

Word Sender*

The Neihardt Foundation Newsletter



"Lakota holy man Black Elk's description of the West"

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Bancroft, Nebraska 68004

June 2008

The Great Plains and the Writer . . .

.....the connection is profoundly evident and intensely personal as proven by the presentations at this 28th Neihardt Conference. Neihardt knew the Great Plains intimately and it colored his writings, whether in the description of a prairie fire by having lived through one, or the site of a battle by talking to those who had been there. His writing reflected, as Sen. Earl Pomeroy of North Dakota once stated, Neihardt had "an awareness of the importance of place that so many Americans whether historians or literary artists, often seem to lack" (memo to L.F.Aly 1/20/80).

This year's conference explored how various authors, poets, performers, and historians have gained a great deal of their inspiration from a 'sense of place' rooted in the Plains, as did Neihardt by combining poetry, music, history, biography, and visual art to offer a broad perspective. The day began with readings of poetry and prose by Twyla Hansen, one of Nebraska's most popular modern poets, a Nebraska native and granddaughter of former Bancroft residents, so her material is very personal to the area. She shared how important it is for her to write about her surroundings, the day-to-day living on the Plains, and the telling of stories connected to the land now as well as those of yester-year.



Tom May, Nancy Johnson, Twyla Hansen and Steve Kinsella answer audience questions



Author, songwriter, Tom May

The book *900 Miles From Nowhere* was a labor of love for Steve Kinsella. He related how the book of vintage photos, letters and diary entries came into being beginning with a college summer archeology internship and discovering a decrepit sod house inhabited by "the partially preserved life of a Great Plains pioneer." Later, similar sites continued to intrigue him enough to seek out historical society archives for those scraps which would tell him who some of these people were, why they came, and perhaps more importantly, why and how they left. Kinsella's thought provoking stories and humor were the topic of many conversations on the way to the Bancroft Community Center where lunch was served by the Q125 Committee as a fundraiser for Bancroft's upcoming 2009 Quasquicentennial.

Recording artist, poet, song writer, balladeer, author, performer and many more are titles for Tom May. Most people in this part of the country know him as the host of River City Folk, the radio and television program highlighting traditional and contemporary folk music.



Jay and Shauna Gerke accept the Word Sender award on behalf of Jan Two Bears Falcon

He reminded us that song lyrics, particularly of folk songs, must be grounded in personal experiences, either contemporary or historical. The Great Plains and the combined mountain and valley meadows of Washington State where he now resides contribute to his subject matter. Then, for nearly an hour, his rich full voice rang throughout the building with history and poetry in songs such as “Celilo Falls” based on the story of damage done to culture and environment by the damming of part of the Columbia River; “Yukon Journey 45 Below” a ballad of a modern journey into a timeless land and the humbling experiences which occurred; and “The Words Upon the Wire” which is a biography of his father’s life as a telegrapher in the Nebraska Sand Hills.

The final presentation of the day pulled in the biography and work of another Nebraskan and contemporary of John Neihardt, Wright Morris. Nancy Johnson of Central City is an independent scholar who focuses on family histories, vintage photographs, and pioneer Plains women, and Wright Morris. Wright Morris, was an author whose powers of observation and depth of understanding of his surroundings and the people he encountered make him one of the most interesting Nebraska personalities. Johnson used images of Morris’ boyhood in Central City, along with anecdotal stories and quotes from Morris’ works, to create a picture of small-town Great Plains life.

All of the presenters were received by a very appreciative audience and kept on track by our excellent moderator, Dr. Lisa Sandlin, Professor of Creative Writing at Wayne State College and author of *In the River Province* among others. Dr. Sandlin participated as one of our women authors in the 2000 “Year of Mona” conference. The panel discussion winding up the conference elicited quite a number of questions from the audience as well as interesting and inspiring answers

and comments from the participants. At the end we were treated to an encore performance of two songs by Tom May, including his signature sign-off song for River City Folk.

The mid-day break in the program provided an opportunity to recognize some very special people. The Neihardt Young Poet’s contest first place winners in the Junior High and High School categories were present to accept their cash awards and certificates. Chrisinda Scheideler of Scotia is a 7th grader at North Loup-Scotia Junior High and won for her poem “I Was There” and Kaylee Erickson of Lincoln, a 10th grader at Lincoln Science High School won for her poem “First Encounter.” Read the poems elsewhere in this edition. Another honor awarded is the annual Wall of Fame plaque given to former and current Board members in recognition of exemplary service to the Foundation. This year’s award went to Jan Two Bears Falcon and was accepted on her behalf by her son and daughter-in-law, Jay and Shauna Gerke of Blair. Adding to the theme focus was the Impact! Exhibit in the gallery. We thank the Nebraska Humanities Council and Nebraska Arts Council for their funding support.



