

The NCB News

Volume 16

Fall/Winter 2006

No. 3

A Publication of the Nebraska Center for the Book

Nebraska Books Honored by Center for the Book

The 2006 Nebraska Book Awards program, sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book (NCB), recognizes and honors books that are written by Nebraska authors, published by Nebraska publishers, set in Nebraska, or concerning Nebraska.

This year's winners were featured at the Nebraska Book Festival:

- **Anthology:** *Slamma Lamma Ding Dong: An Anthology of Nebraska's Slam Poets*, Editors: J.M. Huscher, Matt Mason, Dan Leamen; iUniverse, Inc.
- **Children/Young Adult:** *The Nebraska Adventure*, by Jean A. Lukesh; Gibbs Smith
- **Cover Design/ Illustration:** *These Trespasses*, by Jim Reese; The Backwaters Press



- **Fiction:** *This is Not the Tropics*, by Ladette Randolph; University of Wisconsin Press
- **Nonfiction:** *Impertinences: Selected Writings of Elia Peattie, A Journalist In The Gilded Age*, by Elia W. Peattie, Editor: Susanne George-Bloomfield; University of Nebraska Press
- **Nonfiction Honor Book:** *Rainmakers: A Photographic Story of Center Pivots*; Groundwater Foundation
- **Poetry:** *No Accident*, by Aaron Anstett; The Backwaters Press

Award winners were honored at the 2006 Nebraska Book Festival at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln. Books published in 2006 will be eligible for the 2007 Awards program. To receive notification of the 2007 Book Awards program, contact Maria Medrano-Nehls, 402-471-2045 or 800-307-2665, e-mail: mnehls@nlc.state.ne.us. ♦

UNK English Department Honored at Annual Meeting

The University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) Department of English has been awarded the **Jane Pope Geske Award** for exceptional contribution to literacy, books, reading, libraries, bookselling, and writing in Nebraska. The award was presented at the 2006 Nebraska Center for the Book annual meeting held in November at the Center for Great Plains Studies in Lincoln. The Department was well-represented at the presentation.

This award, established by the Nebraska Center for the Book and presented

annually, commemorates Geske's passion for books. It was established in recognition of her contribution to the well-being of the libraries of Nebraska. Jane Geske was a founding member of the Nebraska Center for the Book, a former director of the Nebraska Library Commission, and a long-time leader in Nebraska library and literary activities.



UNK Department of English accepts Geske Award.

The UNK Department of English was honored for its long-term contributions, service, and dedication to the promotion and advancement of English literature and literary participation (both on and off campus) in Nebraska. Included in its service, UNK has hosted the Nebraska Literature/Book Festival three times and has participated in festival programming since its start in 1991. For more than ten years, UNK hosted the Fort Kearny Summer Writers' Conference, which brought all levels of writers together – professional, intermediate, and beginning – for a full week of writing workshops, one-on-one sessions with published authors, and readings. Nominations are now open for the 2007 award to honor a Nebraska association, organization, business, library, school, academic institution, or other group that has made an exceptional long-term contribution to the Nebraska community of the book in regard to literacy, books, reading, libraries, book-selling, and/or writing in Nebraska. To nominate an organization, contact Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission Director, 402-471-4001, 800-307-2665, e-mail: rwagner@nlc.state.ne.us. ♦

Poetry Slams—Good Clean Fun...and No Bloodshed

Guest Editorial
by **Matt Mason**,
Editor,
PoetryMenu.com

“What’s a poetry slam?” a skeptical friend asked when I invited her to come see one at the Healing Arts Center in Omaha last month. She had a serious look of doubt as if she expected some sort of pro wrestling show with poets in tights. I explained that a poetry slam is competition poetry, and by this I mean entertainment masquerading as literature, literature masquerading as entertainment: poets read, then judges chosen from the audience flash Olympic-style scoring (from 0 to 10) based on the poem and its performance. No violence, no bloodshed, simply good fun.

A guy named Marc Smith started poetry slams in Chicago twenty years ago this past July, and it has blossomed to where most major cities in the U.S. (and beyond) have weekly or monthly poetry slams. There are regular slams in Wayne, Kearney, Omaha, and Lincoln; there’s even a National Poetry Slam where cities can compete against one another (and, I should note, two Nebraska teams made it to the semi-finals in the past four years).

Does the best poem win in an event sometimes held in bars where the five judges might be drunk by the end? Maybe not, but it does make the audience take center stage, pushing poets to hone their delivery to add what they can to the show.

And Nebraskans, especially, have been doing well with the poetry slam stage: with numerous poets on national tours, with two poets among the only fifty chosen inside each of the anthologies put out after the last four National Poetry Slams, and with *Slamma Lamma Ding Dong: An Anthology of Nebraska’s Slam Poets* winning this year’s Nebraska Book Award for Best Anthology.

