



# The NCB News

Volume 12

Fall 2002

No. 3

A Publication of the Nebraska Center for the Book

## Mari Sandoz Center Opens

by **Gerry Cox**,  
Nebraska Center  
for the Book  
Editor

**M**ari Sandoz has finally joined Bess Streeter Aldrich, Willa Cather, and John Neihardt—Nebraska authors who have buildings dedicated to honor them.

The new Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center on the Chadron State College campus houses memorabilia and photographs, and contains facilities for activities that will foster interest in her writing. The Center, in the remodeled college library, was dedicated in September in a ceremony that included a blessing by an Oglala medicine man and the unveiling of a life-size sculpture of Sandoz by Holdrege native, George Lundeen. The bronze statue depicts a barefoot Sandoz in a flowing skirt and western shirt.

Speakers at the ceremony included Thomas L. Krepel, President of Chadron State College; Ron Hull of Lincoln, friend of Sandoz and President of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society; and Dick Cavett of New York, producer of a 1979 television documentary about Sandoz and a long-time member of the Heritage Society's Board of Directors. Much of the



Photo courtesy of Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, Chadron State College

dedication ceremony moved into the college auditorium during "the first rain all summer"—a pleasant irony that Sandoz would have relished. After students of the Mari Sandoz Elementary School in the Millard Public School district cut the ribbon to open the Center, the public was admitted to tour the new facility.

Sandoz was born south of Hays Springs in 1896 and died in 1966 after living in New York City for many years. Her nonfiction works include *Winter Thunder*, *The Buffalo Hunters*, *Crazy Horse*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, *These Were the Sioux*, and the story of her father, *Old Jules*. Novels include *Slogum House* and *The Tom-Walker*. She also wrote fiction and nonfiction stories for children. ▲

## Nebraska Books Honored

The 2002 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 are:

- ◆ **Cover Design/Illustration:** *All the Horses that He'd Rode*, Charles E. Hunt and Daryl Poulin, Dageforde Publishing.
- ◆ **Fiction:** *A Cafecito Story: El Cuento Del Cafecito*, Julia Alvarez, Belkis Ramirez, Bill Eichner, Chelsea Green Publishing.
- ◆ **Non-Fiction:** *Cold Snap as Yearning*, Robert Vivian, University of Nebraska Press.

- ◆ **Non-Fiction Honor Book:** *The Nature of Nebraska*, Paul A. Johnsgard, University of Nebraska Press.
- ◆ **Poetry:** *Bullroarer: A Sequence*, Ted Genoways, Northeastern University Press.
- ◆ **Poetry Honor Books:** *Lost in Seward County*, Marjorie Saiser, The Backwaters Press. *Trans*, Hilda Raz, Wesleyan University Press.

Books published in 2002 will be eligible for the 2003 Awards program. To receive notification of the 2003 Book Awards program, contact Mary Geibel, 402-471-2045, 800-307-2665, e-mail: <mgeibel@nlc.state.ne.us>. ▲

# Why Have a Center for the Book?

by Kathy Johnson,  
Nebraska Center  
for the Book  
Incoming  
President

*From time-to-time, people ask me, "Why have a center for the book?"*

They add that they "just sit down and read a book and sometimes they talk about it with friends or in a book club. You don't need a center to do any of that. As the primary relationship is between reader and book, who needs an organization?" I answer that a center for the book enables a group of individuals and representatives of organizations or interest groups to support projects or activities that they would be challenged to do alone. The Nebraska Center for the Book is a coalition of organizations and individuals working together to promote books and reading.

To quote John Y. Cole, Director of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress,  
*...we believe there's such a thing as a community of the book. This community stretches from the people who create the books, the authors, through book designers, publishers, printers, booksellers, distributors, librarians, scholars, educators, and students, to the public in general—the reader. Our focus is quite definitely on the reader and reading and on books in the culture at large, but we harness the energies and organizational skills of the book professionals for this endeavor.*

*Humanities Discourse, September/October, 1988, Federation of State Humanities Councils*

The Articles of Incorporation of the Nebraska Center for the Book state that "[t]he Center shall act

as a catalyst, bringing together individuals and organizations to build the Nebraska community of the book. The Center shall serve as a partner and supporter of programs, events, and unique projects which celebrate the written word."

What are some of these "programs, events, and unique projects which celebrate the written word?"

