up on the wall in the family room, right next to the divan and chair you kept. Just to remind us, I think you said."

"Rodney, why—?"

"Goddamnit, Vera!"

He swore and slapped his walking stick into the wall outside her hospital room. Bill Winkler had just told him that the people she'd run into were suing for a million and a half. She was supposed to be asleep, but she heard everything.

"There's only one possibility, my friend," Bill said. "Since she was so drunk, you can't throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Not with that bag of flint, Parsons, up there. But what you can do is tell him Vera's been acting odd for a long time. She's been under a lot of strain. She hasn't been well—you know—mentally. It'd be worth a bundle, *if* he bites. And it wouldn't be entirely untrue, would it? Would it really? I mean, what the hell's been going on, Rodney?"

His cheek bulges, as though a thought is stuck there.

"I built you a new house, didn't I?" he says.

Swirling fields of wheat roll by. Dusky hedgerows divide plots, break the wind. A hawk tilts and soars. Far down the shimmering tracks that parallel the highway a light rotates in and out of view as a train approaches silently.

"Didn't I?" he says, swallowing instead of spitting. She clears her throat. She nearly gags on what she dredges up. She hates him.

"Yes," she says softly.

"And I bought you clothes?"

"Yes."

"And jewelry?"

"Yes."

"And made sure you always had enough money?"

"Yes."

"And didn't I buy you that car? That very same car?"

"Yes," she says. "But—"

"Out with it. But what?"

The train is upon them. The blaring horn fades like a dream.

"I'll tell *you* then. There's not going to be any more, that's what." Dark triangles of tobacco have lodged between his bottom teeth. "They want a million and a half dollars we don't have. We're broke, we're bankrupt, we're on our way to the poor farm. Why, we'll end up worse off than we were twenty-five years ago."

She shuts her eyes to the rush of boxcars. "Maybe—"

"You're thinking maybe that wouldn't be so bad, right?" he says. "Maybe if we could just step back there to the good old days everything'd be hunky-dory."

"Maybe it would have been better if—"

"Back there when we didn't know for sure where the next can of beans was coming from. Back there when we didn't have a damn thing of our own free and clear. Those the good old days you're thinking about? Moon all you want, then. Tell me how wonderful they were. Tell me how much better it was when I spent all day shoveling somebody's manure or cutting their hogs. Tell me—"

A trainman pokes his head out the window of the caboose. She raises her hand to wave, checks herself. The trainman glances down, sunglasses glinting, and passes on.

"Better if what?" Rodney asks suddenly, as though he's only just heard what she's been saying.

"Maybe it would have been better if I *had* killed them."

"You gone plain mad, or what, woman?"

"It wouldn't have cost you so much. I heard Bill Winkler say it was a straight ten or fifteen thousand per death."

"Vera? Vera, listen to me."

"Or if anybody was killed it should have been me. That might have made it easier for you with the judge."

The car slows. "You keep talking that way and we're going back. We'll get you another doctor. A head doctor. One of those shrinks. That's what you need, sure enough. You need somebody to let down that swelling. To get the bloat off."

"Like a cow that strayed into the wrong pasture?"

"Like a cow." He stares straight ahead, guiding the car with two fingers laid loosely over the crossbar of the steering wheel. His lips twitch. She can't tell whether it was going to be a smile or a frown.

He had the same look the afternoon he woke her from a nap and led her to the bedroom window of the old house. Far at the south end of the salvage lot his restored Plymouth had been raised on a thirty-foot platform. PRITCHART'S was spelled out in big white letters the length of the car. She glanced at him. Despite herself, she snickered. A corner of his mouth drew up. She laughed. He stepped back. "Oh, Rodney," she gasped. He broke, sputtering, roaring, like a stubborn engine coming to life.

That was long ago. It was before they removed the bed and other furniture, taking what was left with them to the new house.

A rock whacks the underside of the fender. She jerks alert. Her heart pounds in her temples, in her sinuses, in every cut and bruise. A gravel road stretches like a chalk line ahead of them. In their wake, white braids of dust boil up to form a thick cloud that spreads slowly away on either side of the road, down over hedge trees and scrub oak, ditch weeds.

He is driving the back way home.

It is the back road into Bronson. At the west edge of the city park it becomes paved, swings sharply toward the towering Co-op elevator and the long, squat Butler building that smells of tear gas after each harvest. It leads straight then to the center of town. There is a stop sign between the bank and a drug store. A left turn onto Main Street, past the coin-operated laundry, the grocery store, block after block of approaching cars and pickups, people out for afternoon strolls, people in their yards looking on. Everyone looking on.

"Why are you going this way?" she says.

"It's shorter. It's different. Haven't come along here in quite a spell." He shrugs. "No particular reason, I guess."

"Why don't you just tie my hands and drag me in behind the car? That's the way outlaws used to be brought in."

"Now there you go again," he says.

"That's what I am, isn't it? Your prisoner?" A trickle of blood oozes down her throat. "Parade me before the people. Show them what you've gotten for your efforts."

His right eyebrow arches. He seems amused.

"Your payoff, your reward," she says matter of factly. Her head dips. She hisses. "Why are you doing this to me, Rodney?"

"I sort of like what you—"

"Damn you! God-damn you! I will not be humiliated like this! I will not be led around in front of my friends like your little puppy dog!" An arrowhead of pain surfaces between her eyes.

He rolls his head toward her.

"You've got it all wrong," he says finally. "It's nothing like that. Why, I'm doing you a favor. I'm giving you one last chance to show your stuff, Vera."

"You son of a bitch!"

"That what you doing in Wichita? Showing your stuff?"

"I told you what—"

"Riding around. That's what you said. Riding around showing your stuff."

"I didn't say—"

"At three o'clock in the morning. Drunk. You get drunk riding around? Oh, no, there were bars. You told me there were bars. Where you talked to people. You like to talk to people. That all you like?"

"I hate you. I hate every bone in your body."

"Kind of lonely riding around like that, isn't it? It's nice to have some company. You pick up one of those chatty fellows at a bar?"

"No! I told you a thousand times, no!"

"And you and him ride around, maybe sipping a little now and then? Still showing your stuff, for sure. Could be you showed your stuff to each other."

"There wasn't anyone."

"Did he like your stuff? You like his?"

"Oh, Rodney, oh, God. Please."

"Why, what better fun could there be? Riding around like that on the broad avenues of Wichita, getting drunk, showing—"

"Nobody! Nobody was there!"

"Don't lie to me! I read the police report. A witness said he saw someone—a *man*—leaving your car at the time of the accident. Deny that! go ahead, deny it!"

"I don't remember anybody."

"Was he driving?"

"No, there wasn't—"

Was he?" His breath stinks. "Tell me, Goddamnit! Was he driving!"

"There wasn't anybody!"

The brakes jam on. The car slides sideways in the road. Gravel shoots into the air and falls against the windows and onto the hood.

"Whore!"

She ducks. The back of his hand rakes the top of her cheek and grazes her forehead. His open palm twists her head back. The brief, sharp pain plunks to nausea. She peers with some curiosity at the blood spatters on the window.

"Tell me he was driving, you slut!"

His walking stick. She doesn't dare forget about it. She finds the release button for the seat belt. She frees herself. She opens her door.

"Why are you protecting him?" he calls after her. She walks farther away. "Is he worth everything we have? Everthing we've ever had?"

"I've said all I'm going to say." She holds a Kleenex to her nose. "I'll walk from here, thank you."

A massive solid glob sticks in her throat. She goes to her knees, arches her neck, opens her mouth, like someone before the executioner. Blood and mucus and rice gush out. A fountain. A fountain with gray-green monsters lurking at the water's edge. She smells fresh air, bites it, swallows it. Rancid cabbage. She hunches forward, catching herself with her arms. "Dear God, please, dear God, let me die. Let me die."

She comes to in the car. They are parked in the driveway of their home. She gropes for her sunglasses to cut the glare from the white siding.

Neither of them talks, neither of them makes a move to get out. They will have to soon because of the heat.

Train Whistle



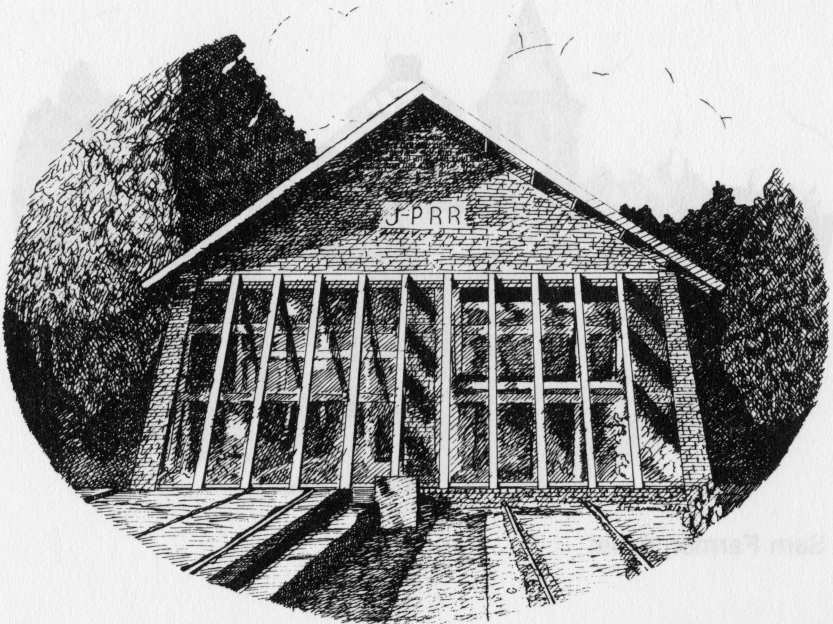
Charles Wagner

Every night
at 10:00
it hollers
like a woman
standing
on her doorstep

calling
the name
of a child
that will never
come home.