And what makes me most proud of local writers: the poetry slam often emphasizes performance, but in these parts we don’t let our writing suffer for that. What’s a poetry slam? A damn fine time bringing literature to new audiences.

To find out where the next Nebraska poetry slam (or open mic or featured reading or poetry festival) is, see PoetryMenu.com.

Lincoln Libraries Offers Electronic Booklists

Lincoln City Libraries now offers NextReads, more than twenty electronic booklist newsletters. Library card holders are invited to subscribe to these newsletters in categories including Armchair Traveler, Audiobooks, Award Winners, Biographies and Memoirs, BookGuide Staff Favorites, Business and Marketing, Do-It-Yourself, Fantasy, Fiction A-to-Z,

From Nebraska, Historical Fiction, History and Current Events, Horror, Inspirational Fiction, Large Type, Mind and Body Fitness, Mystery, Nature and Science, Popular Culture, Romance, Science Fiction, Spirituality and Religion, Teen Scene, and Thrillers and Suspense. For more information see www.lincolnlibraries.com/depts/bookguide/nextreads.htm.

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2007 Nebraska Center for the Book Board Meetings

February 4 Bellevue

May TBA

August TBA

November 4 Annual Meeting,
Lincoln

Advertising

The NCB News can accept up to four 1/8 page ads for each issue. The advertising rate is \$125 for 1/8-page. *NCB News* is issued May 1, August 15, and November 1. The advertising and copy deadline is six weeks prior to issue date. For details, contact Mary Jo Ryan, Nebraska Center for the Book, The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120, Lincoln, NE 68508-2023; phone 402-471-3434, 800-307-2665, e-mail: mjryan@nlc.state.ne.us, www.unl.edu/NCB.

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The 2006 National Book Festival in Washington, D.C.

by Mel Krutz,
Nebraska Center
for the Book
Past-President

And we are home again in a flash, seemingly as fast as the efficient metro that wheeled us conveniently close to the National Mall where at least 16 large tents stood, each with a series of white peaks like at the Denver International Airport. Here books, not planes, were the focus.

One hundred thousand people or more spent the day on the mall between the National Capitol and the Washington Monument, flying from one tent to another, landing gently into topics titled Fiction and Fantasy, History and Biography, Poetry, Home and

Family, Mystery and Thrillers, Let's Read America, and many more. There was even a tent with books from all fifty states, a tent for one to three year olds who

might need care, a headquarters and volunteers tent, one for the Center for the Book - Library of Congress, one for book sales, and several for book signings with authors scheduled in all day.

The Centers for the Book, from all fifty states and some territories, were hangered in the largest tent of all (ten peaks). Mary Jo Ryan, Devra Dragos, Betty Beck, and I, with two Junior League volunteers, spent an equally exciting day in this aura of rich excitement

and cacophony, of children's voices which spread eagerness and enthusiasm contagious to us all, where at each state's table they requested that state's marking be added to their national maps.

At our table: "Do you know where Nebraska is?" Head shake no. "Try somewhere in the middle of the country." Big grin. Finger point on target from a little girl with blond curls, pink turtleneck, and a gentle smile at the windmill stamp we place where her finger points. Families of children, all ages of children and adults, all talking and rushing, picking up handouts and booklists, trinkets, and mementoes - a journey of history, geography, insight.

We met people from our hometowns, and/or who had known someone from Nebraska, were here themselves at one time or another, "graduated from UNL Law School," some wearers of Cornhusker sweatshirts, "taught at Mickle Jr. High," "had a relative in Ogallala," "born in Omaha," "boyfriend there," "went to school in Chadron," "went to Concordia," "to Hastings College," "Do you know, will Ted Kooser be here to read again this year?" "It would be nice if Willa Cather could come."

We each took flight from the tent of states for a while, to peek in under some of the other peaks. I just missed hearing this year's Poet Laureate, Donald Hall, getting to the poetry tent in time to hear Yevgeny Yevtushenko read poems about Russia, and later in the day back at our hotel found that all sessions were being presented on cable, where I spent time hearing Doris Kearns Goodwin, Kay Bailey Hutchinson, Taylor Branch (who wrote 3,000 pages in three volumes researching Civil Rights), and Robert Remini -listening on far into the night. My mind continues to be in flight with the memory of it all.



Mary Jo Ryan (r), and Betty Beck (center) of the Nebraska Library Commission, share information about Nebraska writers at the Festival.

What is the Nebraska Center for the Book?

The Nebraska Center for the Book brings together the state's readers, writers, booksellers, librarians, publishers, printers, educators, and scholars to build the community of the book. We are the people who know and love books, and who value the richness they bring to our lives. Our

Nebraska Center supports programs to celebrate and stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. We have been an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress since 1990.