Attendees gave speakers their rapt attention

Welcome New Members

Lee Myers - Wisner
Ruth Ann Bargmann - Bancroft
Louise Boyd - Stanton
Judith Meyer - Bancroft
Marcella Broyhill - Dakota City

New LIFE Membership:

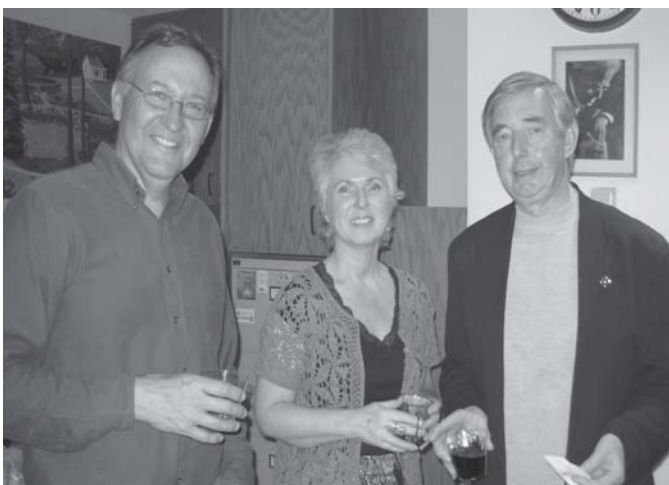
Cynthia Cooper - Bancroft

Kooser Exhibit



We were most pleased to host Kooser Impact! for the months of April and May. This exhibit consisted of works by 28 Nebraska artists brought together in a fascinating combination of original works with a common element, the poetry of Pulitzer Prize winner and two-term U.S. Poet Laureate, Ted Kooser. Impact! has been around for more than 15 years and includes well recognized artists such as Gib Neal, Carlos Frey, Don Dernovich and Julia Noyes.

In this project, each artist chose a poem by Kooser and created an original piece in their particular medium. There were works in acrylic, oil, water color, batik, ceramic, metalwork, collage, and glass. Thank you to the Nebraska Arts Council for funding.



Vice President Paul Hammel, Executive Director Nancy Gillis and Irish poet, Desmond Egan at April SAM Program

43rd Annual Neihardt Day August 3rd

This year's State legislated celebration of Nebraska's Poet Laureate will focus on the variety of people who chose to seek their fortunes living out their lives along the Missouri River. Neihardt encountered many interesting characters on his 1907 journey by canoe on the great Missouri River from Fort Benton to Sioux City which became the book *The River and I*. The main speaker will be Nancy M. Peterson of Centennial, CO, author of *People of the Old Missury*, *People of the Troubled Waters*, *People of the Moonshell*, and *Walking in Two Worlds: Mixed Blood Indian Women Seeking Their Path*, who will address the lives of ranchers, farmers, and Native Americans. Excerpts from Neihardt's *The River and I* will look at how Neihardt described those he met along the way and will be read by Tim Anderson, UNL- School of Journalism. An added treat will be traditional Native American flute music. The main program is held outdoors and begins at 1:30 p.m.. Our emcee will once again be Ron Hull of NETV.

The day's activities begin with a Neihardt Board of Directors meeting at 10 a.m., followed by the annual General Membership meeting at 11:30 a.m.. A box lunch is offered by a local caterer for picnicking on the beautiful grounds, tours of the facility, the study, and the grounds are available, and books and gift items will be for sale, including Peterson's books. Some bleacher seating is provided; bring lawn chairs. The day is free and open to the public. This event is partially funded by the Nebraska Humanities Council.