Houses on the Little Balkans Heritage Preservation Guild Tour

October 17, 1982

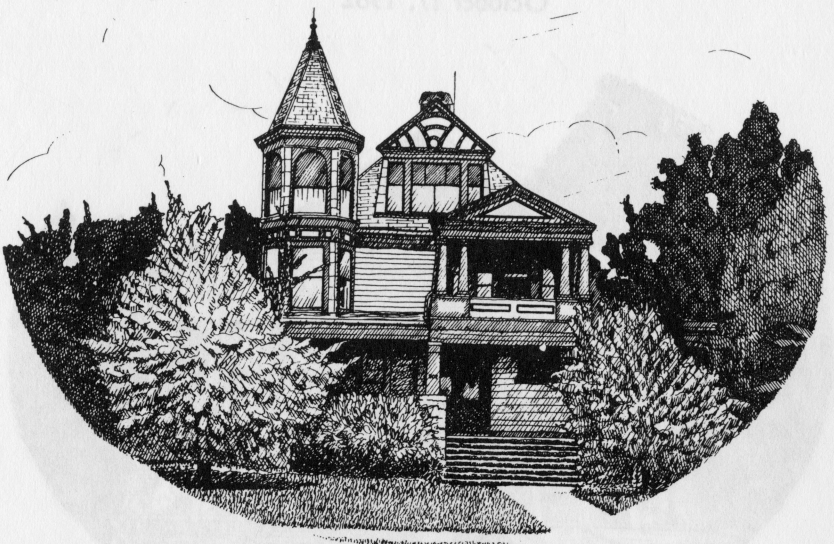


Sam Farmer, Artist

**The Joplin-Pittsburg Railroad Car Barn, Route 1, Pittsburg, KS: 1891.
Currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Alex Barde.**

The car barn on West Fourth Street was built by the Forest Park Electric Railway, the second electric railway in Pittsburg. Never profitable, the line was sold at public auction on February 23, 1894, to the Neosho Investment Co., which sold it to the Pittsburg, Frontenac and Suburban on August 29, 1895. The barn was used for storage and finally sold at auction on May 14, 1929, when this and other property was reorganized as the Joplin-Pittsburg Railroad Co. In 1932 all passenger service in Pittsburg and Frontenac was terminated, and the barn was enlarged in order to store work cars there. In 1954 the electric railroad company was dissolved and the barn utilized by private individuals until the Bardes converted it into a passive solar home in 1974.

The 1982 Little Balkans Heritage



Sam Farmer, Artist

**The John R. Lindbergh Home, 507 W. Euclid, Pittsburg, KS: 1893.
Currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Wachter.**

This Victorian mansion was built by Swedish-born John R. Lindberg, who came to Pittsburg in 1877, when the town had only forty-two inhabitants. (He was a druggist until 1886, when he became one of the organizers of the First National Bank of Pittsburg. Founder of the Commercial Club, forerunner of the Pittsburg Chamber of Commerce, Lindberg was also a member of the first city council. In March 1883 he became president of the Pittsburg Building and Loan Association, a position he held until his death on July 10, 1915.) The home remained in the Lindburg family until 1946, when it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilson. It was sold in 1957 to Mr. and Mrs. William M. Scully, Jr., in 1967 to Mr. and Mrs. John S. Shaw, and on April 12, 1976, to its present owners.

Preservation Guild House Tour

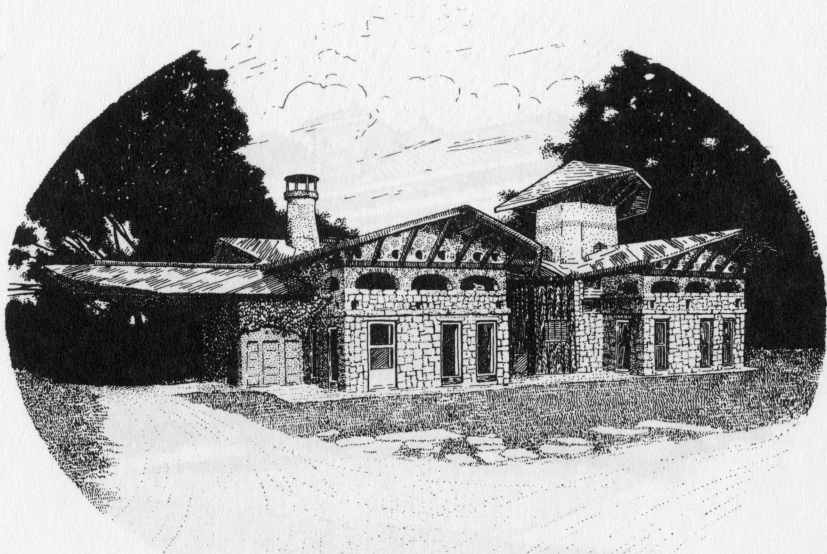


John McDonald, Artist

**The Caffey-Clemens Home, 405 W. Euclid, Pittsburg, KS: 1914.
Currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bryson C. Clark.**

In 1913 Dr. Hugh B. and Maud E. Shea Caffey purchased a lot upon which to build their dream home. (Dr. Caffey, who had come to Pittsburg upon his graduation from the Tulane University medical school in 1901, specialized in the treatment of eye, ear, nose, and throat diseases.) Completed in 1914, the home was enjoyed by the Caffeys for a short time only, for Dr. Caffey died undergoing surgery on April 16, 1917. His widow sold the home to Ira and Julia Ryan Clemens on September 26, 1919. (Clemens was owner of the Clemens Coal Co. and founder of the Commercial Fuel Co.) His widow spent her last years here after Clemens' death on August 24, 1943. She died on February 11, 1961, and the home was purchased by the Clarks on December 31 of the same year.

Little Balkans Heritage



John McDonald, Artist

The A. Staneart Graham Home, 601 Grandview Heights Terrace, Pittsburg, Ks: 1934.

Currently owned by Gene DeGruson.

Frank Lloyd Wright's concept of an organic architecture freed the imagination of A. Staneart Graham to build his home on an isolated tract of land in the southwest corner of Pittsburg, purchased from Mr. and Mrs. B. O. Gudgen on November 17, 1933. (Born in Pittsburg on August 8, 1904, Graham was graduated from the University of Kansas Law School in 1925. In 1937 he co-founded, with E. Victor Baxter, KOAM Radio, purchasing used equipment from Dr. John R. Brinkley's KFKB Radio station in Milford.) Construction on the home began in 1934 and the Grahams took residence in 1937. In 1950 the second floor with its sun-reflecting metal roof was completed. Graham worked on the house until his death on June 26, 1968. His widow, Ruth Muir Graham, sold the home on June 14, 1973.



Church

By Zula Bennington Greene

There were the Baptists and the Methodists, each a little country church and graveyard in a clearing that held back the woods. But it was a transient victory, for hickory and walnut and scrub oak ringed the edge, patient, waiting their time. A few seasons of human abandonment and they would move in and reclaim their land.

My mother had joined the Methodist church before her marriage, but my father never belonged to a church or a lodge. Nor did he enter into the many arguments about doctrines or denominations. He thought it would be good to live to see the Second Coming with his own eyes, to see the graves give up their dead and himself snatched to glory without the pains of dissolution.

Hopewell, the Baptist church, was nearer to us than Shiloh, the Methodist, and we went there more often. It was within walking distance if you cut through the fields and pastures. My father hated to hitch up the horses on Sunday. They needed their rest too. So we walked to Hopewell, stopping by the Dietzes and walking on with some of them for Sunday School and for the church service once every month when the circuit rider came to preach.

The one I remember best is Hopewell's Brother Hawkins, who drove two lively horses to a buggy. Most circuit riders came on horseback. Brother Hawkins was a large man with bold dark eyes under heavy brows, a prominent nose and a positive manner. He spoke with the confidence of an executive at a board meeting who has the proxies in his pocket. Perhaps I remember him best because of a public reprimand. Toward the end of a long sermon Jessie Harper and I, sitting near the front, fidgeted and whispered. He leaned over the pulpit, pointed a finger at us and said, "Now you girls down there be a little quieter. We're having meeting."

I flushed with shame, felt all eyes on us, and dreaded what my parents would say when we went home. Papa just grinned, "So the preacher had to get after you and Jessie." Mamma said, "I thought the sermon was a little longer than usual."