Join the Nebraska Center for the Book

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ E-Mail: _____

Name/address of a friend who might be interested in NCB membership:

___ \$15 Individual Membership ___ \$25 Organizational Membership ___ \$50 Octavo Membership

___ \$100 Quarto Membership ___ \$250 Folio Membership

**Please send this form and a check to: Nebraska Center for the Book
The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120 • Lincoln, NE 68508-2023**



2006 Nebraska Book Festival Held in Lincoln



Meghan Daum on Writing



Meghan Daum

At the 2006 Nebraska Book Festival, keynote speaker Meghan Daum talked about the act of writing. Daum is the author of *The Quality of Life Report* (a novel) and *My Misspent Youth* (essays), and is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. She lived four years in Lincoln around the turn of the century.

Some of the advice she offered to writers:

- "Writing doesn't just happen when you're trying to write. It happens every waking and non-waking moment."
- "Learn to recognize ideas in their rawest possible form. It's not about coming up with ideas. It's about recognizing the ideas that are out there. We have to learn to see the potential in the material. It's not

Beyond Borders: Nebraska and the World, the 2006 Nebraska Book Festival, was held in Lincoln at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Jointly sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Humanities Council, Nebraska Library Commission, and Nebraska Wesleyan University, the festival featured author readings, exhibits and displays, panel discussions, music, food, film, receptions, a day-long student writing workshop, and storytelling activities for children. ➤

about finding the idea; it's about shaping the material around us into an interesting idea."

- On finishing a project: "It is very much an act of acceptance...you cannot hit a home run every time. It's essential that you don't force perfection... I think a lot of people put off finishing because they fear rejection. A 'reject' is a person who has never been rejected."
- "Work offline, charge up the battery on your laptop and take it to the park." Daum asked the audience to "...imagine a typewriter with a built-in stereo, TV, telephone, and which was designed to interrupt you every few minutes. Would any writer have bought such a machine? And yet that's what a computer with an Internet connection is. When it's time to write, kill your Internet." ➤

Paul Olson Receives Mildred Bennett Award

UNL Professor Emeritus Dr. Paul Olson was awarded the Mildred Bennett award at the 2006 Nebraska Book Festival. This award is given annually by the Nebraska Center for the Book to an individual that has made a significant contribution to fostering the literary tradition in Nebraska. The following transcript of Dr. Olson's luncheon address illustrates how he exemplifies the tradition of this award:

The Bennett Award, by Paul Olson

It is a signal honor to receive the Mildred Bennett award. I knew Mildred Bennett a bit but not well, and I know that what she did for Red Cloud and for the understanding of Red Cloud, Nebraska, and the Great Plains will not be matched. My field of vision has been the Great Plains, and that is because the Great Plains—especially Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Kansas—provided the soils where my family could take root. But we did not take root as a people that originally had much to do with books. We who relate to the Nebraska Center for the Book should not think that the possession of books is the prime measure of the "civilization" possessed by a people. Neither the Native Americans of the Plains nor the pioneers belonged to bookish cultures.

My ancestors came to Nebraska and the Great Plains in the 1860s-90s. They were illiterate, poverty stricken, and hungry for a little land, refugees from a semi-feudal Sweden that had starved, conscripted, and otherwise abused them. My grandfather so hated Sweden that he went back to the old country to bring great-grandpa to Nebraska in his 90s so that he would not have to die in Sweden. It was in this Great Plains area and from its people that our interest in the book began. Even great-grandpa, who came here illiterate, learned to read from sale bills that had big print. He observed that word-and-thing self-teaching was possible at auctions.

Though my ancestors hungered to read, they also did not realize that the great Native American cultures had lived well without reading and that the land they so longed to possess was stolen from these cultures. The Sioux, Pawnee, Omaha, Otoe, and Winnebago—the cultures to whom we owe Black Elk, Louise Erdrich, the Winnebago four hero cycles so admired by Karl Jung, the Pawnee Calumet ceremony poetry—were all cultures without the book that now have become book cultures. (My grandfather so misunderstood the Omaha culture on the reservation near which he settled that he thought that the Omaha were extremely



Paul Olson Receives Mildred Bennett Award (continued)



Paul Olson

wealthy and he called them “Yankees,” his usual epithet for rich people.) I suspect that the European peasant cultures from which the ancestors of most of the people in this room came were also cultures without the book. Now most of us have become—in our religious practice and in our search for meaning—people of the book, in the Koran’s phrase. This does not make our present culture better than that of the cultures without the book. It does not make us nobler, better storytellers, better poets or more heroic in action. It does make us different, in that we can freeze our utterances in print and make the past palpable through that medium. But the culture of the book and print and the computer may, paradoxically, make us so interested in recording the trivialities of our existence that we neglect to remember who we are and what we have been.