Up Coming SAM Programs

September

Jim Horn (Osage) on the origins of Plains cultures

October

Dean Jacobs, world traveler on his latest journeys to Africa and Siberia

Steve and Bobbi Olsen, authors of *Marking Time: Nebraska's Historic Places*

November

Norma Farrens

Interviews with Eastern Nebraska Veterans

December

A Touch of Brass - Concert

Young Poets Contest

The Neihardt's Young Poet's Contest targets the talents of junior high school and high school students from across the State. The first place winner in the Senior High Division is Kaylee Erickson, who attends school at Lincoln Public. The Junior High Division winner is Chrisinda Scheideler from North Loup-Scotia Public

First Encounter

Kaylee Erickson - First Place Senior High Division

I see an arm sticking out from the grass
 at first I thought it was just a stick; it is dark like the soil
 but smooth; like my rifle. I gently nudge it
 up springs a young native
 he is lean, his muscles tightening as he looks at me.
 I look into his eyes; they are scared, yet soft.
 I see his mouth moving but I do not understand
 I can't take my eyes off his eyes.
 He looks at me, then the rifle; then I understand
 I slowly put it down and take a step forward; he is uneasy
 I put out my hand, he looks at it.
 He starts to leave silently, barely disturbing the surroundings
 I follow clumsily behind him.
 I'm not sure which way we are walking
 in the grass I get lost
 I'm not sure how long we walked
 but the sun was almost all the way down.
 Up ahead I start to see smoke, winding its way up the sky
 as I get closer I hear Voices, Talking, Singing, Chanting
 He's taking me to a village and they are gathered around a fire
 all eyes turn to me
 an old chief hands me a small bowl with herbs and I realize
 they are no threat
 I wish I could say the same for us.

Waka Wico Iye - Word Sender - Friend

Roni McDaniel - Second Place Senior High Division

You devoted much time to a dying man's wish
 Words were lifted and sent, because of you.

Now everyone knows of your good deed
 which is only half of what you left in your stead.

Your words helped others raise above, beyond
 many of my Lakota people of you, are fond.

No bad words! No harsh remarks!
 Praises and whispers, you deserve all.

Pilamayaye, dear friend! Know that even if time has passed
 it is not the end, you've lifted words, lifted hope!

For the man that was outcast from the inner circle-
 a word was lifted because of you.



Kaylee Erickson, receives her first place certificate and cash award from Executive Director Nancy Gillis

The Solitary Gentleman

Megan Stice - Third Place Senior High Division

The setting sun leaves behind a trail of gold,
 violet, and magenta.

It leaves the past behind it,
 to begin a new dawn.

Rolling bruise-colored clouds swell in the
 heavens.

Lonely trees rest unwillingly, they cast long
 broken shadows along the cracked soil,
 and the color the landscape with emerald.

A gentleman sits stately on top of his horse,
 his face looks into the glow.

Squinting into the distance,
 insignificant against the horizon.

The wind sings with the rustling branches,
 whispering the song of the young night.

A smile inched itself upon the man's creased
 face.

He bowed his brimmed hat toward the West,
 and trotted off away from the sun.

I Was There

*Chrisinda Scheideler - First Place
Junior High Division*

I was there when the buffalo roamed
when the buffalo pies you collected were for your cooking fire.

I was there when the prairie was filled with long, flowing grass
and when it blew, it looked like a sea of glass.

I was there when the Indians roamed the land of their ancestors
hunting the buffalo because the buffalo was what they needed to survive.

I was the woman that was there when all you needed was a heart,
a few possessions, a home, and love for this prairie.

I felt as if I were the sky, the land, my home.

I was there.

The West

Kerby Hanson - Second Place Junior High Division

The soft sweeping sound of the prairie grass.

The gray smoke of the tribal chief's pipe.

Screaming men hurtling towards buffalo on horseback.

Prosperity of an undiscovered land cut off by the great river.

And if people could only know that this paradise is

The West.

Land of great Native American warriors

Land of the gold rush

Land of a riches only a few found

This is

The West

The Words of Nature

Michayla Kynard - Third Place Junior High Division

The warm, crisp wind

blows through the grass

and makes the trees

call out to the mountains

and out among the plains of the north

and calls me

and reels me into nature

and shows me the beauty of the north.

The beauty that is so unique

that is nature

that is life we don't see

or care about

that I hope is special to you

and know is special to me

that are the words of nature.



Tom May and Chrisinda Scheideler

Entries for
the 2008-2009
Neihardt's Young
Poets Contest
will be accepted
between
September 1, 2008
and January 1, 2009

*Contact us for more
information*



*First Place poetry winners were:
Chrisinda Scheideler and Kaylee
Erickson*

New in the Library

Traveling Through History by
Patrick Hicks

900 Miles from Nowhere by
Steve Kinsella



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Thank You

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