Sermons were always long. Spiritual sustenance had to be provided for a whole month. Brother Hawkins waved the Bible and shouted that he believed every word of it, from Genesis to Revelation. To the faithful in the amen corner it was like waving a flag and brought on an applause of amens.

The sermon worked up to a climax and the collection. Brother Hawkins could approach money from more directions than a chamber of commerce—appeals to duty, appeals to pride, hints of dire consequences and urgent need. Brother Peck, a sad-eyed Methodist Circuit-rider whose sandy hair seemed an extension of his face, used his large family of children effectively. "A preacher's children," he would say hollowly, "get just as hungry as anybody else's."

The hat was passed, mostly a perfunctory gesture on the women's side. Women sat on one side of the church, men on the other. It may have been thought that a separation of the sexes would tend to direct the mind more closely to the sermon. When a young man brought his girl to church he sat with her on the women's side—their attendance was practically an announcement of their engagement—and a newly married couple sat together for a time. When she stopped coming, that was practically an announcement that they were expecting. A woman did not appear in public much after her pregnancy became obvious.

The preacher always went home with somebody for dinner. If no invitation was issued, a few women held a discreet conference to decide which could take him. Each summer about the time everybody had frying chickens, the church held a basket dinner on a Sunday following the service. Men set up a long table behind the church and while the women were setting out the food, children wandered through the cemetery, reading the stones, their mothers calling out, "Now be careful and don't step on the graves."

The men squatted outside the circle of activity in that uncomfortable-looking position of one knee sharply flexed, the other at right angles. Women do not sit that way, nor children, nor men in town, nobody but men in the country. If bits of wood are at hand, they take out their pocket knives and whittle. A few break off blades of grass and chew them, possibly in lieu of tobacco.

When it was time to eat, a silence went round. Somebody always rushed in from the woods talking loudly and had to be shushed so Brother Hawkins could ask the blessing. He stood and glared until everybody was quiet, then prayed in a loud and sure voice which said he was in good standing with the powers he addressed.

We went to Sunday School, learned stories from the Bible, and took home picture cards that had the Golden Text printed on them. We learned songs and sang them at home. The church and school were our only sources of

entertainment, of hearing music or poetry. We had no library except the few books in the school library. So I learned the church songs and even now I can run through the second and third verses, if I don't stop to think, of songs like "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Showers of Blessing," "Beulah Land," "Work for the Night Is Coming." All the children signed the temperance pledge at Sunday School at least once a year.

The Baptists and Methodists had something of the attitude toward each other as state delegates at a national convention. All are there for the same purpose, but each plans to arrive at it in his own way. The two chief differences between the churches, as noted by the people in our community, were baptism and the taking of the sacrament. People said the Baptists baptized and the Methodists sprinkled, which was putting it simply, and that the Baptists held close communion, with only the members of the church invited to take sacrament. They came forward and the bread and the cup were passed, all using the same cup. The Methodists invited all "professing Christians" to partake.

A "professing Christian" was one who had been converted and saved, and the line was drawn close at revival meetings. Each church had one every year and Shiloh, in addition, had a rousing camp meeting each summer. As the fervor mounted, inquiries were made of friends and relatives as to whether they had been saved, asked in much the same manner that one would inquire if a person had had his polio shots. Friends would ask each other of a mutual friend, "Has she professed?" I feel certain that nobody ever asked my father if he was saved. He just wasn't the kind of person who attracted questioners.

Years later in Topeka, Kansas, I knew Florence Heiser, a former singer and actress who was bringing road shows to Topeka. She was beautiful and fascinating and free, wore purple and rose and big flowered and plumed hats. It would have been as startling to see her in tailored gray or navy as it would have been to see other women in the clothes she wore, which were neither new nor modish, but were worn with a special style and grace. A bit of lace or chiffon was usually dripping from something or there was a shift to one side—she carried her purse in her bosom—but I never saw her when I did not think she was elegant and beautiful.

She worked in her office at odd hours and often took the last bus home, and this was at a time when the buses ran till midnight. Late one night she was waiting on a street, humming a little tune. She was a bit disheveled and did look, one must admit, like the popular image of a lady of the evening. She always seemed to be thinking of some wonderful secret. Her hat had been clapped carelessly on her head, a rose hanging from the brim.

She was approached by two women, who greeted her with the question, "Are you saved?"

Any other woman would have responded with cold and scornful silence or a sharp rebuff. But not Florence. She turned on them the melting warmth of her smile, her big velvety brown eyes and golden ivory skin, and in that voice

that made you think of meadow larks and prisms and waterfalls, answered them sweetly, "Yes, I am saved. Are you?"

Theology, along with politics, was a lively topic of conversation. Scripture was cited for death-bed repentance. Death was not so sudden as it often is now and people generally died in their beds after an illness. Opinions differed on the age of accountability. It was reasonably agreed that an infant who died would be welcomed at the pearly gates, as surely would a child of six or eight or ten. But anyone old enough to know right from wrong was thought to be held accountable, and therefore lost, if he died unconverted, and, some held, unbaptized.

Tougher to dispose of were the heathen. Some thought that those who had never had a chance to hear the Word would surely be saved. Others were doubtful. Texts were quoted to support both arguments. The hottest discussions were on the unpardonable sin, and the talk always got around to that fascinating topic, which held awful unfathomable mystery.

The church believed its mission was to save souls for the hereafter, more than to promote Christian conduct here on earth. That brought up another point—was a person who was once saved, forever saved? A few believed so, but more thought a Christian could backslide, and revival preachers always had a special sermon for backsliders. There is that story about a minister in a ski resort town. On the bulletin board of his church was the subject of his Sunday sermon: "Are our young people backsliding on their week ends?"

Revival meetings were both social and religious. If a sinner was saved and confessed his sins, nobody wanted to miss it. Families brought food and bedding to the Shiloh camp meeting and remained for a week, sometimes for the duration, listening to three sermons a day. Beds were spread on the ground in a row of shelters with three sides closed, the fourth open, facing the woods, which provided wood for outdoor cooking and privacy for toilet needs. This was thought of as a kind of vacation.

I would walk past the open sides, observing the scenes of domesticity, and wish we could camp out.

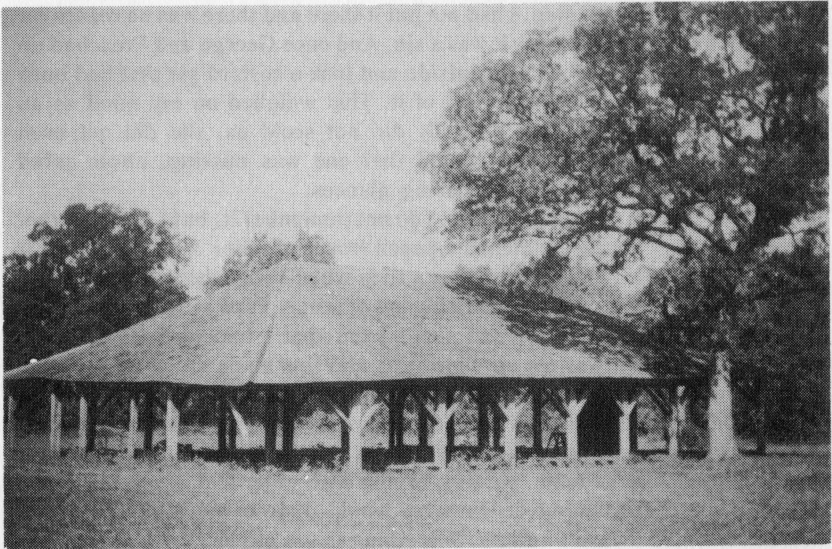
"Couldn't we have a camp?" I asked my father.

"You wouldn't like to gaum around like that, Hon," he said. "The flies would eat us up and there's no fit place for the horses."

Other families brought a basket dinner on a Sunday and stayed for all three sermons. The time between the afternoon and the evening sermons was the best, with campers frying meat and potatoes and making coffee over open fires and the basket-dinner families setting out the remains of their food. Men were bringing in wood from the timber, horses were eating and stomping at flies, children were playing. Babies were sleeping on quilts spread on the ground, mothers fanning flies away and patting starch bags on red welty chigger bites of whimpering toddlers. Lengthening shadows turned the day into soft dusk, filled with pleasant sights and sounds and smells.

The evangelist and his family were the center of attention and to see him, out of the pulpit, holding a baby in his arms instead of waving them, made him seem almost like anybody else instead of a thundering prophet.

During a revival many women and girls felt a strong emotional attachment to the evangelist. Indeed, the power of moving people was his chief asset. A revival, like an athletic tournament, did not draw big crowds until interest had been aroused. A week of preaching was needed to stir religious fervor to a high pitch.



Shiloh Tabernacle. A new roof was put on it in recent years. The big tree is an oak. — ZBG

The tabernacle was a wide space, roofed, but not enclosed. Straw was scattered over the dirt floor and stuck to clothing when people kneeled to pray. The congregation sat on rows of backless wooden benches and listened to the gospel of hell fire and the bottomless pit. (A boy once asked his father what the preacher meant by "the bottle of spit.")

