

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SPRING 1997

SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE TO TAKE PLACE IN SAUK CENTRE JULY 1997

The Sinclair Lewis Society will sponsor a conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, Thursday and Friday, July 17 and 18, 1997 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the publication of *Babbitt* and the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Kingsblood Royal*.

The keynote speaker will be Richard Lingeman, author of a new biography to be published on Lewis by Random House. There will be two panels on *Babbitt*, one panel on *Kingsblood Royal*, and papers on, among other topics, *It Can't Happen Here*, a German *Main Street*, an Italian response to *Babbitt*, the sale of Lewis's books in the 1920s, Lewis as social critic, and the rise of Lewis as a figure of literary importance in the 1920s. Patricia Schenck, the University Archivist from St. Cloud State University, will be speaking on the new collection of letters from Lewis to Marcella Powers (see related stories in this newsletter). Stephen R. Pastore will be speaking on collecting Lewis novels and ephemera. Other scheduled speakers (at press time) will include Frederick Betz, Martin Bucco, Nancy Bunge, Jane Lamm Carroll, M. Ellen DuPree, Valerio C. Ferme, Brooke Hessler, James M. Hutchisson, Catherine Jurca, Robert L. McLaughlin, Sally E. Parry, Todd Stanley, Jonathan Veitch, Nicholas Witschi, and Jean Mullin Yonke.

Other activities include visits to Lewis's boyhood home, his grave, and the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center. There will also be a showing of the 1934 film version of *Babbitt* with Guy Kibbee and Aline MacMahon. The conference coincides with the annual Sinclair Lewis Days that usually includes a parade, craft show, concerts, and carnival games. Fliers on the conference with reservation forms and accommodation and travel information are available. The nearest airport is Minneapolis/St. Paul where cars can be rented. There is limousine service available.

If you have questions or would like to receive a flyer, please contact Sally Parry, Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University 61790-4240; Fax 309/438-5414; sparry@rs6000.cmp.ilstu.edu, phone (309)-438-5783.

LEWIS PANEL AT ALA CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be sponsoring a panel at this year's American Literature Association Conference, to be held in Baltimore, May 23-25. James M. Hutchisson will chair the panel and the speakers will be: Roger Forseth, University of Wisconsin-Superior, "Can You Go Home Again? Sinclair Lewis: Main Street and Paris"; Jay Williams, *Critical Inquiry*, "Lewis and Mary Austin"; and Mary Ryder, South Dakota State University, "Lewis and Willa Cather." The Lewis session will be Saturday, May 24, from 10:30—11:50 a.m.

This eighth annual conference of the ALA will take place at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel. The preregistration conference fee is \$40 (with a special rate of \$10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). To make a hotel reservation, call 1-800-535-1201 and request the American Literature Association rate (\$98 a night, single or double). Preregistration fees should be sent to Alfred Bendixen, English Dept., Cal State U at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90032.

WELLS LEWIS

By Sally E. Parry

Fred Armstrong, a former sergeant in the U.S. Army, served overseas with Wells Lewis during World War II and came back to the United States the week before Wells was killed by a sniper. He contacted the Sinclair Lewis Society before Christmas and made a generous donation in honor of his wife, the late Christine Moon Armstrong, and Lt. Lewis.

He told me a little about Wells and his penchant for being a snappy dresser, even in the army. He was a handsome man who looked good in his fleece jacket. Apparently Lt. Lewis was riding in a jeep with General Dahlquist and was picked off because the sniper thought Wells was the higher-ranking officer since he was better dressed.

Lt. Lewis was recommended for the Silver Star the week before he was killed, but he said he didn't want it and tried to get Sgt. Armstrong to delay the paperwork. Sgt. Armstrong has been in touch with the wife of John Paul Lewis, regarding the Silver Star that Lt. Lewis earned, with the hopes that Mr. Lewis will access the military archives, find the copy of the G-2 letter recommending Lt. Lewis for the Silver Star, and receive it on behalf of the Lewis family. (See accompanying interview with Fred Armstrong by Erin Hollis., on page 7.)

FROM THE LEWIS ARCHIVES II

By Roger Forseth

Two important collections of Sinclair Lewis letters are now available to the public: the Lewis—*Saturday Evening Post* correspondence acquired by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); and Lewis's letters to Marcella Powers now in the Lewis collection of St. Cloud State University (SCSU).¹

"The Sinclair Lewis Letters Collection," purchased by the MHS in 1995 for \$20,000, consists of about 200 letters (98 Lewis autographs) between the author and editors of the *Saturday Evening Post*, written (mostly typed) from 1915 to 1936.² Lewis's primary correspondent was George Horace Lorimer (1867-1937), the long-time editor (1899-1936) of the *Post*. In addition to a 1933 telegram, the collection also includes a letter to Lorimer from Grace Hegger Lewis regarding a submission of hers ("A short serial. Hope you like it."), dated 4/6/21. At this writing the MHS curators are in the process of separating Lewis's letters from the onion-skinned responses that were glued to the backs of the originals, a practice that simplified the *Post's* filing system and complicated the work of the curators.

These letters are almost entirely concerned with Lewis's submissions to the *Post* of short stories or serials, their acceptance, rejection, or revision.³ In 1915, for example, Lewis wrote Lorimer:

For four solid years, now, I've been working on two novels, "our Mr. Wrenn," which Harper & Bro listed last year and "The Trail of the Hawk," which Harpers will publish, and maybe feature a little, next month.

So now I've started at short stories with the accumulated plans and plots of four years, and a certain pleasure in turning from terrifically long things, without a Belgian's chance of being serialized, to magazine work again.

In particular, I have plans for a serial—no, I ain't going to bore you with the plot—and a desire to do some *Post* stories about my native state, Minnesota, which has some exceedingly dramatic stuff that has been practically untouched in fiction. (8/16/15)

The serial referred to is *Free Air*, which was to run in the *Post* in 1919.⁴

This collection demonstrates that from the beginning to the end of his life Lewis concerned himself—at turns wryly and affectionately—with Midwestern topography and culture. No sooner was *Free Air* in the pipeline than he wrote Lorimer, "I have thought of the [North Dakota populist] Non-Partisan League as a possible topic of fiction, but it seems to me still too controversial and too unsettled" (3/21/19). And:

A day and a half after I left Wyncote I was plowing through scores of miles of black-mud roads, oozy with several days of rain, driving much family and luggage down here from Minneapolis; but now I'm settled [in Mankato] and ready for work on the new novel, Main Street. (Lorimer, 6/4/19)

And again:

Unless you call me off, I want to do next a series of two or three...humorous articles giving my own experiences in Free Air trips. I don't want to overdo the Free Air, motor-touring idea...but I think these articles of mine would be quite different from the story, and equally interesting to motorists. And in one of them I want to pay my respects to the garages, etc., who are not courteous to the passing stranger—not namin' no names, but suggesting thoughts for garagemen and restaurantmen who want to succeed.⁵ (Lorimer, 10/3/19)

After 1920 Lewis's contributions to the *Post* ceased almost entirely. While it lasted, however, his relationship with the magazine was a beneficial one, both professionally and personally,⁶ and the last two letters in the collection of the MHS suggest that the friendship of Lewis and Lorimer over the years had remained intact. "It gave me a curious and rather unhappy feeling," he wrote to his old editor,

to read in the papers a few days ago of your resigning from the editorship of The Saturday Evening Post. It was, of course, you who gave me the first chance to start freelancing when you accepted a story of mine in 1915. Twenty-one years ago! Good god! And ever since then during years when I haven't so much as sent you a manuscript, I've had the comforting feeling that you were eternally there—and that I was a young fella of thirty who would one of these days make good!

Then you went and started Dorothy upon her freelancing also.

But I am comforted to read that you are going to have a chance to return to your own writing. I hope that we may encounter each other in New York or London or again in Paris, and have a chance to curse out all editors as fellow authors misunderstood by those mysterious beings! (9/7/36)

And Lorimer wrote back:

Many thanks for your very kind letter of September 7th. I am resigning with a mixture of regret and relief—regret at severing a relationship that has been uniformly pleasant and stimulating for almost forty years and with relief because I shall, I think, be able in the future to live and to work at a little more leisurely pace.