Given this context, it is, I think, particularly important that we celebrate the local book that grows out of our soils like cottonwood trees or bluestem. It is equally important, since we have books that have frozen in place what we once were, that we know our own various pasts as people. We now have before us a great debate as to whether we need the canon or not, whether the old “great books” should be taught. That is not, in my mind, a question up for debate. Of course, the canonical books should be taught. For all their faults, they are in our blood. These books are our faults and our strengths. They are in our blood beyond being removed. But what is even more in our blood is the place where we are. It is in the crossing of wonderful books—visions of our pasts with our *own vision of our place* that we construct a picture of what our lives might mean.

Willa Cather writes well of this when she describes Jim Burden’s vision of Nebraska seen through the eyes of Virgil in *My Antonia*. Burden is studying Virgil’s agricultural book, *The Georgics*. Then he muses:

I propped my book open and stared listlessly at the page of the *Georgics* where tomorrow’s lesson began. It opened with the melancholy reflection that, in the lives of mortals the best days are the first to flee. ‘*Optima dies ... prima fugit.*’ I turned back to the beginning of the third book, which we had read in class that morning. ‘*Primus ego in patriam mecum ... deducam Musas*’; ‘for I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country.’

Cleric [Jim’s teacher in Classics] had explained to us that ‘*patria*’ here meant, not a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighbourhood on the Mincio where the poet was born. This was not a boast, but a hope, at once bold and devoutly humble, that he (Virgil) might bring the Muse (but lately come to Italy from her cloudy Grecian mountains), not to the capital, the *palatia Romana*, but to his own little

country; to his father’s fields, ‘sloping down to the river and to the old beech trees with broken tops.’ Then Jim briefly sees his classics teacher, Gaston Cleric, and thinks about Grecian Italy. In the end, he sees and thinks about a beautiful woman in his life, who brings him back to Nebraska and Virgil:

It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil. If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. I understood that clearly, for the first time. This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish. As I sat down to my book at last, my old dream about Lena coming across the harvest-field in her short skirt seemed to me like the memory of an actual experience. It floated before me on the page like a picture, and underneath it stood the mournful line: ‘*Optima dies... prima fugit.*’

That is, Jim has read about the muse, dreamed the muse in the form of Lena, and experienced a Persephone-like muse in the living Lena. From all of these experiences combined, he knows that the best of times flee first, that they can be recorded in dream and print, and that Virgil’s books have kept the meaning of such times fresh. Still, what is before him remains most important.

It is in the character of much Great Plains literature that it asks us to see the great myths of humankind, its sacred stories, reenacted in the little rural neighborhood of our immediate being. Over and over the good writers of our time and place, like Cather and Neihardt/Black Elk and Louise Erdrich and Malcolm X and Scott Momaday and Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood, have the sense that they are the first to bring the muse into their and our neighborhood. The writers at this meeting whom I have read—and I have not read them all—have often done the same thing. Even in the work inspired by the brilliant teachers in the Nebraska Rural Writing Project, I can find, in the work of our local school children, another version of the vision of the crossing of the past and the present, the heroic and the daily. It arises out of their writing down family stories about the past and recording their own neighborhood experiences.

My own contribution in teaching Great Plains literature, writing about it, and creating curricula for school and college has been peripheral to what the writers have done. My vocation has been, I would hope, to have loved well writing from this place, to have loved my ancestral neighborhoods in Wahoo and Shickley and Wausa, and to have kept, for my students, those best days that so easily flee fresh in their imaginations and alive on the tips of their pens. If I have done that, I have done the best I know how to do.



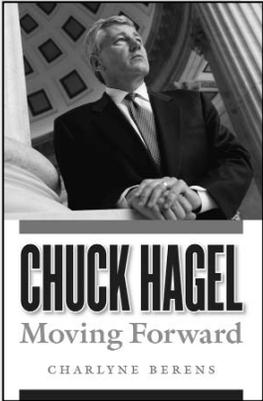
Review: *Chuck Hagel: Moving Forward*

by **Charlyne Berens,**

University of
Nebraska Press,
2006

ISBN:
0803210752

Reviewed by
David Bristow,
Nebraska Life
Magazine



Could U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel become the next president of the United States? Over the next two years, we're going to hear plenty on that subject. Many voters appreciate Hagel's candor on issues such as the Iraq war and the growing federal budget deficit. They say it takes courage and integrity to criticize one's own party—particularly when just about everyone else in Washington is speaking only in blindly partisan sound-bites. Others see Hagel as a grandstanding pseudo-maverick who grabs headlines by publicly criticizing President Bush, even as his votes in the Senate follow the party line on almost every issue.

This new book by University of Nebraska - Lincoln journalism professor Charlyne Berens probably won't reconcile Hagel's supporters and detractors, but it will inform them. It's the first full-length biography of the senator, a thoughtful and readable profile of his life and career.