Every evangelist had a stock of stories about sinners saved by a hair. They were converted on the last night of the meeting and the very next day or the next week, they sickened and died. Today they would have been killed in a car crash on the way home. Stories of sinners who died unsaved scared people to the mourners' bench. As the congregation sang—most evangelists had a wife who could lead the singing—the preacher raised his arms and exhorted, sweat running down his face and dampening his shirt under his suspenders. Palm leaf fans were waving all over the tabernacle. Women wore long skirts, starched petticoats, cotton stockings, high shoes, high collars, and long sleeves. Men wore shirts, with very few neckties, and trousers held up by suspenders. As they sang, the people were turning their heads to see who was "coming forward." Now and then a woman or two got shouting happy.

The summer I was fourteen I was converted. The preacher said all were born in sin and had to be saved by the blood of the lamb. Blood was mixed liberally in sermons and songs.

Guilt did not lie heavy on me, but I had no trouble recalling my sins. Once I had told my mother I did not know where the wash pan was and I did know. I had seen it on the front step. I had not put it there and there was no reason for me to lie, but I did and I knew it was a sin. And once George and I reached up to an open kitchen window from outside and took a custard pie that had been set there to cool. We ate every bit of it. That weighed on my mind as an unexpiated sin, for Mamma not only did not scold us, she did not even mention a missing pie, never hinted that one was missing, never asked leading questions or gave us accusing glances.

Another sin was my quick temper. I do not remember it, but I was told that when I was very young I snatched a pencil from my sister Julia and threw it into the fire. Within my memory was a time when I was about to hit George with a stick, but he took himself nimbly out of range. Papa saw it and gave me a spanking. While no blood was shed, I felt that I had paid for that sin.

But my worst sin was my stubbornness and this made me more unhappy than any other of my wrong doings. If something disturbed me near meal time I would impulsively say I wasn't hungry when the meal was announced. Right away I would be sorry and know that I was hungry and would think of the family around the table, passing food to each other and would feel alone and desolate. Yet when my dear mother would come to me with kind gentle words I still said I wasn't hungry. Something in me refused to give. I wanted it to, I was pained. But it would not.

I was converted and joined the church and felt truly that my sins had been forgiven. I learned to control my temper and yearned to do good. Going to the pasture for the cows, with no creatures to hear me but frightened rabbits and curious squirrels, I preached aloud to the heathen. Yet a few months later when I went to prayer meeting and knew that as one of the new converts I would be expected to testify to the joys of being saved, I sat silent and fearful. I cannot understand why all my life I can one day make a spectacle of myself and the next day be painfully reticent.

Julia and I joined the Methodist church and when she chose to be baptized by immersion, I said I also would. But on the bank of the creek I had one of my impulses. I went to the minister right in front of everybody and said I wanted to be sprinkled instead of immersed. It wasn't that I was afraid of the water. He had said that sprinkling was symbolic of the spirit descending and that immersion was symbolic of the washing away of sins. Kneeling alone on the bank of Hogle's Creek, I received baptism by sprinkling.

The Hopewell church held its baptizings at another place in Hogle's Creek. Spectators rattled down to the water in wagons and buggies, in hacks and on horseback, tied the horses to trees and assembled on the bank. The song was always "Shall We Gather at the River," sung in voices that quavered and were lost in the outdoors.

In a shirt and an old pair of pants with suspenders, the preacher waded out, leading the candidates in a line, hand in hand. The women wore several petticoats, to save themselves the embarrassment of clinging skirts, and they kept pushing down the skirts that floated up. The preacher took hold of the person's two hands, folded them over his chest, lowered him into the water, and brought him back up again. When all had been baptized they waded out dripping. Members were generally taken into the church in summer, but there was always someone who bragged that they had to break the ice to baptize him.

After a baptizing I went home and baptized my rag dolls and was distressed at the length of time it took them to dry. (A girl, immersing her doll after she had seen a baptizing, intoned, "In the name of the father and the son and into the hole you go.")

Funerals were held in the church. No undertakers served our community. I never knew of such a person until a good many years afterwards. Death was generally managed without professional help, except for the minister. Every neighborhood had a woman who attended the sick and assisted at birth and death. In ours it was Aunt Martha Bird, the wife of my mother's Uncle George Bird. A doctor was called if an illness seemed serious.

Neighbors came and "sat up with" the sick, and when death came, washed and dressed the body. Sometimes a casket was bought, and sometimes one was made by Hugh Harper, a plain wooden box which women lined with cotton batting and covered with white muslin. Neighbors dug the grave and took the casket to church in a farm wagon. The minister spoke long and solemnly, picturing the person as already in heaven, free from suffering and greeting those who had gone before. The congregation walked by for a last look, then returned to their seats and sat while the family made their farewells.

There was talk of how the chief mourner "took it," and the demonstration was taken as a measure of grief. "His wife sure took it hard" might be said in commendation. After one funeral a woman said, "I was sitting where I could see her the whole time and she never shed a tear." The coffin was lowered into the fresh clay, unsoftened by mortician's grass or florist's wreaths. People brought flowers from their own gardens if any were in bloom. Family and friends stood by until the grave was filled.

If a child died the parents were told that Jesus needed another angel and how much better it was that the little one had been spared the pain and sorrow of living. But despite the pain and sorrow and the anticipated joys of heaven, people clung to life. It might be a vale of tears, but not even the most earnest believers wanted to leave it.

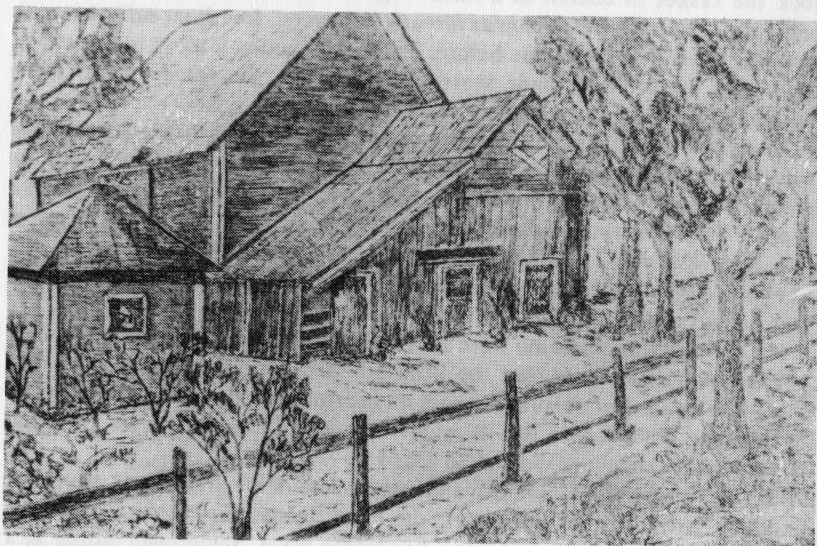
It was a long way from the bland smoothness of the undertaker, his bland assistant, the frilled mauve casket, the hired musicians, everything done to soften the impact of death, all at a handsome price. Sometimes sitting at a funeral, I think of Hopewell and the natural and simple burying of the dead.

Nobody in our family had died except my Grandfather Bennington, who is buried in the Shiloh cemetery. To read his name on the stone, Reuben Bennington, the last name the same as mine, brought a feeling of kinship with the others there with him. Everybody thought of the dead as being in heaven.

Heaven was somewhere up there, possibly right above the blue sky, where God, an old man with a long beard and a stern solemn face, sat listening to prayers and deciding which he would answer, saying who would be born and who would die and punishing people who did not repent. Women blamed themselves for deaths and disasters in the family, saying God sent them as a punishment for their sins, and sometimes their neighbors said the same things.

Hell was a hot fire inside the earth burning forever. My image of the Devil, taken from the cover of a book, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, was of a shadowy figure with fierce fiery eyes, a three-prong pitchfork in his hands. A great aunt told us that the Bad Man lived in the woods and would come out and get children who were not good. But we roamed the woods every day and never once saw him.

Heaven and Hell seemed far away in both time and space. I expected to go to heaven when I died, but that too was very far away. I could not imagine it ever happening to me. Old folks died, of course, but it was impossible to think of myself as ever being old.



Down on the Farm

Marian Hughes Shuff

Neosho Falls, KS

(1859-1937)



dawn eyes the apparition, a townsite on the flat bottom
beside the river that pledged unlimited future
time has stripped the flesh from the living
a body of people, a body that breathed, traded, mated
how was it to know the child would birth this way

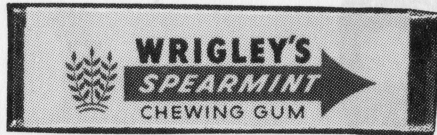
a skull of a town in the steaming noon
socketed storefronts always staring at each other
mindless as the placid river, murmuring its victory
while the killdeer cry out loudly on the gravel

the bombed out look on the ruin of the school
occupied by a battery of pigeons
their only enemy now themselves and the vines
ever so gently prying away stone after stone

time has massacred the founders that
time promised, tendril-tongued, a feast
followed by a far more comfortable death

Jimmy Aubert

Wrigley's Spearmint



I open the package and smell
sugared air. It clearly recalls
a barbershop when I was small
and bribed with such sweets. There were piles
of hair on the floor, strange bright oils
in tall bottles along the mirrors.
Chewing, I taste my fear of scissors,
as pale hands move uncaringly
to cut away my dignity.