At least I did know two promising young writers when I saw

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them, even though they have graduated into the realm of books and syndicates and lectures and moving pictures. I sincerely hope that I may occasionally see you both in the future. (9/14/36)

The tone of warm formality that characterizes this exchange, indeed, runs through the entire Lewis-Lorimer/Post correspondence.⁷

The SCSU collection of "Sinclair Lewis's Letters to Marcella Powers," 264 items dated from August 30, 1939 to September 11, 1947 (including an undated poem, "Ode to His Catalepsy David C. Powers"),

were purchased in April 1996 [for \$6000] from Mary Branham, a longtime friend of Marcella Powers. Branham inherited the letters as part of Powers' estate. Some of the letters are typed, many are holographic. They had been numbered (by Branham).

Some include cartoons drawn by Lewis.⁸

The correspondence is in excellent shape, the chronology meticulously maintained. Examining these letters, one gets the impression that their significance was from the beginning recognized by Marcella Powers. Unfortunately, her letters to Lewis, so far as is known, have not survived.

These letters are of major biographical importance.⁹ Indeed, Mark Schorer, who had access to the correspondence, quoted extensively from them in his *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (1961).¹⁰ The first letter (8/30/39) is addressed to "Dear Peggy" and signed, "Ever, Red-or Sinclair Lewis if you insist," but most of the others, with one notable exception, are both addressed and signed with affectionate, fanciful, and often romantic inventions (e.g., to "Lamb" from "Pedro the Grik"; to "Princess Panda" from "Emile"). The exception is a tart note, "Dear Marcella:"

I had planned to write you a very long letter today, but considering that in the two and a half weeks that I have been away I have received from you only one letter and one scrawled pencil note of a dozen words, there doesn't seem to be any use. (7/10/43)

This note, however, was not sent until the next day, accompanied by an apologetic explanation ("Darling, I am enclosing a rather hurt and unhappy letter that I wrote yesterday but could not bring myself to mail"). Far more characteristic of the correspondence is an eccentric intimacy illustrated at times by unusually elaborate typewriter-created designs. It would have been a treat to see what Lewis might have produced with a word processor!

Largely speaking, these letters constitute a remarkable portrait of Lewis in his later years. They gravitate in tone from lover to mentor to, as it were, affectionate uncle, the last when Lewis, with considerable dignity, congratulates Marcella on her marriage, writing to her from Santa Barbara on 3/17/47:

Darling: After huge thought—the only suitable wedding present from me is the dedication to Kingsblood... Sometime, when you get a flat large enough to hold more than just a troop of s.s.s's——

[signed] x

And again, on March 22:

Your letter of yesterday came just right—half an hour ago. Yes, I am there with you; in love and high hope.

And I don't even know how to address you's but I assume that as a career, you are still Miss Powers... Anyway, you are still blessed by Marcella, and

My love to Mike [Michael Amrine] [signed] SSS

In addition to richly chronicling the progress of a love affair and friendship, these letters, like those of the MHS Collection, also confirm Lewis's abiding affection for Minnesota and the Great Plains. A great deal of space is given to accounts not only of day-to-day activities but to motor trips through the Midwest, accounts at times that have the quality of a topographical journal. Indeed, seven of the letters (dated Duluth, May 19-June 17, 1944) are carbon copies of entries in his "Minnesota Diary."¹¹ In one letter Lewis seems determined to give Miss Powers a geography lesson (5/15/42):

Back unimpaired from a trip of 1300 miles, which is only one hundred miles less than the driving distance from New York to Minneapolis but which out here, where men are men and women are not broads but just broad, merely took us creeping along the borders of two states and halfway across another. Get out your atlas, I know you haven't one but if you did have one, and look at Lake Minnetonka and Minneapolis south to Albert Lea, Minnesota—there is so too a town named that, and a very fine, natty up-to-date town it is—then west to the Dakota border, cross said, west through Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which is a roaring metropolis of 34,000, and north and west to Aberdeen; then cross the border again into North Dakota, stop at the village of Linton and eat some of the worst and most chip-like roast beef that ever desecrated an oven, north and west to Bismarck, then turn sighing east again to Fergus Falls, Minnesota, and back home—home meaning an humble cot upon Lake Minnetonka which obediently awaits its celebrated mistress, R.M. Powers, S.S. (which stands for Short-hand Shark).

I was enormously impressed by this wide land.

Finally, these letters contain accounts of preparation for Lewis's major works of this period, *Cass Timberlane* and *Kingsblood Royal*. Cataloging his research for the latter, he writes (from Minneapolis, 1/13/46):

I have gone to a Negro church; talked to its pastor for hours; had dinner with another Negro pastor in St. Paul and his wife and a returned Negro soldier who got busted from sergeant to private for protesting about segregation; gone with the local Negro editor—extremely competent and dynamic—to an intimate dinner of 12 non-highbrow-and-uplift Negro men (barbers, a literate janitor, several small-business Negroes)—the organization has a dinner once a month; it has been in existence for 52 years, and one charter member is still alive, at about 80.

I have explored the big new white-and-Negro settlement project here, with its co-op; I have been with the colored editor to a semi-tough Negro saloon, on Saturday evening, and with him had lunch at the cafeteria in the bldg devoted to civic welfare—all full of bright, liberal uplifters, mit a charming young Negro 2nd lieut. just back from India. This coming week I am to see a lot of still more assorted Negroes, including some colored undergrads in the University, and dine with some University professors (astonishingly enough, WHITE!) that I know.

It is clear from this letter—and from the other evidence of Lewis's research for *Kingsblood Royal*—that late in life his methods of work—indeed, his energy, thoroughness, and enthusiasm—had not abated.

In his last letter to Miss Powers, Lewis wrote:

You have been so gallant; you have tried so tenderly to make your marriage not merely go but be splendid; you have been so faithful and so enterprising on your job. My unceasing admiration of you is greater than ever.

It is, I suppose, wise for me to go on to Chicago tomorrow afternoon—it may even relieve you of piles of feather comforters of anxious solicitude—well-meaning comforters but hot and smothering in this weather. I shall never be more than a few hours away by plane, and I have instructed Mel not merely to give you any advice you may need, but to provide, instantly, any amount of money that you may need. He is very trusty and he appreciates you—he'd better.

My dear lamb, you have been so good, so utterly good.

(9/11/47)

As important as these letters in the SCSU Collection are as a chronicle of literary business and travel, their dominant theme—epitomized by this final note—remains that of autumnal romance. The correspondence thus ended as it began: with Sinclair Lewis's feelings of warm concern for Marcella Powers and her welfare.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Mark A. Greene, Tod Daniels-Howell, and Patrick Coleman, Acquisitions and Curatorial Department, MHS; and Patricia Schenk, Sinclair Lewis Archive, SCSU, for their generous aid and permissions for this article.

2. For an account of this acquisition, see Peg Meier, "Sinclair Lewis' Wry Affection for Minnesota," *Minneapolis Star Tribune* 21 Sept 1995: A1, A8, reprinted (in part) in *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, Spring 1996: 11-12.

3. The vast majority of the letters (85) were written from 1917 through 1920. The marked drop in the correspondence after 1920 (e.g.: 1919: 38; 1920: 15; 1921: 2) no doubt reflects a change in Sinclair Lewis's relationship with the *Post* brought about by the publication of *Main Street* with its critical and financial success, which relieved the author of the sort of day-to-day negotiations that characterized his early publishing routine.

4. The serial publication of *Free Air* resulted in a revealing—and amusing—exchange between Lewis and Harry G. Davis, secretary of The Minnesota Highway Improvement Association, included in this collection and reprinted, in part, in Meier (note 2 above).

5. The series, "Adventures in Automobumming," appeared in the *Post*, December 20, 27, 1919, January 3, 1920.

6. In 1917, for example, he wrote *Post* editor Churchill Williams: "I want to express my gratitude to Mr. Lorimer and you and to the *Post* in general for your voluntary raise of my rate from five hundred to six hundred" (5/23). Not the rate Scott Fitzgerald was to receive a decade later, but substantial nonetheless.