Charles Timothy Hagel was born in North Platte in 1946 and grew up in numerous towns across the state. While living in Rushville, Tim Hagel (as he was then known) showed up for an intramural junior high football practice, but was not invited to join the team. Undaunted, he "asked his mother to dye a white T-shirt black, the team's color, and went back to sit on the bleachers and watch the practices for the next three days, hoping to be noticed," Berens writes. "Finally the coach asked the persistent outsider if he wanted to play." When asked his name, Hagel gave his full name. "The coach said, 'OK, Chuck, get out there.'" After that, Hagel insisted that everyone, even his parents, call him Chuck.

We enjoy stories like that, those that seem to reveal

or explain the future man: the persistent outsider who defines himself—even names himself—according to his own preferences. A useful biography needs to be more than that, though, and this book is. Berens did extensive research, interviewed numerous sources, and conducted hours of interviews with Hagel without granting him right of pre-publication review.

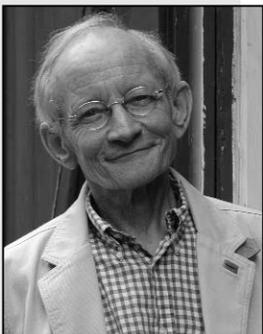
Berens devotes many pages to the Vietnam War, an experience that shaped Hagel's life in many ways. After high school, he was an indifferent collegian, and was no longer a student when the local draft board warned him that he would be drafted if he didn't enroll in college. Instead, he volunteered for the Army.

Hagel was seriously wounded in combat. After he came home, though he felt the war was being fought ineffectively, he didn't doubt the wisdom of the war itself. Only decades later, after he was in the Senate—long after the point in his life when others might assume that his attitudes had hardened unchangeably—would Hagel begin to investigate the Vietnam War's background and question the motives of U.S. involvement. Just as his experience in Vietnam influenced his view of war ("There's no glory, only suffering," he said), so did Iraq influence his view of Vietnam. Though Hagel remembers being "very disturbed" when Congress voted in 1975 to end U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, Berens writes, "In 2004, looking at how entangled America had become in Iraq, Hagel began to think maybe the nation had had no good alternatives when it left Vietnam in the seventies."

That's the stuff of a fascinating and complex portrait. In Hagel's case, such a portrait is indeed timely.

American Life in Poetry: Column 088

by **Ted Kooser,**
U.S. Poet
Laureate,
2004-2006



This wistful poem shows how the familiar and the odd, the real and imaginary, exist side by side. A Midwestern father transforms himself from a staid businessman into a rock-n-roll star, reclaiming a piece of his imaginary youth. In the end, it shows how fragile moments might be recovered to offer a glimpse into our inner lives.

My Father Holds the Door for Yoko Ono

*In New York City for a conference
on weed control, leaving the hotel
in a cluster of horticulturalists,
he alone stops, midwestern, crewcut,
narrow blue tie, cufflinks, wingtips,
holds the door for the Asian woman
in a miniskirt and thigh high
white leather boots. She nods
slightly, a sad and beautiful gesture.
Neither smile, as if performing*

*a timeless ritual, as if anticipating
the loss of a son or a lover.*

*Years later, Christmas, inexplicably
he dons my mother's auburn wig,
my brother's wire-rimmed glasses,
and strikes a pose clowning
with my second hand acoustic guitar.
He is transformed, a working class hero
and a door whispers shut,
like cherry blossoms falling.*

Reprinted from *Folio*, Winter, 2004, by permission of the author. Copyright (c) 2004 by Christopher Chambers, who teaches creative writing at Loyola University, New Orleans. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation, The Library of Congress, and the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.

New Book Club Kits Add to Library Commission Collection

by Lisa Kelly,
Nebraska Library
Commission

We are excited to announce that several new titles have been added to The Nebraska Library Commission book group collection! In addition to listing the titles at the link below, I'd like to highlight various kits and make suggestions for your book group, or maybe even ideas for growing a book group.

First up is an older title, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, by Rebecca Wells (1997). I read this book shortly after it was released at the encouragement of my (then) 79-year-old neighbor. My neighbor was preparing for a reunion of some long-time female friends and this book helped to set the tone for their gathering. When I finished the book, my neighbor and I talked about it and after she met with her friends, we talked again. What stories she had to tell. This book focuses on women who sustain each other through a myriad of situations, some celebratory and some heartbreaking, and all the many occasions in-between.

The book begins with a fallout between mother and daughter and the Ya-Yas work to reconcile the two. As with many fiction novels, place is a character in this book. Louisiana can easily be celebrated by incorporating Cajun food and music to elicit the senses before and during your meeting. Imagine playing blues and Cajun music while smelling gumbo simmering on the stove.