Michael L. Johnson



Montage (Silkscreen)

Rosemary Postai

The Other Face of W.C. Fields

By Louise Brooks



Almost as cautiously as he won success in the theatre and films during the twenties, W. C. Fields won the hearts of American schoolboys during the sixties. A curious idol. For he has become their beloved, not so much because they appreciate his comic art based on the years of work he spent practicing juggling, perfecting his timing which is almost the whole of comedy, but because they imagine him to be a character like Quilp in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Quilp fell on the floor rolling with laughter when he forced Sampson Brass to drink boiling rum and water. Fields is supposed to have pleased himself by spiking Baby Leroy's milk with a possibly lethal dose of gin.

It is the word "work" in the above paragraph that makes the schoolboys' love affair with Fields suspect. "Work" is a dirty word in their vocabulary; and Fields is perhaps the only comedian who reveals, through his stately procedures, the passionate amount of work he put into his performance.

Many schoolboys write to me and come to see me. Most of them know only my name and have never seen any of my films. They approach me with wildly uninformed flattery after which, presuming me to be a forlorn old actress full of gratitude, they expect me to fill their arms with my most precious still pictures and sit three hours at the typewriter composing material which they will muck about, sign with their names, and present to the teachers of their film classes.



W.C. Fields as Micawber in David Copperfield [MGM, 1935].

Where Fields is concerned it does not take me long to learn that these boys have seen few of his films, and in discussing any of them they have great difficulty remembering its title or whether they saw the whole of it or an excerpted reel or two. The Fields they idolize is the man they read about and superimpose on the Fields they see on the screen.

If, when I wrote my first film article in 1956, I had known how many film biographies and autobiographies I would have to read in order to check my memories, I would have thrown my typewriter out the window before I became addicted to the writing habit.

In 1778 Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote: "Pointed axioms and acute replies fly loose about the world, and are assigned successively to those whom it may be the fashion to celebrate." In 1922, when I first arrived in New York, I heard every gag, joke, and anecdote which, over the past fourteen years of reading, have brought me to a condition of nausea as I find them "assigned successively" to film celebrities. There are two categories of celebrities fitted with appropriate anecdotes that writers and readers appear to dote on with foolish untiring enthusiasm. They are the tramp-type star delineated by her outrageous conduct, and the drunken actor whose cruel antics are termed hilarious. In the first category is the favorite anecdote about the star who goes into a smart restaurant clad only in a mink coat and a pair of slippers. Beneath the coat she is naked! The question is how is it known, her nakedness? Does she do a striptease? In that case the management would swiftly bundle her into a waiting cab and every newspaper across the country would carry the story. Journalists refer to the mink coat anecdote as a "possible" item because it *could* happen. It has happened but not to a star with the eyes of the press upon her. No documentation ever confirms this anecdote assigned to stars like Jean Harlow.

Thomas Gray said that "men will believe anything at all provided they are under no obligation to believe it." In the second category of drunken actor anecdotes, out of the myths surrounding Irish wakes, writers have contrived an item so impossible that no film reader doubts it for an instant. This *funny* story tells about a bunch of drunks who steal the body of an actor friend from his casket in a funeral home and set it up in a chair in another friend's house, during his absence. Surprise! Surprise! I have consulted funeral directors and the police about this repulsive prank and find that breaking into a funeral home would immediately arouse the police and get the pranksters clapped into jail. It is not necessary to add that such a frolic with the body of W. C. Fields would attract the notice of the press.

Where two or three are gathered together in his name they do not waste time discussing Fields' films; they get right down to their "favorite stories" about the "little guy who looked life in the eye and told it where to go." With more than forty years separating them from the Fields of the theatre and his unseen early films, his admirers must rely on the word of journalists like Roger Dougherty, who writes, "Fields' characterization of a seedy, irascible,

sharp tongued drunk with a bulbous nose and an ice cold heart made him a headliner in the Ziegfeld Follies, George White's Scandals, Earl Carroll's Vanities and such films as *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* and *If I Had a Million* ...In later years he jousting with Charlie McCarty on Edgar Bergen's radio show." The facts of Fields' character development are these: in 1923-24 he appeared on Broadway in the musical comedy *Poppy*. He played a small-time bungling cheat, an affectionate father with no trace of drunkenness. William LeBaron saw *Poppy*, and when he became head of production at Paramount's Long Island studio he gave Fields a contract in 1925. *If I Had a Million* was released in 1932. Fields worked on Edgar Bergen's radio show in 1937 and 1938. *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* was released in 1941.

Speaking of Edgar Bergen, another writer, Jim Harmon, quotes him as saying, "Fields would be drinking in the morning, drinking at noon, drinking in the afternoon. But he **never** acted if he were drunk." On his own, Harmon goes on to call Fields "a man of monumental pettiness and eccentricity, with a hundred categories of hatreds and dislikes." What, I wonder, is the source of this line written in 1970?

Bernard Sobel was the press agent of the Ziegfeld Follies for ten years. He covered most of Fields' appearances in that show, including his last in 1925. At that time Bill was a man of forty-six, completely formed as a comedian, completely set as a private person. Sobel in his book *Broadway Heartbeat* (1953), writing about Fields' distorted biographies, says, "Hollywood made him an autocrat whose odd behaviour was matched only by his drinking prowess. Somehow I can't believe that Fields let fame distort him."

No, it wasn't fame that distorted Fields. It was sickness and the clutching fear of being discarded to die on the Hollywood rubbish heap. If he must play a nasty old drunk and be publicised as a nasty old drunk in order to work on the Edgar Bergen radio show, then so be it. He was an isolated person. As a young man he stretched out his hand to Beauty and Love and they trust it away. Gradually he reduced reality to exclude all but his work, filling the gaps with alcohol whose dim eyes transformed the world into a distant view of harmless shadows. He was also a solitary person. Years of traveling alone around the world with his juggling act taught him the value of solitude and the release it gave his mind. He abhorred bars, nightclubs, parties, and other people's houses. He seems to have left no diaries, no letters, no serious autobiographical material. Most of his life will remain unknown. But the history of no life is a jest.

The tragedy of film history is that it is fabricated, falsified in truth and in fact, by the very people who make film history. In the early years of film production, when nobody believed there was going to be any film history, it was understandable that most film magazines and books printed trash which aimed only at fulfilling the public's wish of sharing a fairytale existence with its movie idols. But since about 1950 film has been established as an art and its history recognized as a serious matter. Yet film celebrities continue to cast themselves as stock types of nice or naughty girls, of good or bad boys

whom their chroniclers (to quote Ortega) "spray with a shower of anecdotes."

The most heartbreaking of all these books is Mack Sennett's *King of Comedy* (1954), taped and written by Cameron Shipp. Except in superficial observations Sennett had not faith enough in his genius to risk a serious, luminous exposition of his world of comedy and the immortal grotesques who inhabited it. This world of universal laughter which was silenced by exclusion when the film corporations lengthened their feature films, filling out programmes with animated cartoons and newsreels. As a part of film history, as a person who was *there*, Sennett might have given readers the truth about the mysteriously manipulated scandals which destroyed two of his greatest stars—Mabel Normand and Fatty Arbuckle. But he so abused dates and facts that, for the most part, his anecdotes are historically worthless. What he had to say about Fields' salary and drinking habits is simply a footnote to his own vanity.

Only one line in his book reminds me of the Mack Sennett I used to see in the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel when I was living there in 1936. Almost every day from about noon he would sit in the lobby for a couple of hours, smoking his cigars, watching the people go by. He was then but fifty-one—this big, healthy, wonderfully handsome and virile man. How could *he* have allowed himself to be discarded to die on the Hollywood rubbish heap? Although he spoke to no one, he was never bored. As he followed with keen and unembarrassed attention my flights in and out of the hotel, I wondered what thoughts lay behind the expressionless mask he wore in public. Now I know he was practicing the art of paying attention. In his book, speaking of working for D. W. Griffith in New York, he says: "I learned all I ever learned about making pictures by standing around watching people who knew how." Anyone who has achieved excellence in any form knows that it comes as a result of ceaseless concentration. Paying attention.

I was in the Ziegfeld Follies with W.C. Fields in 1925. I was eighteen when I cabled Otto Kahn, the New York banker, begging him to rescue me from London where I was dancing the Charleston at the Cafe de Paris. He cabled Edmund Goulding, the future film director who was visiting his family in London, telling Eddie to pay my rent at 49A Pall Mall and deposit me on the *S. S. Homeric* sailing for New York on February 14th. Upon my arrival there, Ziegfeld, who had been looking for me ever since I disappeared from the chorus of *George White's Scandals* in September 1924, gave me a job in *Louie the 14th*, a musical comedy starring Leon Errol. It opened at William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theatre in March 1925. The stage director of *Louie* was Teddy Royce (who died in England in 1965 at the age of ninety-four). He was an elfin creature with snapping black eyes who whisked about on the coldest winter days dressed only in a tweed suit and a grey cashmere scarf wound around his neck. He detested all of Ziegfeld's spoiled beauties, but most of all me because on occasion, when I had other commitments, I would wire my non-appearance to the theatre. One day in

June he called the girls together on stage after the Wednesday matinee. I came on last, standing inconspicuously at the end of the line on the right. Centered behind the orchestra pit stood Mr. Royce sipping his gin and water. After some vague remarks about the lack of discipline in the theatre, he looked sharply at me and said, "Some girls in this show are using the theatre exclusively as a show case." All the girls looked at me too and grinned happily. I was humiliated and insulted. I rushed to the little den under the stage box which Mr. Ziegfeld used for consultations and told him how Mr. Royce had publicly humiliated and insulted me. He smiled his charming silver fox smile and instantly transferred me to the Follies.