- ◆ The annual Nebraska Book Festival
- ◆ Letters about Literature contest
- ◆ Nebraska Book Awards, which "recognizes and honors books that are written by Nebraska authors, published by Nebraska publishers, set in Nebraska, or relating to Nebraska"
- ◆ Jane Geske Award, which "recognizes a Nebraska association, organization, business, library, school, academic institution, or other group that has made an exceptional, long-term contribution to one or more of these fields in Nebraska: Literacy, Reading, Bookselling, Books, Libraries, or Writing"
- ◆ Mildred Bennett Award, which "recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution to fostering the literary tradition in Nebraska"
- ◆ Web sites for the Nebraska Center for the Book (currently under development) and the Nebraska Book Festival

The Nebraska Center for the Book is supported by organizational and individual members, and by grants. Therefore, your membership is vital to the projects of the Center. I hope that you will take the time to **join the Nebraska Center for the Book** or to renew your membership for 2003. Thanks for your past support and thanks for your continuing or new support. ▲

## The **NCB**News

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### Nebraska Center for the Book Board and Committees

#### By-Laws

Joan Birnie, President; Kathy Johnson, Vice President/President Elect; Molly Fisher, Past President

#### Funding/Membership

Kathy Johnson, Vice President/President Elect, Committee Chair; Molly Fisher, Past President; Robert Nedderman; Connie Osborne

#### Nebraska Book Festival

Shelly Clark, Committee Chair; Peter Beeson; Twyla Hansen; Jerry Kromberg, Treasurer; Chuck Peek; Brent Spencer

#### Programs/Projects

Joan Birnie, President, Committee Chair; Vicki Clarke; Mel Krutz, Secretary; Linda Trout

#### Publications/Publicity

Gerry Cox, Committee Chair; Oliver Pollak; Mary Jo Ryan, staff

#### Awards Art Coordinator

Denise Brady

Nebraska Library Commission Director Rod Wagner is an ex officio member of all committees.

#### 2003 Nebraska Center for the Book Board Meetings

February 8 . . . . . Fremont  
May 10 . . . . . Lincoln  
August 9 . . . . . Kearney  
November 2 . . . . . Lincoln, Annual Meeting

#### 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 402-471-2045, 800-307-2665, e-mail: <mjryan@nlc.state.ne.us>.

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# Contributors to the Nebraska Community of the Book Honored

The **2002 Jane Geske Award** was presented to the **Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center**, Chadron State College, at the November Nebraska Center for the Book Annual Meeting. The heritage center pays tribute to Nebraska Hall of Fame author-historian Mari Sandoz, who was born on a Niobrara River homestead south of Hay Springs. It perpetuates and preserves the literary works and legacy of Mari Sandoz. The Center also serves as a repository of High Plains archival materials, a site for seminars and workshops, and a new western Nebraska tourist attraction.

The award, established by the Nebraska Center for the Book, is presented annually to an organization, business, library, school, association, or other group that has made an exceptional contribution to literacy, books, reading, libraries, or Nebraska literature. The Jane Geske Award commemorates Geske's passion for books, and was established in recognition of her contributions 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



**Dan McGlynn, Jeanne Bishop, and Brian Rocky accept the Jane Geske Award.**

the Nebraska Library Commission, and a long-time leader in many Nebraska library and literary activities.

The Grand Island Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer was the site of the 2002 Nebraska Book Festival, sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book. The festival provided the occasion for presentation of the Nebraska Center for the Book's Mildred

Bennett Award and Community Spirit Award. The **Mildred Bennett Award** is given to an individual who provides leadership and service in the promotion of Nebraska literature. This year's recipient was **George T. Ayoub II**. Ayoub, who is a senior correspondent with the Grand Island Independent, received his award as a writer who has fostered Nebraska's literary tradition. The **Nebraska Book Festival Community Spirit Award** was presented to **S. N. "Bud" Wolbach**. Wolbach was president of the Stuhr Museum's Board of Trustees from 1961 until his retirement in 2000. His commitment to community service and to the arts and humanities is well established throughout Nebraska, and was further recognized by the presentation of this award. ▲

## 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**



# Review: **Lost in Seward County**

by **Marjorie Saiser**

The Backwaters Press, 2001

ISBN: 0967714958

Review by **Shelly Clark**

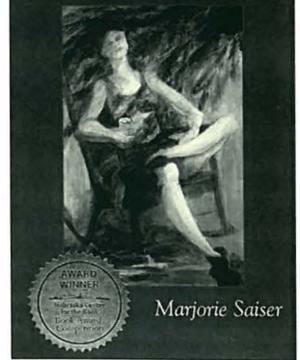
If you are planning to travel the roads of rural Nebraska and need some definitive directions, Lincoln poet Marjorie Saiser may not be the one to consult. However, if good poetry is your destination, Saiser's newest book of poetry, *Lost in Seward County*, is all the guidance you need. In the poem "Looking for Ted," which inspired the title for the book, Saiser describes a little odyssey she unintentionally finds herself traveling in order to find the rural home of a fellow poet, Ted Kooser, who is awaiting her arrival, making soup for lunch.

Once she realizes she's lost, Saiser does what one would logically do—stop and ask for directions. This takes her to the general store in Malcolm.

*...But the man at her left, dealing, says/you can't miss it, follow the road. He gestures in a/direction, and I am dismissed like so much smoke./ I do indeed follow the road and I do what I/can't do—miss it—but it is a fine day to be lost./the air soft as spring, the water dripping/ off the eaves of the farmhouse where I pull in/for further directions, the snow sagging, the soil/warming and softening, softening too much/because now I am stuck in the yard.*

And this is only the beginning of Saiser's troubles as she navigates the back roads of rural Seward County. The tone of the poem is playful, yet in Saiser's masterful way, she is able to take it beyond the literal, beyond the humorous, to a deeper place where the lesson of the poem settles into the heart.