Another way to add dimension to your discussion is to watch the movie together and compare the two sagas. I found the movie more fascinating after reading the book, as the background stories in the book were a bit lengthy but helped make the movie more meaningful. I went to the movie with another woman friend of mine who said the movie touched her more deeply than the book. When the credits rolled, she was crying, having experienced some very difficult times with her own daughter. Book groups that both read a book and watch an accompanying movie can provide some terrific conversations and even entice reluctant adult readers. As with many authors, Rebecca Wells has a website: www.ya-ya.com. At the Gumbo Ya-Ya board you can find tried and true recipes and even locate Ya-Ya groups around the world.

One of the book groups I belonged to served food that reflected elements from the book. Here's a recipe

from the Website to whet your whistle to consider this southern title for your next book gathering. I'd be interested in hearing how things go!

Hon, iffin you want a gumbo, you must try Fedup's gumbo!

FedUp2Here's Gumbo (*feeds 4 Cajuns or 6 Yankees*)

1/2 cup flour

1/2 cup veg/saffola oil (that's the roux)

1/2 chopped onion

1/2 chopped green bell pepper

as much garlic as you can stand

Worcestershire sauce

salt and pepper

green onion tops (4 or 5, chopped)

smoked sausage, sliced into circles

various chicken parts - about 5 or 6 six thighs is

good.

In a small saucepan warm the oil on medium heat, pour in the flour and stir, stir, stir till it's dark brown (like mahogany) that's the roux. While that's goin', in a large pan brown the sausage until it's good and juicy in there - let the sausage stick a little - it'll add more flavor. Next, add your chicken parts - and a little salt/pepper to taste - brown that too. When the roux is the right color, add the onion, bell pepper and garlic - sauté til wilted. Add the whole mess to the pot of browned meat; add enough water to cover all the meat - and the Worcestershire - 1 tablespoon or 3 good shakes! Stir it up until everything is mixed well - no lumps from the roux - it should be really soupy/watery. If it's not dark enough, add a little kitchen bouquet to darken it. Bring it to a boil. Lower to simmer, cover and cook for about 40 minutes. Add green onion tops, cover and cook about 10 minutes. Serve over rice in a bowl, like soup - not like gravy!!! My mama used to make potato salad with it - but that's a lot of starch for one meal, so you could just make a green salad - this is a heavy meal, so you don't need a lotta sides.... Bon Appetite!!!

For a listing of book club kits available from the Nebraska Library Commission, see www.nlc.state.ne.us/ref/bookclubkits.html. Ask your local public or school library to Interlibrary Loan book club kits for your book club. ❖

Windmill Project Underway

The Center for Rural Affairs recently launched a statewide arts project, inviting Nebraska artists to shape their version of a windmill in any media. Incorporating a statewide public sculpture project with local community elements (like library-sponsored literary activities, quilting groups, and exhibits of works in other media), this ambitious effort seeks to

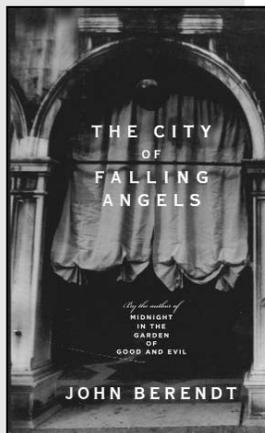
combine the overall goal of supporting rural development with activities in a variety of artistic formats—all centered around the image of the windmill—a symbol of vitality in rural life and culture. For more information, see www.windsoflife.com, or contact Project Coordinator Julie Paschold, jjpaschold@gmail.com. ❖



Review: *The City of Falling Angels*

by **John Berendt**,
The Penguin
Press, 2005
ISBN: 1594200580

Reviewed by
Bob Trautwein,
Columbus Public
Library



On January 29, 1996, three days after a catastrophic fire destroyed a landmark opera house in Venice, the author, John Berendt, arrives for his annual visit—one which turns into an indefinite stay. From what he reads and learns from historians and others—American expatriates, artists, bums, and streetwalkers—about the Finice Opera House and the fire, he discovers the subject of his next book, *The City of Falling Angels*.

As in his first book, he uses a legal trial as a literary device to keep the story moving. His new book may very well gain the readership of his 1994 bestseller, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, which had a four-year run on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Prior to writing this book Berendt had spent the last several years (following his bestseller's success) on long vacations in Venice. He had walked the streets, glided down the canals in gondolas, and visited the palazzos of the rich and famous. As a noted American author, he was entertained and feted by the locals. He found Venice more than a match for Savannah with its hints of mysteries, eccentric inhabitants, and odd traditions. Both cities are isolated both geographically

and culturally from the rest of the world. Venice sits in the middle of a lagoon; Savannah is surrounded by marshes, forests and the ocean. Venetians regard themselves as Venetian first, Italian second. Natives of Savannah hardly ever leave their city.