When I arrived backstage at the New Amsterdam Theatre to start rehearsals for the summer edition of the Follies I asked Billy Shrode, the stage manager, for the number of my dressing room. He looked at my makeup box, he looked at the callboard upon which was posted a list of dressing rooms and their occupants, then he looked at me. "To tell you the truth, Louise," he said, laughing in spite of himself, "I've asked them all and there's not a girl in the show willing to dress with you." Having won no popularity contests with the girls in the *Scandals* and *Louie the 14th*, I received this news without comment. "What the devil do you do to these girls?" Shrode asked. "I don't do *anything* to them." "Maybe that's it," he said and turned back shaking his head at the dressing room list.

The fierce status battles over theatre dressing rooms have sometimes driven stars from shows and even closed them. The dressing room situation in the New Amsterdam was peculiar in that, because of the city fire laws, it was the only theatre in New York sheathed in an office building. Offstage on the ground floor was the single star dressing room. Because Will Rogers came to the theatre wearing his cowboy outfit, carrying his lasso, and chewing his gum, ready to go on stage for his monologue, there was no problem about giving the star dressing room to W. C. Fields. Breaking all the other rules of protocol, Ziegfeld devoted the second floor to his showgirls who, in case they missed the elevator, must not exhaust themselves walking down more than a single flight of stairs to the stage. The principals dressed on the third floor, the chorus girls on the fourth. On the fifth floor was another single dressing room, a duplicate of the star's. Dorothy Knapp, Ziegfeld's most glorified beauty, dressed here alone. It was decided that I should share her glory.

We were a harmonious couple. Between Dorothy and me there was neither jealousy nor competition. For Dorothy, it was not enough, walking across the stage dressed in little except her breathless beauty and divine smile. Although her screen tests had been unsuccessful, she still yearned to become a movie star and took lessons in acting and dancing towards that end. For me, after dancing with Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Martha Graham, my little dances in the Follies were not enough. In May at Paramount under Herbert Brenon's direction, I had played with no enthusiasm a bit part in *The Street of Forgotten Men*. I wanted to be a showgirl and do nothing. My moment of

delight came at the end of the Follies when the whole company came on stage for the finale. Will Rogers and I climbed a ladder to the top of a fifteen-foot tower set in the middle of the stage. Starting with a tiny noose on his lasso, Rogers would twirl it faster and faster, bigger and bigger until the rope hissed in a circle around us like an intoxicated snake as the curtains opened and the dazzling spotlight shone upon us.

The fifth floor dressing room lost its exclusive atmosphere when Peggy Fears, who had also transferred from *Louie* to the Follies, decided to become my best friend. She was a darling girl, with a sweet singing voice, from Dallas, Texas. Her smooth chesnut-colored hair was untouched by dyes or permanent waves. Instead of the expensive gowns of a Follies girl, she wore schoolgirl sweaters and skirts. Perhaps it was her whimsical sense of fun that attracted her to me. And what could be more fun than Peggy, the most popular girl in the show, becoming friends with its most abominated member—me? One night she crashed our dressing room carrying a Wedgwood teapot full of corn whisky and, knowing my literary pretensions, two disgustingly vulgar magazines—*Broadway Brevities* and the *Police Gazette*. A week later we were living together in the Gladstone Hotel off Park Avenue, where swarmed Peggy's friends until September when she went on tour with the Follies and I went into *The American Venus* at Paramount's Long Island studio.

It was through Peggy Fears that I came to know Bill Fields. Before the matinee, at the Rosary Florist, she would select a bouquet to be wrapped in waxed paper and presented to Bill in his dressing room. It touched his heart. Bill adored beautiful girls but few were invited to his dressing room. He was morbidly sensitive about the skin disease which inflamed his nose and sometimes erupted on his hands, making it necessary for him to learn to juggle wearing gloves. After several devastating experiences with beautiful girls he had decided to restrict his choice of girl friends to those less attractive whom he would not find adrift with saxophone players.

Bill entertained Peggy and me with distinction. His bar was an open wardrobe trunk fitted with shelves, planted, as if it were an *objet d'art*, beside his chair. While Shorty, the silent dwarf who was his valet and assistant on the stage, went about preparing our drinks, Peggy and I would dance around Bill who sat at his makeup shelf, listening to our nonsense with gracious attention.

I have never loved and laughed at W.C. Fields in films as I loved and laughed at him in the theatre. There are three reasons. First, in the theatre he was a make-believe character playing in a make-believe world. In films he was a real character acting in real stories. In the stage the crafty idiocy with which he attempted to extract himself from ludicrous situations was unbelievable funny. The same idiocy attending the same situations on the screen gave his "real" character sometimes a degraded often a cruel and destructive quality.

Every night at the Follies, standing in the wings, I would watch Bill's *Bedroom Sketch* with Edna Leedom and his *Picnic Sketch* with Ray Dooley.

The *Bedroom Sketch* opens in darkness. Bill and Edna are asleep in a double bed facing the audience. On Bill's side is a lamp on a night table; on Edna's side is a telephone on a night table. The telephone rings. Bill turns on the lamp, gets out of bed sodden with sleep, his hair on end, wearing rumpled old white pajamas. He trots round the bed in his little pink feet to answer the telephone. After mumbling a few words he says, "Goodnight, Elmer." Then looking down at Edna, who neither moves nor speaks, he adds, "That was Elmer." Bill turns out the light and gets back into bed. The telephone rings again. This time when Bill says, "That was Elmer," Edna sits up in a fury. She is lovely. Her blonde hair is in perfect order and her lace nightgown exposes her lovely bosom and arms. Her anger does not hide the merriment in her eyes and the dimples in her cheeks. While they fight over the identity of Elmer, nobody in the audience is expected to believe that Edna is Bill's jealous wife. The film *International House* (1933) contains a bedroom sequence played by Bill in the same old white pajamas with another lovely blonde in an exquisite nightgown—Peggy Hopkins Joyce. But the realistic distaste with which she regards Bill spoils the fun.

In the Follies, Bill, as the father, played the *Picnic Sketch* with Ray Dooley as his small daughter. At that time, although Ray was twenty-eight with two children of her own, she had the face of an infant monkey and a body that fitted nicely into a baby carriage. Her squalling brats from two to six were brilliant travesties. She was not the usual aggressive child of the theatre. Up to the moment of an outburst she was a passive child following Bill's operations, her eyes glazed with anxiety. Making no sound, she watched him break in the door of the unoccupied house upon whose lawn was spread the litter of the picnic lunch. He burst into the house outraged to find the door locked against honest tax-paying Americans, and came out in triumph with a paper bag filled with stolen food. It was not until he opened the can of tomatoes with a hatchet, squirting the red juice in his face, that she set up the howls which made him flinch and recoil and grab at his hat.

As the traditional obnoxious brat, a little boy, Mickey Bennett, played Ray Dooley's part in the picnic sequence of the film, *It's the Old Army Game* (1926). It was shot on the front lawn of the most lavish estate in Palm Beach, El Mirasol, the winter home of a J. P. Morgan parter, Edward Stotesbury. Not only was it the most improbable spot for a Fields picnic, but what the production unit did to the lawn was frightful. During the five days of shooting the litter converted it to a garbage dump; and when the trucks and forty pairs of feet finished their work it looked like the abandoned site of an old soldiers' reunion. But Mr. and Mrs. Stotesbury were thrilled. "Everybody," said Mrs. Stotesbury, "everybody in Palm Beach is driving by to see what is going on here." I was not in the sequence, so she invited me to tea inside the villa. After I autographed a photograph for her young granddaughter whose name was also Louise Brooks, Mr. Stotesbury, a teetery but spry little man of

seventy-seven, dressed in the costume of an eighteenth-century dandy, took me up to his library where he entertained me with a short concert on the drums.

My second reason for preferring Fields on the stage to Fields on the screen is that on the stage the audience saw all of him all the time. In 1925 when I was shooting *The American Venus* and he *Sally of the Sawdust*, I would go to his set to watch him work. He paid no attention to camera setups. For each shot he would rehearse the same business to exasperating perfection while Carol Dempster and D.S. Griffith sat bored and limp in chairs beside the camera. Long shot, medium shot, two shot or close-up, Bill performed in each as if he were standing whole before an audience which could appreciate every detail of his costume and follow the dainty disposition of his hands and feet. Every time the camera drew closer, it cut off another piece of him and deprived him of some comic effect.