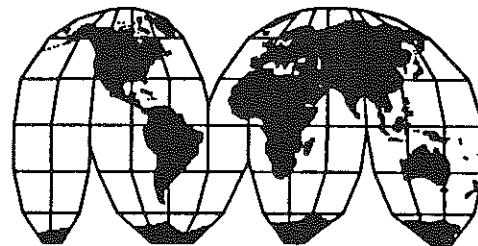
7. For information about the Lewis Collection, write Tod Daniels-Howell, Acquisitions and Curatorial Department, MHS, 345 Kellogg Boulevard West, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55012-1906; phone: 612/296-9986.

8. "Letters from Sinclair Lewis to Marcella Powers," *Guide to the Lewis Family Papers* 42-49. For information, write Patricia Schenk, Archivist, SCSU University Library, Saint Cloud, Minnesota 56301; phone 320/255-4753. The entire guide is on Web Site: <http://lrs.stcloud.msus.edu/archives/lewisguide.html>

9. See Rene Kaluza, "Love Letters from a Wordsmith: SCSU Collection of Nobel Prize-Winning Author's Correspondence with Actress Reveals His Softer Side," *St. Cloud Times* 21 Jan 1997: 6A, 10A. Patricia Schenk, George Killough, Richard Lingeman, and Roger Forseth were interviewed for this article. See pages 5-6 of this issue.

10. Robert L. Coard, in his evaluation and purchase recommendation of the collection for the SCSU Library, writes, "The Lewis/Powers letters do have significant biographical value. Much of their biographical essence has already been expressed by . . . Schorer." Professor Coard's memorandum is included in the *Lewis Family Papers*.

11. See George Killough, "Sinclair Lewis's 'Minnesota Diary' and His Devotion to Thoreau," *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 2.1 (Fall 1993) [3].



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Love Letters from a Wordsmith

St. Cloud State University's collection of Nobel Prize-winning author's correspondence with actress reveals his softer side

(from the *St. Cloud Times*, Jan. 21, 1997: 6A 1)

By Rene Kaluza
TIMES STAFF WRITER

You won't find a treasure chest in the narrow office Pat Schenk occupies in the lower level of St. Cloud State University's library.

But if you love books, writing and writers, and, if you wonder about the glamour and glory in the lives of one of Minnesota's—and America's—most famous authors, you will find a treasure there too valuable to ignore. Schenk, the university's archivist, guards 260 letters written by Nobel Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis to Marcella Powers, the young actress he met and spent eight of the last 12 years of his life charming. They are the newest additions to the university's collection of Lewis papers, joining photographs, books, clippings and letters of the Lewis family. And they have brought the collection new status in the world of writers, researchers and historians.

"Next to Yale, it's probably the best collection of Lewis material," said Roger Forseth, professor emeritus of English at the University of Wisconsin Superior and a member of the board of directors of the Sinclair Lewis Society. "I'd say it's now the second-most important collection of Lewis material."

Indeed the letters, purchased by the university in 1996 from Powers' friend Mary Branham, already are among the material being used for a new biography of Lewis by Richard Lingeman, former executive editor and now a senior editor at *The Nation*. Lingeman expects to finish his work this year. Lingeman and Forseth both describe the letters as a source of fresh insight on Lewis' personality, a personality many say has been incomplete in previous biographies and scholarly papers on Lewis' life and work.

Much of what is known about Lewis by modern fans is based on a biography of the author published in 1961 by Mark Schorer. "It goes on for 800 pages. It covers absolutely everything. (Schorer) had access to all the major collections," said George Killough, a professor of English at St. Scholastica College in Duluth who is preparing, and hopes to publish, a diary Lewis kept in the 1940s, the same period covered in the letters.

But Lewis fans and scholars are unhappy with Schorer and his treatment of Lewis, Killough said. "It's kind of an unfriendly biography. He doesn't seem to understand Lewis and finds him a little obnoxious, and that comes through clearly in the book. "Subsequent biographers will get a new look at Lewis as subsequent materials come available," said Killough.

Among those subsequent materials: the Powers letters, which many say reveal a side of Lewis unseen in previous works about the first American writer to win a Nobel Prize and the author of *Main Street*, *Babbitt* and *Cass Timberlane*. "For people who have only read the novels, the letters might show a completely

different Lewis than the Lewis they've ever thought of. The voice of the novels is not the voice of the letters," Killough said. Other Lewis experts agree.

"The letters reveal a sort of mellower Lewis. You get a sense of him that you don't get from other sources," Lingeman said. That sense may be evident because the letters have a different purpose from much of the Lewis correspondence and history available for research. They are the love letters of a man of letters.

Lewis met Powers, a young actress, in 1939, and the two were companions for much of the next eight years, remaining friends even after Powers married someone else.

From the beginning, theirs was a relationship of contrasts. He was 54; she was 18.

He had written a dozen nationally acclaimed and prize-winning books, and his acerbic assessments of American institutions were world renowned. Her career was just beginning—summer stock and parts in New York plays. While they were together, she turned to writing and editing.

He had two failed marriages; her relationships were those of a young girl. He was in love. She was charmed.

Writes Lewis from a summer home he rented in Excelsior while Powers played summer stock in New Hampshire: "I mustn't have another summer without you—even if it must be summer somewhere near a theater for which you can desert me all but a couple hours of the day. Had you been here, I would have written just as much, explored just as much—merely have read less and listened less to these damned Linguaphone German lessons which are not a good substitute for you. . . . It's just not much fun alone."

Characterizations of their May-September relationship vary. Lingeman says he presumes she was his girlfriend in every way. "He doesn't get real intimate (in the letters) but certainly he talks about love." Forseth says the relationship moved from one of love to one of friendship.

"(The letters) reflect Lewis' consistent affection for Marcella Powers as his lover—then as a friend," said Forseth. "There's no breaking off. He really comes across as her mentor."

Indeed, the letters encourage Powers to go to college, practice stenography and study theater. He presses her to write longer, more detailed letters.

"I want longer letters from you. And more letters about you inside, inside your head and inside your heart, now that you are grown up," writes Lewis. Then, when she does, he encourages her to become a free-lance writer. Throughout, he acts as editor, admonishing her poor spelling and reminding her to proofread and recopy.

But Lingeman said he believes Lewis was crushed by Powers' rejection of marriage and the drift to friendship.

"He was on the wagon. I think she must have kept him on the wagon," he says. "He was very productive in this period, producing *Kingsblood Royal* and *Cass Timberlane*."

"After she married, he started drinking again. She deserves credit for keeping him sober. He was able to do some of his best work," Lingeman said. Though the letters provide glimpses of the time they spent together, they chronicle primarily their time apart during those years.

Composed on hotel and personal stationery dated and datelined from cities across the country, the letters chronicle Lewis' travels: an apartment in Hollywood while he worked on a movie, the summer home on Lake Minnetonka where he wrote *Gideon Planish*, the home he rented while he taught at the University of Minnesota, one-night stops on a lecture circuit, the house in Duluth that Powers helped him furnish, a farm in Massachusetts. But beyond the insights into the personal drama of the relationship, the letters provide biographers and scholars with a somewhat deeper picture of Lewis' thoughts as he produced his later works.

"It opens up leads on people who inspired his characters. You can see how he formulated his characters," said Lingeman. "He never put people in his characters directly. But you can see the emotions he was feeling about these people and how they evolve into characters."

Lewis' Minnesota fans may find another value in the letters from a man many thought disliked the small-town nature of his home state. Though several contain Lewis' sharp, gossipy observations on the gilt and glitter of Hollywood, most of the others are filled with vivid, detailed passages that show a fondness for his native soil.

"Clearly, here in the '40s, he is reacquainting himself with Minnesota. He had returned with the idea of staying," Forseth said.

Writes Lewis after a trip to Sauk Centre, from the Excelsior lake home: "After S.C., Hart and I motored on north and found a charming range of hills, the Leaf Mountains, of which the highest looks across many miles of fields and dozens (literally) of lakes, like sequins on an old tapestry.... I shall never leave Minnesota. You might just as well make up your mind to coming out here at least twelve (12) times every year."