In *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, the author uses a commentator who transports the reader through the story. In *The City of Falling Angels*, it's the storytelling by Count Girolamo Marcello that ushers the story along. As the Count says, "Everyone plays a role, and the role changes. The key to understanding Venetians is rhythm, the rhythm of the lagoon, the water, the tides, the waves. It's like breathing. High water, high pressure: tense. Low water, low pressure: relax. The tide changes every six hours."

While the trial of the alleged opera-house arsonist drags on in a bureaucratic muddle, Berendt and the Count schmooze with the expatriate community and carry on long discussions about the preservation of local art, culture, and architecture. By the time the opera house is rebuilt, the author has conjured up a delightful story of modern life in Venice and has given the reader an armchair tour of this dignified but deteriorating city.

Nebraska Memories Now Accessible

The Nebraska Library Commission is developing **Nebraska Memories**, a cooperative project to digitize Nebraska-related historical and cultural heritage materials and make them available to

researchers via the Internet. The primary source materials available through Nebraska Memories are owned by a variety of Nebraska cultural organizations and institutions across the state. Participants work with Library Commission staff to digitize the items and create metadata records. Currently 2,333 items are available in the database, which will continue to grow as participants add more

items. Ten groups have contributed materials:

- ↻ Butler County Gallery (Hruska Memorial Public Library and Boston Studio Collection)
- ↻ Hastings Public Library
- ↻ High Plains Historical Society (McCook Public Library and High Plains Historical Society and Museum)
- ↻ Keene Memorial Library (Keene Memorial Library and Dodge County Historical Society)

- ↻ Nebraska State Historical Society
- ↻ Nebraska Library Commission
- ↻ Omaha Public Library
- ↻ Polley Music Library-Lincoln City Libraries
- ↻ Sarpy County Historical Museum (Sump Memorial Library and Sarpy County Historical Museum)
- ↻ Wayne State College

Four other groups are preparing items to be digitized:

- ↻ Bellevue University
- ↻ Crawford Public Library and Crawford Historical Society
- ↻ Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors-Lincoln City Libraries
- ↻ Raymond A. Whiter Tilden Public Library and Antelope County Historical Society

The Nebraska Library Commission invites *NCB News* readers to take a look at the Nebraska Memories site, www.memories.ne.gov, and provide input on its usability by completing the short survey link on the front page of the Website. For organizations interested in participating in Nebraska Memories, see participant information at www.nlc.state.ne.us/nebraskamemories.



Among the photos preserved is this one of a C.B.&Q. Railroad yard crew in McCook, Nebraska.

Stirring up the Gods at the Omaha Lit Fest

by Timothy Schaffert,

(downtown) omaha lit fest Coordinator

The (downtown) omaha lit fest 2006 was book-ended by some of the fall's most radically inclement weather. The lit fest led off with a good left hook: poetry readings on the grassy steps of the Gene Leahy Mall, kicking up rather dramatic responses from God or whoever else was in charge that day. The morning's dark ominous clouds and fierce wind eventually brought rain, followed by an intense sunlight that left some of us a severe shade of pink. Through it all, the sixteen poets defied the elements with their ample verse.

That evening the lit fest hosted a benefit for the Omaha Public Library, which included "Speaking Volumes: Acts of Defacement," an exhibit of books withdrawn from the library's collection and transformed by area artists into sculpture and multimedia collage. The party also featured the rarely screened experimental short film, "Hotel Apex," by vanished Nebraska poet and cult figure Weldon Kees. All in all, the event raised around \$3,000.



But as always, the lit fest's other events were free and open to the public, and they were held throughout the following day in the galleries of the Bemis Center and the Kaneko. Area authors, as well as authors from New York, Chicago, Dallas, Florida and other far-flung reaches descended on Omaha to discuss such topics as blogging, memoir, film adaptation, motherhood, and research.

We then moved onto Aromas Coffee House for a staged reading of a new play, then to a production of the Blue Barn Theatre's very literary "The Pillowman." The gods were either angered or enlivened by all the lit, for they stirred up tornado warnings in the festival's final hours; nonetheless, twenty diehard booklovers showed up for a spirited panel on literary sex, a discussion that lasted past midnight.

The (downtown) omaha lit fest returns in 2007, on Sept. 14 and 15. Visit www.omahalitfest.com for details, or e-mail timothy@omahalitfest.com to request updates.

Book World "Noodling"

By Oliver B. Pollak

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Riffing and "noodling" for something to write about. How about the response to my author's enquiry in the last issue? How about the phenomena of library celebrations when they accession the one, two, three, eight millionth volume? How about my confidence in the expression, "one thing leads to another," and reading's unending divagations? Reading used book catalogues is sort of like taking the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. After you look at 500 to 25,000 titles that you would like to own, read, or see, you have pretty much confirmed your interests.