Lost in Seward County



*...Black mailbox, yes, Ted's house, yes, but what is it/ doing on that side of the road? No matter, here's/Ted's right hand extending beyond the rim of the/front porch. Here's his flannel shirt, his beard,/his bug, his plains eye, laconic, blue./as if home must be close at hand,/dug in, planted, lasting./perpetually found.*

Saiser's map will take you beyond north, south, east, or west. It will take you to rich and meaningful inner landscapes where the world of the imagination and human experience juxtapose with the natural world of place and things. On this journey you will meet people you know, for Saiser's people transcend individual characterizations to become universal in their appeal. You will recognize their tragedies, their triumphs, and their joys as they reflect yours and those of the characters who people your life. Over and over again, in *Lost in Seward County*, Saiser finds the world again.

So, that's the ticket. Pick up the book. Open its pages. Saiser and her fifty-two poems will welcome you to go along for the ride—wherever that may so richly lead. *Lost in Seward County* is Saiser's second book of poetry published by Backwaters Press of Omaha and a 2002 Nebraska Book Award Honor Book for Poetry. ▲

## **Plains Humanities Alliance Established**

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents recently approved the University's plan to act as one of nine universities chosen by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to host a regional humanities center. In praise of Nebraska's application to establish the Plains Humanities Alliance, the Alliance's broad-based collaboration plan was described as a model for this initiative and for the humanities in general. The NEH committed \$378,900, with a three-to-one match requirement.

Sue Rosowski serves as Director, with Deborah Eisloeffel as Program Coordinator, and Sonja Barber providing Web development services. Ted Kooser serves as Senior Editor of the "Great Books of the Great Plains" project.

Priority programs include:

- ◆ "Great Books of the Great Plains," an online, annotated bibliography of up to five hundred of the best books about life on the Great Plains
- ◆ Electronic-based inventory of cultural resources
- ◆ Monthly colloquium series
- ◆ Visiting scholars program
- ◆ National conference on regionalism (proposed for Fall 2003)

For more information contact the Plains Humanities Alliance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1221 Seaton Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0692, 402-472-9478, fax: 402-472-0127, e-mail: <plains1@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/rcplains/index.html>. ▲



## Pictures of the Writing Habit

by **Oliver B. Pollak**,  
University of  
Nebraska at  
Omaha



The afternoon sun lit up Tillie's hair. She talked about her young friends, up-and-coming poets, local and world politics, threats of war, her children, and her grandchildren.

**T**illie Olsen's midwestern roots are well known to Nebraska readers.

For most of her adult life she lived with her husband Jack in San Francisco. In the 1990s Tillie moved to a charming two story "converted barn" in Berkeley, behind her daughter's house. In May 2002, Kay Walters of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Love Library Special Collections, my wife Karen, our sons Aaron and Noah, and I visited the nonagenarian. The path and the house were surrounded by lush foliage. Tillie is lively, engaging, loquacious, and gregarious. And we were there to listen. Long lines of people wait patiently at book signings as she chats with book buyers before she inscribes the books in her miniscule handwriting.

**Editor's Note:** For more information about Tillie Olsen's life and work see the Nebraska Center for Writers Web site, [mockingbird.creighton.edu/ncw/olsen.htm](http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/ncw/olsen.htm).



Tillie's bookshelves contain poetry, women's literature, biography, and books on workers and race. Her books and manuscripts are destined for the Stanford University archives. They will be packed, shipped, unpacked, accessioned, and reshelved, probably losing Tillie's sense of order. Shelving our books in familiar groupings allows us to lay our hands on a volume for reference or for a friend, even if we have not touched it for years. The archeology of reading and rereading leaves a trail of underlining, highlighting, marginalia, bookmarks, folded corners, and less invasive slips of paper and Post-It notes. Cauliflower plumes crown Tillie's well-worked books. Photographs, postcards, and greeting cards stand propped against book spines.

This desk with typewriter and writing paraphernalia is in the bedroom. Pictures include her parents, Ida and Sam Lerner, her daughters, and her grandchildren. In the upper left is the iconic Frida Kahlo. ▲

## Annual Meeting Features Marjorie Saiser



Marjorie Saiser talks about book cover selection.

The Nebraska Center for the Book Annual Meeting was held in November at the Loren Corey Eiseley Branch, Lincoln City Libraries. The Jane Geske Award was presented to the **Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center**, Chadron State College (see related story on page 1). The Nebraska Book Award winners were recognized in a special presentation, with Laura Holmquist accepting the award for Fiction in the name of her brother and sister-in-law, Bill Eichman and Julia Alvarez (see related story on page 1). Their book, *A Cafecito Story: El Cuento Del Cafecito*, is set in the Dominican Republic on an organic coffee farm, and is based on the Altigracia (High Grace) farm owned by the authors. We celebrated the award with freshly brewed Café Altigracia—apty described by Alvarez as "a rich, dark nectar fit for the gods, fresh from our farm."