"He was trying to find some kind of happiness in his life and a place he could settle into," said Lingeman.

By the winter of 1946, he had given up. He sold the house he'd purchased in Duluth.

"He was kind of restless and kind of unhappy. It—his effort to move back—was probably doomed from the start," Killough said.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* welcomes short contributions about Lewis's work, life, and times. We also welcome essays about teaching Lewis's novels and short stories. Send books for review, notices of upcoming conferences, reports on presentations and publications relating to Lewis, discoveries of materials (correspondence, manuscripts, etc.) in and descriptions of collections in libraries, and all other information to Sally Parry, Editor, the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, Department of English, 4240 Illinois State University, Normal IL 61790-4240, or email: separry@rs6000.cmp.ilstu.edu.

CALL FOR PAPERS—WESTERN LITERATURE CONFERENCE

The Western Literature Association welcomes papers, readings, and proposals for sessions that explore and define various traditions and influences shaping the literatures of the American West. How do new western writings relate to more traditionally canonical works? What are some of the distinctive themes or formal characteristics of the several western literary traditions? What are the historical trends in the development of these traditions?

Session topics may include literature of the borderlands, Latino and Native American literary traditions, nature writing and writers of the desert Southwest, issues of class in western literature, and ecological approaches to western writings. Featured speakers include Rudolfo Anaya, Louis Owens, Denise Chavez, and Kate Horsley.

Each paper or presentation is limited to fifteen minutes reading time. Submit manuscripts of no more than ten double-spaced typewritten pages and a 125-word abstract to Gary Scharnhorst, President-elect, WLA, Department of English, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, phone: (505)277-6347, fax: (505)277-5573, e-mail: gscham@unm.edu.

SINCLAIR LEWIS: A DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY IS PUBLISHED

Sinclair Lewis: A Descriptive Bibliography by Stephen R. Pastore has just been published by YaleBooks (New Haven, 1997, 339 pp. + appendix). It is a collector's and scholar's guide to the identification of Lewis's novels and has been eagerly awaited by Lewis fans. The book includes a Preface by Lee Biondi of Heritage Book Shop, a Foreword by Sally E. Parry, and "World So Wide: The Life Journey of Sinclair Lewis" by James M. Hutchisson. There are numerous photographs of the books and dustwrappers and an appendix of serialized novels and first appearances of Lewis's writings, including the novels, essays, poems, and short stories.

Newsletter readers can receive a 25% discount if they purchase the book from Steve Pastore at the address and phone number below. There are a limited number of copies available. He would also be happy to sign or inscribe the book on request. His address is Deerfield Books, RD 2 Box 2698, Lakewood, PA 18439, 717-448-9377 or e-mail deerbook@ptd.net. The cover price is \$59.95.

A review of the book by Society board member and Lewis collector Dan Chabris will appear in the fall issue of *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*.

FORMER US ARMY SERGEANT SHARES A LEWIS MEMORY

By Erin Hollis

Recently I had the opportunity to speak with an ex-Army sergeant who served with Lewis's son, Wells, in World War II. The sergeant's name is Fred Armstrong, and he shared with me some very intriguing and somewhat sad memories about the war and Lieutenant Wells Lewis. What follows is an excerpt from a letter Mr. Armstrong sent to me:

During my military service over-seas with the Texas 36th Infantry Division, I was attached to the area of the Commanding General John L. Dahlquist. As Tech Sergeant, I worked with his two aides—Lt. Wells Lewis and Captain Smith.... Later and after earning the required number of points (100) over seas, I was released from foreign service.

Prior to my departure to the States, I obtained a camera, (purchase price \$1.00) and took pictures of my co-worker and General Dahlquist. . . . Within 10 days to two weeks after my arrival in the States, I was shocked to learn and read the press notices of the death of Lt. Wells Lewis, son of the renowned and famous author Sinclair Lewis. Hence, the reason for the thank you for the 3 x 6 photo of Wells Lewis [Mr. Armstrong sent Lewis a photograph of his son, and Lewis was extremely grateful].

Later I learned that Lt. Lewis was traveling north in France in a jeep with General Dahlquist and a driver when a German sniper hiding in ambush shot Lt. Lewis.

Mr. Armstrong also told me about how Wells was supposed to receive the Silver Star and asked Mr. Armstrong to tear up the recommendation before it got to the general. Mr. Armstrong could not bear to destroy the recommendation, so he gave it to the other aide, who then destroyed the recommendation. Mr. Armstrong speculated that Wells was to receive this award because he helped save a concrete walkway that the Germans were about to destroy (they had already destroyed seven other walkways). The eighth and final walkway was the only escape route.

When I asked Mr. Armstrong about Wells's personality, he told me Wells was a well-dressed, gentle, quiet, and unassuming individual. Since Wells was an officer and Mr. Armstrong was an enlisted man, they never really had a chance to talk casually about family and other interests. However, Mr. Armstrong's story is intriguing since he gave Lewis the chance to see his son again, even if it was a photograph.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT OF 1996 ACTIVITIES SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION

PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 1996

Handicap Access of the Boyhood Home

- The Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home has been made handicapped accessible through the receipt of a \$1,920 grant from the Minnesota Historical Society and a \$1,000 grant from the Stearns County Historical Society. The total project cost was \$3,076.22. About \$400 of the Minnesota grant will have to be returned following the audit of the final report. The project included building a new sidewalk on the east side of the home, and a metal grid ramp and platform at the back entrance of the home. Some minor work was completed inside including putting ramps over the thresholds and removing one door and putting it in storage. We also completed a photo album of the upstairs rooms to show the visitors because the upstairs remains unaccessible.

New Exhibits

- The new Ida Compton memorabilia exhibit at the Interpretive Center was completed in 1996 with funding from Charles Compton. The new display includes the Wedgewood plates, some of the Tokkaido Japanese prints, and the chess set used at Thorvale Farm. The exhibit was designed by June Mathiasen of June's Interior Designs of St. Cloud and is a very nice addition to the Interpretive Center displays. In addition, Mr. Compton financed the building of a new bookcase to house the Sinclair Lewis book collection. It is located behind Lewis' writing desk.

1996 Writers Conference

- The 1996 Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference was held Saturday, Oct. 12, 1996 at the Sauk Centre Junior High School with Jim Umhoefer as coordinator. Douglas Wood was the keynote speaker. He spoke on "The Writer's Journey: A Personal and Literary Path." Presenters were Jim Northrup, "The Writer's Life and Other War Stories"; Susan DeVore Williams, "The Basics of Inspirational Writing"; and an agent from the Lazear Agency of Minneapolis, "When Art Meets Commerce." About 110 people attended. Total income included these grants: Central MN Arts Board, \$1,500; Stearns County Historical Society, \$1,450; The Loft, \$400. Total income was \$6,133 and expenses \$5,157.15, for a net profit of \$975.85. The grant from the MN Humanities Commission was not received this year. Following the conference a reception was held at the Palmer House Hotel. The 1996 conference was well received and Jim is to be commended once again for his fine work.

Boyhood Home Report.

• The Boyhood Home had 1,430 visitors during 1996. Admissions brought in \$3,428.35, souvenir sales were \$3,009.45, for a total income of \$6,437.80. There were 14 groups and bus tours during 1996. Visitors came from 10 nations, 40 states and the District of Columbia. Admissions were down from 1,533 in 1995. We are seeing a down trend, with the peak year being 1990 when we had 2,416 visitors to the home. We continue to sell souvenirs, paperback books and hard cover books. We had two employees during the tourist season, Joyce Lyng and Alyce Olson. See Joyce Lyng's detailed reports in this annual report.

Interpretive Center Report

• There were 10,426 visitors to the Interpretive Center in 1996, and of that number, 3,559 visited the museum. This, again, is down from 4,912 in 1995. This year there was a change of ownership from the land from the State of Minnesota to the City of Sauk Centre. As a result, the Foundation has been able to sell a few souvenirs and books at the Interpretive Center. Total sales were \$789.45. Donations at the Interpretive Center were \$468.77. Joyce Lyng has been working under the Green Thumb program at the Interpretive Center and has been doing work for the Foundation as part of the "tourism" part of her job description.