Petrouchka is a comical marionette in Stravinsky's ballet until the very end when only his face is seen peering over the rooftop and the curtains close on a tragic note. Fields called Charlie Chaplin a "ballet dancer," never deigning to study his film technique.

Having thousands of feet of close shots at his disposal, the film editor supplies my third reason for loving the stage Fields more than the films Fields. He never really left the theatre. As he ignored camera setups, he ignored the cutting room and he could only curse the finished film, seeing his timing ruined by haphazard cuts.

William LeBaron was responsible for attempting to divert Fields from fantasy to realism. Today it is assumed that Fields was a big box-office star in the theatre and in films. He was not. The largest audience he attracted was the radio audience of 1937-38 which listened to his unedited dialogue with another creature of the imagination, Edgar Bergen's dummy, Charlie McCarthy. But back in 1925 LeBaron believed that Fields could never achieve complete success without becoming a real person to the audience. Producing Marion Davies' films for William Randolph Hearst, LeBaron almost brought Marion to life in *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1922). With *Little Old New York* (1923), he produced her first hit in which, dressed in boy's clothes, she acted like a real girl. After seeing Fields play successfully a character part in the musical *Poppy*, LeBaron gave him a part in Marion's film *Fanice Meredith* (1924). When he went to Paramount, he put Fields under contract. Between 1925 and 1938 LeBaron produced twenty-one Fields films. Yet it was only after Fields escaped realism and returned to his world of make-believe that he made his best films at Universal from 1938 to 1941. This is a puzzling fact considering that LeBaron produced all the exhilarant Mae West fantasies at Paramount, managing to neutralize her schemes to portray a *real* femme fatale, or, as Fields put it, "a plumber's idea of Cleopatra."

The first of five Fields films directed by Edward Sutherland was *It's the Old Army Game*. To shoot exteriors at the end of February 1926, Paramount

sent the production unit to Ocala, an inland farming town in Florida. About six miles away was Silver Springs—"150 natural springs issuing from the porous Ocala limestone and flowing into a common basin. At eighty feet objects at the bottom are clearly visible." The basin was filled with tropical fish, surrounded by tropical plants and flowers. This iridescent beauty was viewed from a glass-bottomed motorboat which Sutherland used for a love scene between William Gaxton and me.

The citizens of Ocala, hoping to make Silver Springs a rich tourist attraction, welcomed our company as a means of publicizing their project. We were treated to so much Southern hospitality that the script got lost and the shooting schedule wandered out of sight. Nobody in Ocala seemed to have heard of Prohibition. And if ever there was a company that needed no help in the consumption of liquor, it was ours. Eddie Sutherland and Tom Geraghty (the writer) drank; William Gaxton, Blanche Ring, myself, the crew—everyone drank. Bill Fields drank his private stock apart with his girl friend, Bessie Poole, his manager, Billy Grady, and his valet, Shorty. We were a week over schedule, LeBaron was wiring "All second cameraman's rushes tilted. What are you doing? Come home," when Eddie decided that the picnic sequence absolutely must be shot on Mrs. Statesbury's lawn.

Palm Beach was especially attractive that year because its millionaires decided that they absolutely could not get through the winter without their Follies girls. They provided Ziegfeld with the money to produce *Palm Beach Nights*, a small edition of the Follies. It was housed in an old assembly hall transformed into a nightclub with a full stage by the famous Viennese designer, Joseph Urban. Ziegfeld provided a choice selection of Follies girls, including Paulette Goddard and Susan Flemming. And now every night, at the conclusion of *Palm Beach Nights*, our company (minus Bill Fields) contributed a floor show. Blanche Ring sang "Rings on my Fingers," Mickey Bennett sang ballads in a piercing tenor, I danced, Eddie Sutherland did prat falls, and Billy Gaxton starred as the comedian. He and Ruby Cameron did their old vaudeville act, singing and dancing and telling bum jokes with violent self-approval. Then Gaxton appeared alone playing the violin. This was even worse than the vaudeville act. Trying to recapture the essence of Gaxton's impromptu comedy, I realize now that it was born of despair because he was funny every day too. When we did not work he was funny reading *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* to me; when we worked he was funny about his makeup, always checking with the cameraman, Alvin Wyckoff, to see whether the scar on the back of his neck was well covered since "That's all anyone sees of me."

I knew that our parts as the "love interest" in a Fields comedy meant nothing, but Gaxton had convinced himself that this first job in films would launch him on a successful new career allowing him to escape from years of mediocre vaudeville sketches. At best it was a mistaken act of friendship, Eddie's giving the part of a boy to a sophisticated actor of thirty-four. Billy Gaxton was so vulnerable, so proud of his good looks, his Spanish ancestry,

his acting ability. When he became a great Broadway star in George Gershwin's *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), the deadly bitterness of this failure was exposed by the fact that he refused fabulous contracts, never making another film.

Not having seen *It's the Old Army Game*, I know only that it did not make money. In 1927 when Eddie Sutherland directed his second Fields comedy, *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, Paramount's Long Island studio was closed, LeBaron had gone to FBO, and Fields was finishing his contract at the Hollywood studio. I was married to Eddie during the preparation and production of *Tillie*, which was the worst mess of film making that I have ever observed. Even Fields, who ordinarily did not enter the picture until shooting began, came to our house one afternoon to look into the story as it was told to him by Eddie and the writer, Monte Brice. I remember Bill sitting quietly listening and drinking martinis from Eddie's two-quart cocktail shaker; I remember him teasing me by dropping my fragile Venetian wine glasses and catching them just before they hit the floor; but I can't remember one word he said about the idiotic plot contrived for the remake of the film.

Mack Sennett's *Tillie's Punctured Romance* had been a box-office hit in 1914 due to the presence of Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Normand. The title and the story had no value in 1927 when Paramount (which had bought all of Sennett's properties) sold the rights, along with the services of Fields and Sutherland, to Al and Charlie Christie. The Christie brothers had been making the popular Christie Comedies since 1916. They were kind, big men nearing fifty when the film corporations established the controlling theatre chains which eliminated the Christies' two-reel comedies as they eliminated Sennett's. Temporary insanity, brought on by the prospect of losing their company, their studio, and their Beverly Hills mansion, induced them to produce the six-reel *Tillie* with a Paramount release. It was filmed with groans, previewed with moans, shown in a few theatres, and then buried in the vaults. Poor old *Tillie* had not a single mourner.

After a famous person dies his biographies feel free to give him a glittering list of intimate friends. Anecdotes are so much tastier spiced with expensive names. Bill Fields' list grows with every telling. So far as I know he had no intimate friends and loved only one person whose name, Paul Jones, is meaningless to practically everyone.

Paul Meredith Jones was born in 1897 in Bristol, Tennessee, a mountain village on the Kentucky border. In 1922 he turned up at the Paramount studio and got a job as a prop boy. In 1962, when he retired from that studio, he left behind one of the finest records of a comedy producer known to Hollywood history. He had produced comedies with Bing Cosby and Bob Hope, with Hope alone; with Martin and Lewis, with Jerry Lewis alone; with Danny Kaye and W. C. Fields.

Paul was still an assistant director when LeBaron returned to Paramount in 1931 and began to groom him as a comedy producer. Although LeBaron was

tall and grey and elegant and Paul was a small, sandy-haired hillbilly, they had much in common. Both were serene, witty observers of the scene rather than participants, warm and friendly yet remote. Both were unpublicized, unknown in Hollywood society. But, whereas LeBaron functioned above the storm, he could send Paul to any set where insecure comedians were fighting with insecure comedy directors, and obtain peace.

Fields, Eddie, and I first knew Paul when he was the second assistant on *It's the Old Army Game*. His walk alone, the way he came on the sets as if he had ambled down the mountain to make a friendly call, was as soothing as a lullaby. Leaning on his cane, as relaxed as if he were leaning over a rail fence his narrow eyes twinkling in his long solemn face, he would listen to Bill and Eddie argue about the direction of a scene until they ran out of words. Then with some easy comforting remarks he would make them feel just silly enough to laugh at themselves. When it came time to shoot the scene the argument had settled itself—usually in Bill's favor.

Paul became first assistant on *Tillie's Punctured Romance*. That is when he became Fields' confidant. They had a bond. Women. Paul too adored beautiful girls who did not adore him. His handicap was his total distinction. He did not look or act or talk like anyone in Hollywood. Young girls were ashamed to go out with "that little hillbilly." He had fallen in love with a pretty extra girl, Doris Hill, and persuaded Eddie to give her a part in *Tillie*. During production she met Monte Brice and married him.