Nebraska Center for the Book president Joan Birnie reviewed 2002 activities and 2003 Nebraska Center for the Book board members were elected. Marjorie Saiser read from her books of poetry and shared her experiences as a writer. Saiser's book, *Bones of a Very Fine Hand* (Backwaters Press, 2000), won the 2001 Nebraska Book Award for poetry and *Lost In Seward County* (Backwaters Press, 2001) was named a 2002 poetry honor book.

Her most recent book is *Moving On* (Lone Willow Press, 2002). ▲



Laura Holmquist accepts the Nebraska Book Award for Fiction.

# Committee Seeks Contest Publicity Ideas

Since the 2003 Letters About Literature contest has entered the judging phase, this is a good time to evaluate our publicity activities. The Nebraska Center for the Book Publicity Committee is soliciting suggestions about how to get more Nebraska young people to enter the contest. Letters About Literature is a national reading promotion for children and young adults sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Weekly Reader Corporation, and locally coordinated through the Nebraska Center for the Book.

Contest participants compete on three levels, grades 4–6, grades 7–8, and grades 9–12. Young readers are asked to write a letter to an author, living or dead, explaining how that author's work changed their view of the world or themselves. Contest winners will be announced in April during National Library Week. Two national winners in each competition level will receive a \$500 cash award. The Nebraska Center for the Book will select state finalists to be honored by the governor and receive cash and other prizes. The following excerpts from previous Nebraska entries demonstrate the value of this project.

Ben Keele of Hastings won first place at the senior level in the state competition last year. Ben was also a senior level runner-up in the national competition. Here is an excerpt from his letter to Ayn Rand regarding her novel, *The Fountainhead*:

Another point I found intriguing was your conception of man's self-realization and his place in society. First, I agree with you that innovative ideas come from individual people. Therefore individual rights should be maximized to provide the optimal environment in which people can do what they wish, limited only by society's obligation to protect itself. But while self-realization and independence are important, I think you place them too high on the moral ladder. You advocate that people should only act if their actions directly advance their self-interest. Furthermore, you claim that no individual has an obligation to help anyone else. While I do not think the government should enforce altruism, I think people do have a moral obligation to help each other at times, and I think happiness and self-realization are achieved by altruism.

Nebraska's junior level winner in 2002 was Elizabeth McKim, who attends Humboldt-Table Rock-Steinauer Middle School. Elizabeth wrote a letter to Elizabeth George Spear to discuss her book, *The Sign of the Beaver*. An excerpt from her winning entry follows:

I never have read a book that made the Indians so friendly. It showed me how two, very different cultures can bind together and help each other out. It showed me that being generous could save someone's life.

I now realize how hard it is to live with only the simplest tools. Now I can't complain if I can't get something I want, but don't need. I don't know if I could live like the characters did, since I have been sheltered by technology my entire life.

Technology has changed the way I live, and other people in the world, and if taken away, it would completely change everyone's life.

Read Nebraska's 2002 winning entries in their entirety on the Library Commission Web site, <[www.nlc.state.ne.us/libdev/lal/previouswinners.html](http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/libdev/lal/previouswinners.html)>.

This year, publicity activities included two news releases, mailed to 429 news media outlets; 1,000 flyers distributed at workshops and seminars for writers, teachers, and librarians; group e-mail messages sent to librarians; and newsletter articles in *NCB News*, as well as other specialty newsletters (for homeschoolers, librarians, etc.).

The most cost-effective way to reach large groups of school personnel is through e-mail, but we have not been unable to access these e-mail groups. The committee would like your help in reaching these groups. Please contact Mary Jo Ryan, 402-471-3434, 800-307-2665, e-mail: <[mjryan@nlc.state.ne.us](mailto:mjryan@nlc.state.ne.us)> if you can distribute information about this contest or if you have ideas for contest publicity for next year. ▲

**Troy Johnson**, librarian at the Creighton Law Library, developed an online librarian's book club to read and discuss books about libraries and the library profession. A new book is selected every two months, see the Librarian's Book Club at *Bibliofuture: The Future of the Library and the Book*, <[www.bibliofuture.com](http://www.bibliofuture.com)>. ▲



# Review: Peace Like a River

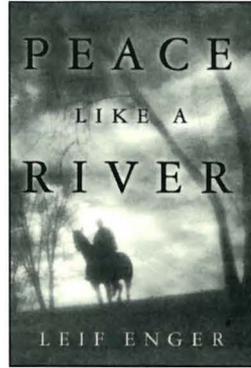
by **Leif Enger**  
 Grove Press,  
 2002,  
 ISBN:  
 0802139256,  
 Paperback.