Birth Home Report

• We have had Ben and Katina Bienusa as renters all of 1996. Real estate taxes were \$1,052.64 for the year, and rent received was \$4,200. We will be looking at repairs to the home on the roof and to water damage caused by snow and ice buildup on the back porch and roof of the home. In 1996 we had to replace the hot water heater in September for \$457.81 and are having to have the sewer pipes cleaned regularly.

Promotion and Tourism

• Biggest single item is the appearance of the Sinclair Lewis information on the Sauk Centre Creamery's two percent disposable milk cartons. We paid \$170.63 to the creamery for the art work.

• The Foundation advertised in the *Minnesota Explorer* Newspaper for Spring-Summer 1996.

• A FAM Tour came to Sauk Centre and the Foundation presented the participants with Main Street Anniversary mugs filled with candy and a flyer on the Lewis sites.

• The Foundation again participated in the Chamber Coupon promotion, the City Map, and advertised in area papers during the tourist season. We also offered the AAA Senior Discount. We honored 39 Chamber coupons and had 261 AAA discounts of 50c per admission.

New Publications

Several big publishing projects are in the works.

• Bibliography. Stephen Pastore, Lakewood, Penn. is completing the first ever accurate bibliography of Sinclair Lewis. He has worked on it for three years. The book will be on consignment with the Foundation after publication this winter. Pastore has also indicated he may donate some inscribed Lewis artifacts to the Foundation.

- New book. Merritt Ierley, Sussex, N. J. is publishing "Open House, A Guided Tour of the American Home," with a section on Sinclair Lewis and the Boyhood Home.
- New short story collection. Southern Illinois University Press is planning to publish a collection of early Sinclair Lewis short stories about business. None of them have been republished. Editor is Antonio Dorenzo, an author. It should be printed by the fall of 1997.
- Biography. Richard Lingemann is working on a new biography of Sinclair Lewis which should be ready by fall.
- *Main Street*. Martin Bucco has written a new forward to the publication of *Main Street*, which is being well received. The new book is for sale at the home and the Interpretive Center.

Coming in 1997

- In cooperation with the Sinclair Lewis Society of Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, the Foundation will help host the Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre July 17-18 at the Palmer House Hotel. This will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the publication of *Babbitt*, and the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Kingsblood Royal*. Speakers will include James Hutchisson, Martin Bucco, Stephen Pastore, Richard Lingeman, and Pat Schenk. The Society is calling for papers on *Babbitt* and *Kingsblood Royal*, and will include tours of the home, a visit to the gravesite, the Interpretive Center, and a screening of the movie, *Babbitt*.
- The Foundation will be getting into a new venture in 1997. We are going to go into the collectible business with Hometown Collectibles of Ohio. We have paid a deposit and are expecting the prototype of the miniature of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home. We plan to add a new Sauk Centre building each year if we have luck with this project.

The Legend Lives

- The television program "Jeopardy" of Dec. 27, 1996, featured a series of five questions about Sinclair Lewis.
- *The St. Cloud Times* recently did a full page story on Sinclair Lewis and the 200 Marcella Powers letters now at St. Cloud State University in the Lewis Collection.
- Plans continue to stage "Dodsworth," as a musical in New York in the next year.

SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION:

OPERATING THE LEWIS BOYHOOD
HOME MUSEUM

Highway 194 and Highway 71
Sauk Centre MN 56378 • 320-352-5201

Dear Friend,

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation is implementing a membership drive and inviting you to help support the activities the Foundation participates in towards the upkeep of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home and museum.

A LEWIS LIMERICK

Member Steve Pastore reports that he found a limerick by Lewis tucked in the middle of a copy of *American Poetry 1925: A Miscellany* edited by Louis Untermeyer (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925). One can see why Lewis stuck to novel writing!

There is a young man I admire
He's filled with poetic fire.
He's a really good friend,
Both our elbows oft bend,
And his name is Lou Untermeyer!

Now I'm in your book.

Sinclair Lewis
New York, Nov. 15, 1925

Many tourists visit Sauk Centre every year from foreign countries and also from every state in the United States. They come here especially to visit the boyhood home and museum of this famous author who was the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Because of this fact they also visit the businesses and purchase items. Many tourists have told me that they include time to visit the businesses in town and to walk down the "Original Main Street USA" and Sinclair Lewis Avenue where Lewis once strolled. Sauk Centre—NOT any other city in the world can claim Sinclair Lewis. Tourism is a big business in Sauk Centre and the Foundation needs your support to continue the operation of the boyhood home and museum. We are important to each other—everyone—individuals, as well as businesses can work together to accomplish this endeavor.

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation consists of President Roberta Olson, Secretary Colleen Steffes, Treasurer Irene Trisko and Board members Patricia Lewis, Ken Lewis, Katie Bromen, Alice Bromen, Marcy Weitzel, Jim Umhoefer, Chris Thomas and Joan Wolter and the members—individuals and businesses. Board meetings are held the third Monday of each month, except for February because of the annual membership meeting which is held on February 7th—Lewis's birthday—at the Palmer House.

Members will receive mailings of special happenings, activities, conferences and the annual meeting. Memberships are renewable in February of each year. To become a member of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation please send a check/money order made out to the **SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION**, with the form to Irene Trisko, Treasurer, 314 Pendergast St., Sauk Centre, MN 56378.

If further information is needed please contact Joyce Lyng at 320/352-5201 or 352-2624. Thank You in advance for your membership and support. Your membership card will be sent to you upon receiving your remittance.

Sincerely,

Joyce Lyng
Sinclair Lewis Foundation
Lewis Boyhood Home Guide

CONTRIBUTORS

The editor of *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue by writing articles or sending in notes. These people include Fred Armstrong, Frederick Betz, Rebecca Cooper, Robert Fleming, Roger Forseth, Erin Hollis, James Hutchisson, George Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Roberta Olson, Steve Pastore, Timothy James Ryan, Rodger Tarr, and Ray Lewis White.

QUERY ON ESPERANTO

Timothy James Ryan, president of the Esperanto Society of Washington, writes, "I am hoping you can furnish some assistance with respect to a phase of Mr. Lewis's young life. Apparently he attended the World Esperanto Congress in 1910 in Washington, DC, because local newspaper coverage of that convention reported that a Sinclair Lewis addressed the group on behalf of holding the next such event in San Francisco.

"I have checked Lewis biographies in libraries here, as well as 'Sinclair Lewis: The Journey' by Roberta Olson, which I acquired at the Boyhood Home in Sauk Centre, and apparently Lewis was indeed in Washington in 1910 and had recently been in San Francisco, so almost certainly the Sinclair Lewis mentioned as speaking at that Esperanto congress is the same as the later writer. However, I can find nothing specifically about Lewis and Esperanto in any Lewis material I have checked.

"I am hoping that you have some extensive biographical material there that would shed more light on this. Did he actually study Esperanto? Did he become more active in the Esperanto movement anywhere besides attending that one convention in 1910? Did he ever make any public statements about the International Language, or mention Esperanto in any of his writings?"

Any members with information on Esperanto and Lewis are invited to send the information to *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* or directly to Mr. Ryan at 5840 Cameron Run Terrace, Ste. 714, Alexandria, VA 22303, e-mail: 75032.1706@compuserve.com.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

The *New York Times* reports that James O. Freedman, the president of Dartmouth College, is a Sinclair Lewis fan. In an article titled, "A Shy Scholar Transforms Dartmouth into a Haven for Intellectuals," (Jan. 4, 1997: 6), Sara Rimer, a reporter, visits Freedman, and describes him as follows: "Moving amid the 6,000 books, past Samuel Johnson, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and William Butler Yeats, Mr. Freedman pulled out Sinclair Lewis's 'Arrowsmith.' His father, a high school English teacher, gave it to him when he was 15. This was the book, Mr. Freedman said, that set off a lifetime of reading."