I reviewed *John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers in Kansas History*, edited by Virgil Dean for *Nebraska History*. Michael H. Hoeflich, former Dean of the University of Kansas Law School, wrote a fascinating story about Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, who produced as many as 500,000,000 copies of his 2,200 *Little Blue Books* in Girard, Kansas. In the process of finishing my forthcoming "To Educate and Serve: A Centennial History of Creighton University School of Law, 1904-2004," I came across the following alluring examples of Michael Hoeflich's bookishness: "Legal Ephemera: A Window on Society and the Law" (*AB*, March 10, 1997); "Legal History and the History of the Book: Variations on a Theme" (*University of Kansas Law Review*, 1997-98); "Lawyers and Law Books in Nineteenth Century Kansas" (*University of Kansas Law Review*, 2002); "The Lawyer as a Pragmatic Reader: The History of Legal Common-Placing" (*Arkansas Law*

Review, 2002); "Annals of Legal Bibliography: L. G. Marvin (*Law Librarian Journal*, 2004); *The Auction Catalogue of the Law Library of Joseph Story* (2004); and "Auctions and the Distribution of Law Books in Antebellum America" (*Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 2005).

I noodled around abebooks.com and found an 1871 catalogue, *Law List of Kay & Brother of Philadelphia*, advertising 114 separate publications with "ink names on the front cover" of "Thad. P. Wagner, Atty. At law - Lawrence, Kansas and Judge David Wagner of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin (1873)"—apparently previous owners of this publishers list. Price: \$50. For a Kansas-based bibliophile law professor: "priceless." Mike thanked me for the lead and immediately purchased the item. He is working on a book about the sale and distribution of law books in America before the Civil War. What surprises me is how I could have gotten this far without running across Haldeman-Julius and Hoeflich earlier.

Meanwhile my search for the poetry of bookstores and libraries continues. I am reading my 290 catalogs from the preeminent books-on-books book dealer, Oak Knoll Books in New Castle, Delaware. This amounts to about 175,000 titles. As of catalogue 95, I have Xeroxed, scissored, and pasted about two hundred titles onto 3 x 5 cards. Interlibrary Loan, here I come. To share your adventures in Book World "Noodling," contact obpomni@aol.com.



The NCB News



THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

*an affiliate of the Library of
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c/o Nebraska Library Commission
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Find Nebraska Memories
at www.memories.ne.gov



Calendar of Events:

- Lunch at the Library:** Shelly Clark Geiser February 7 Lincoln
Contact: Nebraska Literary Heritage Association, Lincoln City Libraries, 402-441-8516
m.mcgowan@lincolnlibraries.org, www.lincolnlibraries.com/info/programs.htm
- The Clean Part Reading Series,** with Sandy Florian, Sommer Browning,
Julie Doxsee February 10 Lincoln
Contact: thecleanpartreadingseries@gmail.com, thecleanpart.blogspot.com
- Presentation on Alvin Johnson,** by Dr. Steven Shively February 11 Bancroft
Contact: John G. Neihardt State Historic Site, 402-648-3388,
neihardt@gpcom.net, www.neihardtcenter.org
- John H. Ames Reading Series:** Rajean Luebs Shepherd February 15 Lincoln
Contact: Lincoln City Libraries, 402-441-8516, m.mcgowan@lincolnlibraries.org,
www.lincolnlibraries.com/info/programs.htm
- Bess Streeter Aldrich 126th Birthday Celebration** February 17 Elmwood
Contact: Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation, Teresa Lorensen, 402-994-3855,
tlorensen@alltel.net, www.bessstreeteraldrich.org
- Wakonda's Dream Poetry Slam** February 17 Omaha
Contact: www.poetrymenu.com
- Paul A. Olson Seminar:** Chasing Droughts across Nebraska's Past,
Present, and Future, with Michael Hayes February 21 Lincoln
Contact: Center for Great Plains Studies, Kim Weide, 402-472-3964,
kweide@unlnotes.edu, www.unl.edu/plains/seminars/Olson/olsonseminars.html
- Nebraska State Reading Conference** February 22-24 Kearney
Contact: Judy Crawford, dcrawfor@esu4.org, www.nereads.org
- Cat in the Hat Festival** March 1 Madison
Contact: Madison County Museum, 402-454-3733, mchs@esu8.org
- Read Across America Day** March 2 Nationwide
Contact: National Education Association, 888-747-READ, www.nea.org/readacross
- StoryConnect Storytelling Festival** March 2-3 Omaha
Contact: Southwest Church of Christ, 402-489-9129, gteten@tconl.com
- Lunch at the Library:** Stephanie Whitson March 7 Lincoln
Contact: Nebraska Literary Heritage Association, Lincoln City Libraries, 402-441-8516,
m.mcgowan@lincolnlibraries.org, www.lincolnlibraries.com/info/programs.htm
- Omaha Public Library Friends Book Sale** March 9-10 Omaha
Contact: www.omahalibraryfriends.org