Review by **Fran  
 Reinehr**

In this tale of generosity, filial commitment, and heart, *Peace Like a River* reminds us of the restorative power that great literature provides for us. This story, set in Minnesota and North Dakota in the 1960s with breathtaking descriptive accuracy, is an historic quest, a tragedy, and a love story. However, this story is also a meditation on the possibility of magic in our everyday lives.

As difficult as the story becomes, we are not left bereft, but uplifted, because of the strength of the people we meet. They include Jeremiah, the father who demonstrates courage and parental devotion; sons Rueben and Davy; and Swede, the nine-year-old daughter who asks if "it is hubris to believe we all live

epics?" Jeremiah attends to his three children, with no mother in the picture. He believes that each of their lives matter in every way and that it is up to him to be an honest model. Enger's artistic telling of this story provides us with a warmhearted tale. The story, written in lyrical prose, helps remind us how easy it is to fall in love with some people who come to us in a story. For me, these are real people whom I would like to call on the phone to see if things are going all right. ▲



## 550 Attend One Book—One Lincoln Author Event

Photos courtesy of  
 Lincoln City  
 Libraries

Lincoln Mayor Don Wesely commented that he really enjoyed circling the parking lot, hunting for a parking place in order to attend a library event. Approximately 550 Lincoln readers, many with books in hand, hunted along with him, determined to attend the final **One Book—One Lincoln** program, a visit by *Plainsong* author Kent Haruf. One Book—One Lincoln is a community reading program co-sponsored by Lincoln City Libraries and the Lincoln Journal Star, with funding from BryanLGH Medical Center, Lincoln Community Foundation, and the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. The program encouraged all adults in Lincoln and Lancaster County to read and discuss the same book at the same time, creating a community-wide reading and discussion experience to encourage reading and dialogue.

Lincoln readers embraced One Book—One Lincoln. 4,007 volumes of *Plainsong* were checked out of the libraries, including hardbound, paperback,

books-on-tape and compact disc formats. More than 1200 copies were sold in Lincoln bookstores. Forty-three discussion groups were held at the libraries, in residences, in schools, and churches. Local community radio station KZUM ran three special one-hour Booktalk shows to explore the phenomena. Special adult library programs explored Plains music, photography, gardening, and writing. Haruf's presentation and reading was taped and broadcast on community television.

Evaluations are still being tallied, but preliminary results indicate that most readers thought *Plainsong* was a good choice and that the library should plan to do it again. Barbara Hansen, Lincoln City Libraries spokesperson, summed up the experience, "All-in-all, I don't think we could have asked for anything better." For more information see the library Web site, <[www.lcl.lib.ne.us/info/obol.htm](http://www.lcl.lib.ne.us/info/obol.htm)>. ▲



Left: Library Director Carol Connor welcomes the crowd to the Haruf program.

Center: Lincoln Mayor Don Wesely congratulates Lincoln City Libraries and the Lincoln Journal Star on the success of the One Book—One Lincoln community reading program.

Right: Author Kent Haruf addresses the audience.



## Nebraska Book Festival Draws 705

The Nebraska community of the book celebrated "A Sense of Time, A Sense of Place" at the 2002 Nebraska Book Festival at the Stuhr Museum in Grand Island. Sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Humanities Council, Stuhr Museum, and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, the Festival Committee obtained local support from Rinder Printing, Kim and Tom Dinsdale, H & H Distributing, Grand Island Community Foundation, St. Francis Medical Center, Principal Financial Group, Go Hastings, Fonner Park, AT&T, Carnegie Corp. of America, Home Federal Savings & Loan, Eakes Office Plus, Equitable Federal Savings Bank, City of Grand Island, Grand Island Independent, Holiday Inn, Snow's Floral, Skagway, Pizza Hut, and Arby's.

Highlights of the Festival included:

- ◆ Student Day on Friday, attended by 190

- ◆ Friday Banquet, attended by 197 and featuring Bob Greene, author of *Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen* as keynote speaker
- ◆ Saturday Keynote, featuring John Sorensen on Grace Abbott's impact on social reform
- ◆ Picnic with Poets
- ◆ Special Children's Programming
- ◆ Workshops: Eiseley, Neihardt, Aldrich, Sandoz, Morris, African American Homesteaders, Lewis and Clark Expedition, Fiction Writing, and others.
- ◆ Readings: Poetry and Fiction, including Chaparral Poets and others
- ◆ Outdoor Fair: Book Vendor Displays
- ◆ Book Binding Demonstration
- ◆ Open Microphone
- ◆ Gathering of the Groups (see related article below)
- ◆ Native American Storytelling

Next year's festival will be hosted by Creighton University in Omaha. ▲

## Historic Gathering of Groups Held

The first statewide gathering of Book Discussion and Writing Groups assembled this fall at the Nebraska Book Festival, after participants responded to the Nebraska Center for the Book survey (see related article on page 9).