Edward F. Greve, 74, died in Duluth in January. A high school teacher, curator for the St. Louis County Historical Society in Duluth from 1943 to 1945, and associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, he was a research historian for Sinclair Lewis while Lewis lived in Duluth.

The town of Carmel, California turned 80 on October 26, 1996. As reported in *Carmel-By-The-Sea's Freedom* (vol. 6, no. 10, 1996), "Carmel's controversies have been present ever since its beginning. There were arguments about speeches by writer-activist Sinclair Lewis, who was present at the town's heatedly debated birth. On October 26, 1926, an assortment of 181 locals went to the polls to state their position in the debate: 113 voted for Carmel's incorporation, and 68 opposed, indicating there was even controversy about becoming a formal town."

In an article entitled, "'Sister Carrie' Paves Way to Renaissance," in the March 30, 1997 *Chicago Tribune* (4:2), reporter John Blades notes that although only one thousand copies of *Sister Carrie* were originally printed (and only 456 sold), when the novel was reissued seven years later it received high praise from critics. These and later works "had a profound influence on the fiction of Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis and others."

In October 1996, at a session on "Jack London and the Counterculture" at the Jack London Society Third Biennial Symposium, James Williams, editor of the *Jack London Journal*, spoke on alcoholism and mentioned *Dodsworth*.

Pico Iyer's review, "American Dreamers," of *The Wallaces and Reader's Digest: An Insider's Story* by Peter Canning, describes DeWitt and Lila Wallace as seemingly sprung "from the mistier reaches of Ronald Reagan's imagination. . . . The tale of the Wallaces—which seems to have begun on Main Street in Disneyland and ended up like Lear on Fifth Avenue is irresistible, and it has been told often and well" (*New York Times Book Review* Nov. 24, 1996: 7).

In the United Airlines magazine *Hemispheres* (January 1997), in an article by Karen Raugust called "The Twin Cities: 25 Fascinating Facts Every Visitor Should Know," fact 19 is "St. Paul's Summit Avenue is lined with Victorian mansions, including the governor's residence, the former estate of railroad

baron James J. Hill, and the homes where Minnesota writers F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis lived during World War I" (24).

In her Sunday *New York Times* column "Liberties," Maureen Dowd wrote (Nov. 3, 1996) on "Seducing History" and how President Clinton is concerned with his place in history. "Elmer Gantry would be impressed with the testimony Mr. Clinton says he gathered in 10 minutes shaking hands: A professor who, thanks to a Bill Clinton research grant, says he will cure Parkinson's disease; a man who, thanks to Bill Clinton's family-leave law, was able to adopt a baby without his wife losing her job; a dropout who, thanks to a Bill Clinton student loan, will study microbiology; three breast cancer survivors who, thanks to Bill Clinton research money, hope to see the disease whipped; a female police officer who, thanks to Bill Clinton's crime bill, feels safer" (*Week in Review* 15).

An advertisement in the Sunday *New York Times Book Review* for October 27, 1996 for Carl T. Rowan's *The Coming Race War in America* is headlined "Who Says It Can't Happen Here?" The book, on "warning signs of impending racial strife," is published by Little, Brown.

Shirley Jones toured the country this past holiday season with a concert of songs from movies and Broadway. The program also mentioned her role in *Elmer Gantry*. "About this point in time [after appearing in the movie of *The Music Man*] Richard Brooks and Columbia pictures set the courageous wheels in motion for the devastating treatment of a subject matter never before dealt with on screen. Starring Burt Lancaster, it featured a lost and touching prostitute who all but topples the growing empire of an ambitious evangelist—and again, the candidates for the lusty role poured out of the woodwork. But Brooks had another idea. As with the controversial movie itself, Brooks requested producer-consent to break casting tradition and sign America's ultimate girl-next-door for the bawdy role. Word had it Brooks's suggestion caused waves. The back rooms bristled with debate. Some pros, many cons. But Brooks won out; he signed his lady. The result? A 1961 'Best Supporting Actress' Academy Award for Shirley Jones's powerful portrayal of 'Lulu Baines' in the ageless American classic *Elmer Gantry*."

MANTRAP, THE MOVIE

By Sally E. Parry

"Gripping! Sensational! Different! By the author of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith*" reads the front of the box in which the movie *Mantrap* comes. And it's actually a good movie too.

Mantrap was released by Paramount in 1926 with Clara Bow as Alverna, Percy Marmont as Ralph, Ernest Torrence as Joe Easter, and Eugene Pallette as Wes Woodbury. The film was directed by Victor Fleming who also directed such films as *Treasure Island*, *Captains Courageous*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

Hyde, and *Gone with the Wind*. The fine cinematography was by James Wong Howe who also did such sound films as *The Thin Man*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Objective Burma*, *Picnic*, and *The Rose Tattoo*.

The box's description of the plot is "Clara, tired of city life, marries Ernest and moves to the great Northwest. Percy, a city boy on vacation, meets Clara and they decide to run away together. A delightful comedy romp." Although this simplifies the story (and makes it sound like the protagonists are all about eighteen years old), the movie is actually quite faithful to the novel in many ways. Alverna's indiscretions with the local mountie are played down, but she is still the flirtatious city woman who is quickly bored by life in the woods. Ralph is no longer indifferent to women but downright afraid of them. This makes his job as a divorce lawyer very hard.

There is no forest fire nor any other terrible trials to endure since as soon as Ralph and Alverna run totally out of food a plane lands on the lake and the pilot hands them a sack of food. Alverna takes Joe's motorboat which leaves Joe and Ralph in the woods, having to hike to civilization. However, the confrontation between Joe and Ralph over whether or not Joe should accompany Ralph to New York never takes place. Joe returns to his cabin in the woods and within a few days Alverna returns, realizing that she has loved him all along. Ralph, meanwhile, has been transformed into a confident and sexually attractive man, sought after by women.

The performances were all first rate with Clara Bow bringing a strikingly modern sense of seductiveness to her performance, the year before she became known as the "It" Girl. Ernest Torrence, who usually played villains in silent films, was sympathetic as Joe Easter, and Percy Marmont, a British actor, was convincing as the citified man who is invigorated by his exposure to the wilderness. One of my favorite character actors, Eugene Pallette, has the right sense of worldliness and boorishness that his Babbitt-like character should have. The titles were amusing and contributed greatly to the humor of the film.

My thanks to Steve Pastore for lending the film to me. This 67 minute film is available from Grapevine Video, P.O. Box 46161, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

Movie Notes

In a Time Warner video catalogue, the movie of *Cass Timberlane* (1947) is described as "Can a flamboyant woman find happiness in marriage to a small-town widower? Not if she's tempted by his sophisticated friend! Lana Turner and Spencer Tracy star in this May-December romance." (But who would choose Zachary Scott over Spencer Tracy?)

JEOPARDY TIME

from Joyce Lyng

The television program *Jeopardy* aired on Friday, December, 1996 included an entire 5 answer (questions) category on Sinclair Lewis.

The \$200 question was: This "Call of the Wild" author bought story plots from Lewis—answered correctly as Jack London.

The \$400 question was: Lewis was the first American to win this award: he received it 4 years after turning down a Pulitzer. The question was answered correctly as: Nobel Prize for Literature.

The \$600 question was: Lewis's 5 major novels from *Main Street* to *Dodsworth* were published during this decade—first person answered incorrectly: in the 30's—the second person answered correctly: what are the 20's.

The \$800 question was: Often confused with this author on our show, Lewis worked as a janitor at the utopian colony, Helicon Hall: the question was answered correctly—who is Upton Sinclair.

The \$1000 question was: In this, his hometown, he was known as Harry Lewis; Sinclair is his middle name: the contestants were unable to answer this question so Alex gave them the answer—Sauk Centre, Minnesota.

Barbara Brake, a Sauk Centre resident, tried out last year to become a contestant on *Jeopardy*. She visited the Sinclair Lewis Museum prior to her trip to Minneapolis where a contestant search was held at the Mall of America. She was seeking out more information on Sinclair Lewis. She told me that she would be seeing Alex Trebeck, the host of *Jeopardy* that day also—so I thought that this would be a great opportunity for me to provide the show with some more updated information on Lewis and his works. Barbara gave this packet of information to Alex when she visited with him, he autographed a picture of himself to give to me. I thank her for giving me this great opportunity to provide publicity on "Sauk Centre's most famous son—Sinclair Lewis."