The last time I saw Paul was at his home in 1940. He had become a powerful and wealthy producer without changing a bit. He was married to his pleasant secretary, Julia, and they were living in an old-fashioned bungalow on an unfashionable street in Hollywood. I was soon to leave Hollywood forever, and Paul's stories and imitations of Bill Fields are the last happy memories I possess of that unhappy place. Especially Bill's plot to get rid of Bessie Poole. Bessie was a large, plump blonde who wore ruffled pink organdie dresses with matching hat, gloves, shoes, and parasol. Her composure was indestructible. All Bill's suggestions that she should leave him for her own good were deflected with smiling contentment. Not being a cruel man, or a brave one, he designed a painless separation by means of a fictional business trip, taking Paul with him to San Francisco. Bessie saw them off, waving goodbye with her pink handkerchief to Bill and Paul standing on the observation platform of the train. All the time Bill was waving and beaming and calling goodbye to Bessie he was muttering his horrid plot into Paul's ear. When they arrived in San Francisco he would telephone his lawyer in Hollywood, instructing him to present a generous check to Bessie and stuff her on the first train back to New York and the burlesque show. Paul knew, of course, that Fields would never have the courage to carry out the plot which seemed so feasible as the train was pulling out and he was calling, "Goodbye Bessie, goodbye my dear—my little rosebud. Take care of yourself."



Hector: A Character of Verbage

By Robert Hilt

When do compatriots really begin to appreciate the nature, materials, and eventually the legend of a storyteller? Having had experienced some two score years of rapt attention listening to the yarns of such folk, I believe that fond and lasting remembrances of a really "true character" may only be valid if they remain vivid for over a decade. Only one or two unforgettable tales or a couple of nodding heads at the mention of a yarner's name are not sufficient for honest inclusion into any local "Hall of Shame." Few such characters may therefore exist in an individual mind, much less in the collective memory of remnant residents of an area.

As befits the lot of liars, many are but brief residents of their areas of notoriety. This short essay is a tribute to one such fellow, to remain discreetly unnamed, who still is in the land of the living—somewhere—and most certainly within the age of memory and knowledge of scores of Little Balkans folk. Thus, for fear of giving lasting fame to this bloke, and with all due apology to those who bear the name of this assumed pseudonym, he will simply be called Hector.

Hector, a man of will, built his own house in Englevale, hinterland area in Crawford County. Those of us who knew him well wondered if the somewhat distant site wasn't an assurance to hide any faults of construction. Such factors as flooded basement, sagging walls rebuilt, etc., were easy oversights to the masterbuilder. His knowledge as builder was surpassed by his native knowledge of Far North members of the animal kingdom. His belief in the top speed of 728.6 m.p.h. of the Canadian deerfly, regardless of scientific proof presented to the contrary, left his faith in biology undaunted. He must have felt that we, the unbelievers, might believe anything—or as Berger stated through the aged chieftain in *Little Big Man*: "The two-legged critter can believe anything, the more preposterous, the better."

We were at first a gullable lot. The snickers, gaffes, mirth, and scorn of a decade ago now may well be the only worth of hours spent with Hector.

Hector posed as a wise, athletic, and heroic figure to himself. His exaggeration knew few bounds. There was no story or true life event that

wasn't fair game to "top" with Hector using himself as the central character. The following is only a representative number of excerpts that remain on a collective, indelible memory.

A sports figure for all occasions, Hector had run faster, kicked farther, rode harder, and hit greater pitching than any man we had ever met, at least to hear him tell it. It was truly amazing to his peers that a man who had almost equalled the Olympic record in the 100 meter dash could not score after tagging-up at third in softball of a long fly to center. Even more unbelievable was his acclaimed 63 yard field goal (Canadian Professional Football League) proclaimed the Monday following the miracle 62 yarder by Tom Dempsey in the N.F.L. If believed, Hector must have been the best Canadian high school athlete ever. His records in football, hockey, and rodeo we noticed were never accompanied by face-saving newsclippings. It stands beyond comprehension that the man who hit a 600 foot homer off Sachel Paige never managed the long ball playing for the local Farkles. If Hector had been truthful, any of us would have gladly served as his agent in the modern seven-figure superjock era.

Hector's sagacity is well portrayed by his stories of service in the Canadian army during the Korean War at the modest age of fifteen (an age revealed only after close questions). Such a born leader could be no less than the wise old sarge. When cornered, Hector explained his early high school graduation (after all his previously mentioned All-Canada athletic awards) and a touch of premature gray hair which fooled "his men" into also referring to him as "dad."

How unfortunate that the unbelievers grew cold to Hector. The enormity of past brag was just too much bullshit for anyone to swallow new tales. New finds among the group to Hector's give, when presenting such fine facts about their new friend, would quickly be asked: "Who told you that B.S., Hector?" "Aw crap, Hector, who could believe that?" Such statements filled the air soon after his arrival in a knowing group. Facing facts like the 60 m.p.h. speed of the deerfly or no record of a 63 yard field goal in the Canadian Football League records did seem to unnerve Hector somewhat. But only once in our collective remembrance of Hector's five year stay in the Balkans was he speechless.

During the early 1970s there was a good deal of urban racial strife in America, especially in our urban ghettos. Over coffee, several of our group were pondering this complex issue. Hector sitting quietly listening got that old liar's gleam in his eyes. Like a panther, one of our number struck the fateful blow. He clapped his hands and said boldly: "Hold it everyone: Hector wants to tell us about the time he was Black." With a stunned face Hector stammered, stuttered, and excused himself.

Now that the allotted decade has passed, those of us who knew him (and those more recently initiated folk to the yarns of Hector) all fondly recall the greatest liar we ever knew in the Balkans. We wish him well, but we sure do miss those whoppers. Hector is long since gone, but his whoppers linger on.

The Cave of Elijah: A Lebanese Folktale



Collected by Patty Kuhel from Flora Murry Farris.

I was baptized in the cave where Elijah hid from King Ahab in the Bible. There is a shrine there. When I was little, I was sick, and my mother promised she would have me baptized there if I got well. We lived in America then, so I wasn't baptized until I was ten or eleven years old. My grandma took me there. And when you go in, there is no water anywhere in the cave: everything is dry. Then the priest comes in and burns incense, you know, in that thing that they carry. When the priest burns the incense, the water begins to run all around there, and places in the rock that are about that big [showing the circle of her arms] fill with water. And that's the water they used to baptize me.

Grandma told me that one time some woman didn't believe that the water would come in a dry cave like that. And she told everyone, "There won't be no water." So she took some holy water from the Church with her in a little bottle, and she had it hidden under her clothes. So she went in, and the priest went in, and all the people went in. And the priest burned incense and everything, but the water wouldn't come. Then the priest said, "There must be an unbeliever in here!" And then some of the people told him about the woman with the holy water hidden under her clothes, and the priest made her leave the cave. And as soon as she left, the water started to come down the sides of the cave and fill the little pools. *It won't work unless you believe!*

Light Verse by Don T. Walker

Olfactory Pleasures

Thank you, Lord, for giving us noses,
 For aromas are memories—lilacs and roses,
 Baking bread and coffee brewing,
 Frying onions, barbecuing,
 Lillies of the valley, leaves of bay,
 Cinnamon, apples, new mown hay,
 bath-tubbed babies, Ivory Soap,
 Watermelon and cantaloupe,
 Roasting turkey, fresh French fries,
 Wintergreen, peppermint, pumpkin pies,
 Gingerbread and sassafras,
 Bubbling stew, new cut grass,
 Honeysuckle blooming near,
 Cologne behind my honey's ear,
 And Christmas trees in late December—
 These are smells we love to remember.



Super Contortionist

It's just a wicked fantasy,
 As everybody knows,
 But I'd love to watch a centipede
 Put on her pantyhose.

Imposed

"God's fairest creations"
 Don't rate any more.
 They're only known as "Ladies"
 Where the sign is on the door.

Contributors

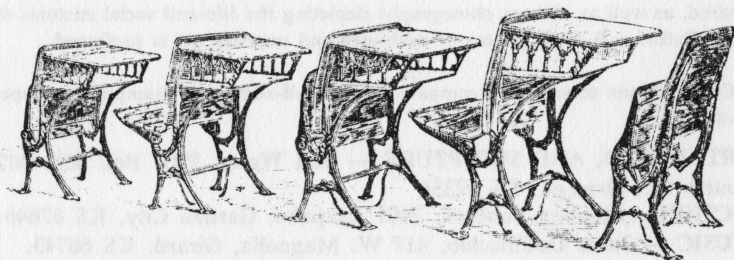
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Invitation To Submit



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 nonfiction.

Prime consideration is given to works by Kansas and former Kansans, as well as work set in the Little Balkans. Current nonfiction contributions are restricted to subjects related to the Little Balkans. At least half of the poetry of each issue will be devoted to poets who have had limited previous publication. Manuscripts should not exceed thirty-five double-spaced typed pages. Works of local and regional artists are desired, as well as vintage photographs depicting the life and social customs of the Little Balkans; B & W photos of sculpture and oversize art is preferred.

Contributions should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope and mailed to:

ART, PHOTO, AND SCULPTURE — Ted Watts, P.O. Box 303, 807 W. Fourth St., Oswego, KS 67356

FICTION — Stephen Robbins, 2001 Arapaho, Garden City, KS 67846.

MUSIC — Janis DeChicchio, 417 W. Magnolia, Girard, KS 66743.

NONFICTION — Shelby Horn, 615 Kansas, Oswego, KS 67356.

POETRY — Gene DeGruson, 601 Grandview Heights Terrace, Pittsburg, KS 66762.



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