It was an historic happening. The auditorium was full. The participants networked and shared. Print and online resource lists for readers and writers were made available, and the participants responded to the question, "What makes belonging to a book discussion or writing group meaningful to you?" A cumulative report of those answers is forthcoming.

A highlight of the event was recognition of Billie Snyder Thornburg from North Platte, who at age ninety had just published her first book. An outcome of the meeting, during the Book Discussion Group session with Laureen Riedesel, was a request that this be followed up with "an ultimate happening with related events," possibly before or after the Book Festival, or at an entirely different time—a thing of its own to not interfere with the rest of the Book Festival schedule. Special thanks go to Laureen Riedesel and Don Welch for leading the breakout groups. ▲

## University Receives Federal Preservation Grant

Readers of Walt Whitman will find that the electronic age offers new access and insights into the 19th-century American poet's writings. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln recently received a \$276,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for a two-year project, "A Virtual Archive of Whitman's Manuscripts." The project is a collaboration between faculty members Ken Price, Hillegass chair in 19th century American literature in the

department of English, and Katherine Walter, special collections and preservation chair in University Libraries. They will create a finding aid to an estimated 70,000 Walt Whitman manuscripts in more than sixty institutions. For more information see the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Web site, <[www.unl.edu/pr/2002/1002/101602anews.html](http://www.unl.edu/pr/2002/1002/101602anews.html)>. ▲



# Nebraska Readers Span Three Centuries

by Mel Krutz

*The Nebraska Center for the Book, an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, is in the process of conducting a Book and Writing Group Survey of our state.*

The most enjoyable part of this search is communicating with the people who send information and receiving interesting data about the groups that give them literary sustenance.

Seven of the groups have been in existence since Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland were presidents, and there are records to prove it—the days of big wheel bicycles and knickers, of hoop skirts and shirtwaists. The very oldest group that has responded (so far) is the **George Eliot Club** of Hastings, begun Dec. 15, 1889. Hastings historian Dorothy Weyer Creigh explains that the name came about because they chose as their first reading a book on the life of George Eliot, who was considered “an outstanding and most controversial authoress in the nineteenth century and these ladies had courage to have chosen her works and life to study.” When “they followed it up with some of her novels, they were soon called ‘The George Eliot Club,’ and the name stuck.”

Mrs. Creigh goes on to explain that the group was a study club. Members presented lessons and prepared papers in the summers and selected a book in accordance with the topics. “Each member bought his own book and passed it among members, and was expected to read the book before the next

meeting.” (Note that the pronoun used in that sentence for this group of twelve women readers met the expected grammar usage of that era.) Today a member, in turn, presents a review for discussion. The last original survivor of the group, Mrs. Creigh tells us,

“was Mrs. Ragan, founder of the club, who died in Rainier, Alberta, Canada in 1945.” Her participation could easily have spanned fifty years.

**Fortnightly**, of Beatrice, began Sept. 10, 1892 and **Musigma**, of Omaha, began the same year. Musigma has an extensive and fascinating history written by one of its members, Oliver Pollak. The second group in Beatrice (that we know of) began exactly one hundred years later in 1982 at the Beatrice Public Library. Current member, Katherine K. Kilpatrick, tells us that “Fortnightly has minutes from every meeting, dating back to the original meeting. Excerpts from those old meetings are read today. Some are amusing reminders of days past. Poems, songs, and memorials from the archives are also occasionally used today, as is the tradition of beginning the meetings by shaking hands—keeping traditions alive.”

Hastings has three of the oldest groups we know of. In addition to the George Eliot Club, the **Round Table of Hastings** began in 1893 and the **American Literature Club** began in 1895. One of the Round Table members, Oline Marvel, continues to participate after sixty-some years, along with Mrs. Hal Lainson and one other member for nearly as long. Some present members are third generation. This was the second book club in Hastings to be formed. They develop their book lists around a theme for each year. In 2001 the theme was “looking forward, looking back.”

The **American Literature Club of Hastings**, and the **Ladies Columbian Reading Club** of Rushville formed in 1895, along with **Friends in Council of Tecumseh** in 1894, are the “youth” of the oldies.

If you belong to or know about a book or writing group that is not yet in the survey, contact Mel Krutz, 402-643-3464, e-mail: <ck34938@alltel.net> with your name and address. Information about this search will be sent to you. The search for groups concludes this December. ▲



Mel Krutz gathers information about Reading and Writing Groups at the October Nebraska Library Association/Nebraska Educational Media Association Conference.



# State Center Idea Exchange: The Center for the Book

by *Kathy  
Johnson*

Each year in the spring, state centers for the book send their coordinators to Washington, DC to meet their counterparts from all over the country, to share ideas about programs and projects, and to visit the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. Last May, as incoming president of the Nebraska Center for the Book, I participated in this exchange.

On Sunday evening, at an excellent Hunan Chinese restaurant, we began our meeting. Within a few moments, I met coordinators who had been with their state centers for over a decade and some who were just establishing state centers. I also met John Y. Cole, who has headed the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress since its inception in 1977. As the banquet ended, a brief business meeting was conducted and Cathy Gourley presented a national overview of the "Letters about Literature" program.