Submissions Invited

Journal of Florida Literature

Creative, Articles,
Notes, Reviews
Devoted to
Florida Writers and Literature
about Florida

Recent issues include fiction by
George Garrett and articles on
Rawlings, Hurston, Edith Pope,
Key West writers

Submissions and Correspondence:
Kevin M. McCarthy, Editor
English Department
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32611

BABBITT SELLS IN SCHAUMBURG, ILLINOIS

By Rebecca M. Cooper

My interest in Sinclair Lewis began when I was an undergraduate at Illinois State University. I read *Kingsblood Royal* in a 20th-century American literature course and I was intrigued by the details of Lewis's character descriptions and the view he gave his readers of the surroundings, so essential to the feel of the story. He had a way of throwing his characters into situations and sitting back to watch as they acted out their parts.

I began a book discussion group at Borders Books & Music in Schaumburg during the Fall after I graduated with the intention of throwing my fellow readers into situations and watching how they would react to them. I chose *Babbitt* for its scandalous references to Chicago, and the contrasts between "big city" and "small town" that make George's environment so important on many levels.

I did a lot of research on Sinclair Lewis and was able to get some valuable information from Dr. Sally Parry in the ISU English department. I handed each person an outline of Sinclair Lewis's life and a time line of his work. We could not focus on specifics due to time, so we discussed the references to class division and the group equated these older divisions with new prevalent divisions based on houses, job security, cars, and other luxuries. "Small town" hit very close to "suburbia" for many of the readers, who could trace some of the same stereotypes George used to those they had heard or even used themselves. The small towns where some of these readers grew up still exist in the same dusty time frames in which *Babbitt* was captured at his most awkward and disturbing.

It seems that America takes great pride in "her" idea of strength through the "small town" ideal, but it is exactly those small towns, or suburbias in which class differentiation and racial stereotypes thrive, because there is no one to hold them in check. Our suburbias are like islands, without the violence, improprieties, lawlessness that occur in the "big city" of Chicago. But that is where people go blind and where Lewis had it right all along. Here, in this suburb of Chicago, is where people will agree to be stupid, to not disagree with the way people are living.

Technology has only increased the validity of what Lewis had to say: it is "who you know" that gives you a semblance of identity. In our society of computer-aided communication, superfast modems, cellular phones, and faxes it seems easier to reach out and "know" lots of people. But it has really become more complex; we no longer "see" whom we are talking with; therefore we cannot really know them. There is an error of presence; which is to say that we know ourselves by what we surround ourselves with and if all we have is machines then where has our identity gone? It is still "whom you know" or whom you are seen by and with. People base a great deal in association, although as in *Babbitt*, the people we associate ourselves with may come to be more like the McKelveys.

There seemed to be a great deal of interest in the social vs. private self and many people believed that George Babbitt lost the balance between these two parts of himself and really created two new identities. The social self was caught up in alcohol, cigars, and other women, while his private self was stuck on gaining respect, however phony, and recognition from the people around him, even though he didn't think their ideas were worth much.

Religion and women came up also; the former in stronger religious conviction in small-town people, and the latter in the role that George's wife played as status-hungry housewife. Given the opportunity to step out of George's shadow she may have asserted herself as an individual, but after their dinner with some old friends, she refuses to have them over because someone may think they are friends. Her reactions to the situation they were just in showed us her struggle for status was partly through her husband's associations and if she could control one of them, then she would.

Babbitt gave everyone a lot to think about. It was well received by most people because of Lewis's knack for detail that made it easy to posit the reader within the situations as they were taking place. It was clear that Lewis did nothing haphazardly, and that he seemed to have a very clear idea of what each character would do in the situations he presented to them. A few comments were made on the dated references that threw some readers off and made the text hard to read. I could only find a few scattered details, but these only seemed to add to the emphasis of Lewis's theme of dirty small-town values eating away at the American pie.

BOOK NOTES

Daedalus Books is featuring remaindered copies of the HBJ edition of *Arrowsmith* at \$5.98 (original price \$15.95). The copy describes the novel as follows. "This novel, originally published in 1925, has as its heart an age-old dilemma: should a doctor withhold experimental treatment from a patient and continue research, thus assuring the patient's death, or should a risky, untested procedure be carried out? Young Martin Arrowsmith, a doctor and researcher, faces this dilemma when he is sent to a Caribbean island besieged by bubonic plague. Torn between an innate humanitarianism and his scientific training and curiosity, Dr. Arrowsmith makes a decision that has catastrophic personal consequences and a lasting effect on the course of his career. Sinclair Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930 'for his powerful and vivid art of description and his ability to use wit and humor in the creation of original characters.'" The phone number for Daedalus is 1-800-395-2665.

The Easton Press is publishing the Collector's Library of Famous Editions and is including *Main Street* with the Grant Wood illustrations. Subscribers pay \$42.75 per book for leather binding, gilt edges, etc. The *Main Street* edition is described in the brochure as "A Famous Edition does more than just present a great work of literature, it illustrates the work! Our edition of

Sinclair Lewis' novel, *Main Street*, is a perfect example. The color drawings are by Grant Wood, whose uncanny eye for character and knowledge of the American heartland, made him the perfect choice to illustrate this classic novel of Middle America. Sinclair Lewis was so delighted that Grant Wood was providing the illustrations, that he agreed to write a special introduction. Taken as a whole, this wonderful edition has been called 'the most interesting American illustrated book.'" Call toll-free 1-800-211-1308 for more information. For those who don't want to pay \$42.75 every month, the covers of the new Penguin editions of *Main Street* and *Babbitt* feature Grant Wood illustrations.

The review of David Foster Wallace's new collection of essays, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (Little, Brown, 1997), in the *New York Times Book Review* for March 16, 1997 is entitled "The Road to Babbittville." Reviewer Laura Miller praises Wallace's "forays into Middle American culture" and says that "if he seizes upon his experiences to reveal ugly aspects of the American character, he always does it through the lens of his own worst impulses."

The University of Iowa has recently published *Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small Town America* by Richard V. Francaviglia. The book's primary focus is on Walt Disney's version of Main Street and "how this happy, make-believe rendition of small-town America in the 1890s is changing the face of urban planning in the 1990s."

Johns Hopkins University Press has just published *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* by Chester Liebs for \$24.95 in paperback. The *Chicago Tribune* reviewed it favorably: "A serious book but what fun! . . . Combining great pictures with lucid, insightful, and often witty text, it tells the story of what has been growing up along the nation's highways over the last 80 years."

Bas Bleu, Bookseller-by-Post, is offering *Weeds* by Edith Summers Kelley. "A forgotten novel of the 1920s, *Weeds* has been resurrected as a classic of American naturalism. It packs quite a wallop. Edith Summers Kelley (who once worked as Upton Sinclair's secretary and was later engaged for a while to Sinclair Lewis) writes with a clarity of detail that brings the most coddled of 1990s readers into the hardscrabble life of Kentucky in the first two decades of this century. What's most important is that Kelley makes very real her protagonist's longings for something beyond the confines of her domesticity. She grasps at passion, art, even 'man's work' to get beyond the punitive drudgery of what she, as a woman, was expected to do." The novel is being sold for \$15.95. Contact Bas Bleu at 1-800-433-1155 or at Suite 508, 1447 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, GA 30309.



ORIGINAL LEWIS LETTERS IN ST. CLOUD STATE ARCHIVES From the *Sauk Centre Herald*, Feb. 18, 1997:3

By Harry Hanson
Staff Writer

Members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation listened as Pat Schenk of the St. Cloud State University Archives expounded on recently received original Lewis letters at the organization's annual meeting Feb. 7. The date corresponded with the 112th birthday anniversary of Lewis in Sauk Centre.