Monday morning we gathered for a continental breakfast in the Madison Building. After breakfast, we all took our places around an enormous rectangle of tables, with microphones in front of us and posters and flyers about the programs of the centers flanking us around the room. Mr. Cole welcomed the assembly and we introduced ourselves and our state affiliations. Seeing so many people from so many parts of the country brings home how much energy and interest there is for these centers' activities. I found that browsing the posters and literature displays was one of the most valuable parts of the meeting. I also learned that some Centers are based in their state humanities councils and that others have other administrative arrangements. Perhaps most important, I learned that each of the centers—even those with paid staff—have no more than two or three programs. Some Centers put all their energy into one program.

Program presentations followed. One discussion centered on the second National Book Festival (see related article on page 11). The afternoon session focused on administrative matters including board structure, fundraising, partnerships, and programming. Former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin and his wife made an appearance during the day. At the closing reception, James Billington, Librarian of Congress, made some remarks.

On Tuesday, a series of state center small meetings were held, but I opted to participate in the national library legislative day instead. I joined the Nebraska delegation, a group of Nebraska librarians and trustees, headed by Nebraska Library Commission



Nebraska library representatives participating in Library Legislative Day are pictured above (l. to r.) Diana Johnson, Director of the Stromsburg Public Library and co-chair of the Nebraska Library Association Legislative Committee; Kathy Tooker, Eastern Library System Administrator; Kris Rogge, Nebraska Library Commission member; Brenda Ealey, Southeast Library System Administrator; Kathy Johnson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries Reference Department and President of the Nebraska Center for the Book; Rod Wagner, Director of the Nebraska Library Commission; and Sara Schott, Southeast Library System Administrative Assistant.

Director Rod Wagner. Together we walked from one Nebraska Congressional office to another, presenting congressional staff with information about library-related legislation. Senator Chuck Hagel personally greeted our group.

Participating in this exchange helped to ground me in the national aspects of the Center for the Book and increased my understanding of the role and activities of the Nebraska Center for the Book. Participating in the legislative day enhanced my understanding of the importance of telling our story to our legislators. I have already used some of this knowledge and hope to continue to apply it throughout my year as President of the Nebraska Center for the Book. ▲

# National Book Festival Held in Washington DC

by **Mary Jo Ryan**, Nebraska Library Commission



I'm dodging the puddles (and something that looks like it could be a squashed rat) on the street and I'm thinking, "So what if we had a national festival to celebrate books, writing, and reading and nobody came?" What if the nation's capitol was locked in the grip of fear of random violence and people were encouraged by law enforcement to stay home...close the drapes...fear their neighbors? Well, of course that was the situation in Washington, DC in October and despite sniper fire and the remnants of the previous day's rain, people did come to the center of the community to celebrate the only thing that ever does overcome fear—ideas.

For nine hours on October 12, the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol was an island of rational discussion, imagination, and joy in the middle of a fearful metropolis. More than seventy authors and storytellers joined basketball stars, children's storybook characters, reading advocates, musicians, food vendors, librarians, and 45,000 book lovers of all ages to create a city of our own, a community of the book.

In the Pavilion of the States, Broken Bow Public Library Director Joan Birnie and I joined representatives from nearly every state, sharing information about our literary heritage, encouraging kids to find Nebraska

on the map, and stamping their maps with the image of a literary character we selected to typify our state, *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*, by Paul Goble. We handed out crayons (courtesy of the Nebraska Soybean Board), dispensed Kool-Aid invented in Nebraska (courtesy of the Hastings Museum), and the visitors told us great stories. Stories of previous lives lived on the Plains and stories of relatives and friends, usually ending with, "...you wouldn't happen to know so-and-so, would you? They live in Lincoln, or Kearney, or North Platte, or Hemingford." We didn't sit down for hours. We didn't see Clifford the Big Red Dog or the Let's Read America Traveling Theatre Extravaganza. We didn't hear Anita Shreve, Tony Hillerman, Vine Deloria Jr., Eric Carle, David McCullough, or First Lady Laura Bush. We didn't buy books and get them signed. But we could **almost** hear the live music over the excited voices of children and their parents, and we decided that these voices are the real music. In the words of a song, *Woodstock*, by Joni Mitchell:

*And I feel like I'm a cog in something turning/  
And maybe it's the time of year/  
Yes and maybe it's the time of man/  
And I don't know who I am/  
But life is for learning.*



## Review: When They Were Young

by **Robert Coles, M.D.**  
Kales Press & the Library of Congress, 2002.  
ISBN: 0-9670076-5-8,  
Hardcover.

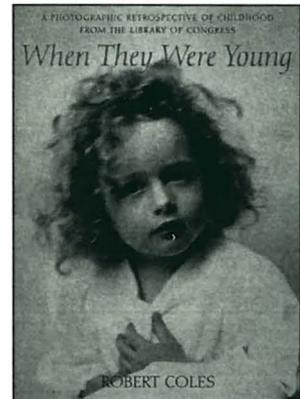
Review by **John Keller**

Pulitzer Prize winner, author, and renowned child psychiatrist Robert Coles joined with the Library of Congress and Kales Press to publish this collection of photographs of children. There are seventy-eight black and white tritone images in this volume, taken from the exhibition entitled *When They Were Young: A Photographic Retrospective of Childhood*, at the Library of Congress Sept. 26, 2002 through March 22, 2003.

There is a timelessness found in photographs of children, and the selections presented in this collection capture the joy, the innocence, the wonder, and often, the sorrow that childhood holds. The clothing and surroundings might betray the era, but the eyes and expressions could be found at any time throughout our histories. This collection spans nearly the entire history of photography, and includes the works of photographers such as Edwin S. Curtis, Dorothea Lange, Jack Delano, and many others. Curtis' photos include Eskimo and Native American children that are beautiful, technical masterpieces conceived

in the confines of the studio. Others were obviously taken candidly, in the child's natural environment.

Each of the photos is described with the photographer's name, the year or period it was taken, and the photographic media. Dr. Coles offers a narrative to the photographs, and by the time I had made it halfway through this handsome volume, I found it far more rewarding to study the photographs before reading the commentary. As a portrait and wedding photographer, my efforts were nearly always a blending of the technical and the emotional. In retrospect, and even with my own notes of a particular event, I often find a photograph conveys the intended emotional response with few, if any words. This exquisite, large volume gives lasting credence to the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words." ▲





## THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

*an affiliate of the Library of Congress*

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### Annual Meeting Features Marjorie Saiser



## Calendar of Events:

- Journey into Christmas with Bess Streeter Aldrich**, Contact: Teresa Lorensen, 402-994-3855, <bsafmus@yahoo.com>, <www.lincolnne.com/nonprofit/bsaf> ..... Dec. 19, 20, 28, 29 . Elmwood
- John Neihardt Center: Author David Bristow**, "A Dirty Wicked Town," Contact: 888-777-4667, <neihardt@gpcom.net> ..... Jan. 12. .... Bancroft
- John H. Ames Reading Series: Steve Buhler**, "Shakespeare and the Cinema," Jane Pope Geske Nebraska Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors, Contact: Joanna Lloyd, 402-441-8516, <heritage@mail.lcl.lib.ne.us>, <www.lcl.lib.ne.us/depts/hr/front.htm> ..... Jan. 16 ..... Lincoln
- Paul Olson Seminar: Mark Engler**, "A National Monument to Homesteading: Homestead National Monument of America in Beatrice," Contact: Great Plains Studies, 402-472-3082, <kweide1@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/plains/events/seminars.html> ..... Jan. 22 ..... Lincoln
- Used Book Sale, Lincoln Area Retired Teachers**, Westfield Shoppingtown Gateway Contact: 402-466-9022, 402-489-6438 ..... Jan. 24-27. .... Lincoln
- Research & Region Conference: Times of Sorrow, Times of Grace**, Contact: Plains Humanities Alliance, UN-L, 402-472-9478, <deisloeffel1@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/rcplains/index.html> ..... Jan. 27 ..... Lincoln
- Lunch at the Library with Writer Karen Shoemaker**, Nebraska Literary Heritage Association Bennett Martin Library, Contact: <heritage@mail.lcl.lib.ne.us> ..... Feb. 4 ..... Lincoln
- Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery Reopening**, Contact: Jessica Kennedy, 402-472-2461, <jkennedy7@unl.edu>, <sheldon.unl.edu> ..... Feb. 15 ..... Lincoln
- Bess Streeter Aldrich Birthday Celebration**, Contact: Teresa Lorensen, 402-994-3855, <bsafmus@yahoo.com>, <www.lincolnne.com/nonprofit/bsaf> ..... Feb. 16. .... Elmwood
- Paul Olson Seminar: William Whitney**, "Prairie Plains Resource Institute: Land Trust on the Great Plains," Contact: Center for Great Plains Studies, 402-472-3082, <kweide1@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/plains/events/seminars.html> ..... Feb. 19 ..... Lincoln
- John H. Ames Reading Series: Poet Hilda Raz, *Trans***, Jane Pope Geske Nebraska Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors, Contact: Joanna Lloyd, 441-8516, <heritage@mail.lcl.lib.ne.us>, <www.lcl.lib.ne.us/depts/hr/front.htm> ..... Feb. 20 ..... Lincoln
- 30th Annual Nebraska State Reading Council Conference**, Contact: Tom Hansen, 308-865-8537, <hansent@unk.edu> ..... Feb. 20-22. .... Kearney
- Rural Voices Reading, Christopher Gustafson**, Contact: Center for Great Plains Studies, 402- 472-3082, <cgps@unl.edu>, <www.unl.edu/plains/about/about.html> ..... Feb.23. .... Lincoln