"Two hundred sixty-one letters he wrote to Marcella Powers, as well as original photographs of the two, were bought by the St. Cloud Foundation," cited Schenk who is the curator of the archives as part of the St. Cloud State Library.

Marcella Powers was an 18-year-old, living at the time in Hollywood and wanting to become a movie starlet. Whether she figured Lewis would be her ladder to success or whether Lewis acted as her confidant is not made clear in any of the letters, according to Schenk.

Lewis was 54-years-old at the time and seemed to be infatuated with her youthful presence, which included a marked exuberance for life. Schenk brought a dozen of the letters under plastic coverings to the meeting. While she has read all 261 letters, she does not feel she qualifies as a Sinclair Lewis scholar.

"I am not sure if there was much more than the blush of retreating to his youthful years as a suitor involved in their relationship," said Schenk in answer to a question. "The use of the word love and the use of xxx signifies an infatuation at the very least. Photographs show Lewis and Powers with a couple named Dahlberg at a restaurant in Miami and another in the Caribbean Islands.

"The couple probably met during summer stock in a theater in Hollywood," suggested Schenk. "Power's mother seemed to be a pusher, thinking it was all right for her 18-year-old daughter to become involved with this older man. There are numerous references to her mother in Lewis' dialogue."

The many trysts of the couple went on over a four year span. Powers married in 1947. Lewis continued his writing even while she was married, suggesting in each letter that he would quit writing if he didn't receive a letter in return.

Lewis' letters were both hand-written and typed single spaced. Omitted words were inked in with a line indicating where the reader should go to have the meaning made more clear.

Schenk went on to say that she felt there was enough material available in the letters for someone to write a good book. However, at present heirs of the Lewis family still hold the copyright on all of these letters. "A writer could quote some facts from the letters, but there is a volume limit to how much could be lifted from the works," stated Schenk. "It would really be something to have the letters that Powers wrote to Lewis in reply."

Phillip Mathews, a former reporter for the *Fargo Forum* and now a free-lance writer, was on hand at the Palmer House for the

presentation of the letters. Mathews has been a member of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and has been a regular at the annual meetings.

As a child, Mathews and his family lived on a rented farm near Park River, N.D. which was owned by Sinclair Lewis.

"When Lewis flew over our farm house, he exclaimed what a 'shack' it was," said Mathews. "A little while later a crew came to build a fine farm home for us to live in, I have been ever grateful to him for that alone."

BIBLIOGRAPHY NOTES

Frederick Betz, a new member of the Society, has had two articles, one on Lewis and one on Dorothy Thompson, accepted which will come out this year. The article in *Orbis* has been published, the one in the *Courier* is forthcoming.

Betz, Frederick, and Jörg Thunecke. "Sinclair Lewis's Cautionary Tale *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) Against the Socio-Political Background in Germany and the USA in the 1930s." *Orbis Litterarum* (Copenhagen) 52 (1997): 35-53.

The article discusses the novel "in light of the 20th century struggle between democracy and totalitarianism, and particularly in view of the current resurgence of right-wing extremism world-wide, a re-examination of Lewis's political cautionary tale in historical context, based on archival work in the Sinclair Lewis Papers (Yale) and the Dorothy Thompson Papers (Syracuse) as well as on extensive research into the contemporary literature and subsequent scholarship, should also demonstrate its continuing relevance."

Betz, Frederick. "What's in a Name?: Characterization and Caricature in Dorothy Thompson Criticism." *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier*. Forthcoming.

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January 1997
List 11

104 (Lewis, Sinclair). COHN, David L. *The Good Old Days: A History of American Morals and Manners as Seen Through the Sears, Roebuck Catalogs 1905 to the Present*. NY: S&S 1940. Foreword (mistakenly called an introduction on book title page and jacket) by Sinclair Lewis.

Quarto. Contemporary bookplate, light foxing to the endpapers, else about fine in a very good dustwrapper with several small chips and tears. \$100

February 1997-List 12

- 123 Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. NY: Doubleday Doran 1935. Fine in fine silver foil-type dustwrapper that is a little tarnished on the spine, but is still unusually nice. A novel about America under a dictatorship, precipitated by the spate of demagogues of the Huey Long/Father Coughlin stripe then popular. \$175
- 124 Lewis, Sinclair. *The God-Seeker*. NY: Random House (1949). Fine in fine dustwrapper with a couple tiny tears and some very slight rubbing. An especially bright copy of this novel about the Minnesota frontier, and seldom found thus. \$175

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164. Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harpers, 1914. Second printing. Near fine copy. \$37.50
165. Lewis, Sinclair. *Tennis At I Play It by Maurice E. McLoughlin*. New York: Doran, 1915. First edition of a book ghostwritten by Sinclair Lewis. Accompanying the book is documentation about Lewis' authorship. Hinges cracked. Very good. Illustrated with photographs. \$375.00
166. Lewis, Sinclair & Sidney Howard. *Sinclair Lewis' Dodsworth*. Dramatized by Sidney Howard. With Comments by Sidney Howard and Sinclair Lewis on *The Art of Dramatization*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1936. First Edition. Signed on the endpaper: "Sincerely, Walter Huston" the actor who starred in the Broadway production created a sensation and won the 1936 New Film Critic's Award for Best Actor when he repeated his perfor-

mance in the film version of *Dodsworth* when it was transferred to the big screen by director William Wyler. Uncommon autograph. About fine copy with the cloth unsoiled. \$500.00

November 1996 Catalogue

194. [Lewis, Sinclair]. **Original Program For the Advance Press Screening of the Film *Elmer Gantry***. Los Angeles: United Artists, 1960. Film director Peter Bogdanovich's copy given to him when he was a film critic. With Bogdanovich's ownership stamp. 8 pages, creased from folding. Illustrated. With cast and production information. \$85.00

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- 235 Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, [1929]. \$200
FIRST EDITION. Near fine copy in dust jacket with a few shallow chips at edges. In the first issue jacket without reviews at bottom of front flap.
- 236 Lewis, Sinclair. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1933. \$125.00
FIRST EDITION. Near fine in lightly soiled dust jacket with several closed edgetears.
- 237 Lewis, Sinclair. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1934. \$125.00
FIRST EDITION. Fine in dust jacket (faint crease at spine).
- 238 Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$200.00
FIRST EDITION. fine in dust jacket.
- 239 Lewis, Sinclair. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1940. \$350.00
FIRST EDITION. *One of an unspecified number of copies signed by Lewis on a tipped in leaf*. Fine in bright unfaded dust jacket with a few nicks and some evidence on verso of tape removal. Very uncommon in this signed issue.
- 240 Lewis, Sinclair. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, [1943]. \$100.00
FIRST EDITION. Fine in unusually bright fresh dust jacket a little rubbed at edge of spine panel.
- 241 Lewis, Sinclair. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House [1949]. \$75.00
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Sale 125

Thursday, January 30, 1997

- 231 Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. Trans. by Gabriel Des Hons. 2 vols. in 1. 7 3/4 x 6 1/2, 3/4 morocco & marbled boards, gilt-lettered & stamped spine, t.e.g. No. 3 of 100 copies. First French Edition. Paris: Firmin-Didot, [1931] Mild foxing, oddly cut margins, else near fine (50/80)

Sale 132

Friday & Saturday, April 25-26, 1997

- 172 Lewis, Sinclair. T.L.S. [1] p 6 3/4 x 5, typed on Hotel Adlon Berlin stationery, laid in clear plastic protector. Jan. 5, 1931.

Letter to Herbert Evans [discoverer of vitamin E and book collector] as follows: "Dear Herbert Evans, Both Dorothy and I were delighted to have your congratulations. We still regard you as a member of the family into which we so enthusiastically adopted you. Dorothy [his second wife, the newspaper columnist, Dorothy Thompson] is just coming out of the hospital today after an appendectomy and we are going to skip off to the mountains for a loaf. We will return to America about March 1st. Is there any chance that you will be in the East? Our address there will be Westport, Connecticut. Yours ever, Sinclair Lewis." Herbert Evans' "congratulations" were undoubtedly sent in response to the Nobel prize for literature awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930 [the first Nobel prize to be awarded to an American writer]. Fine condition. (300/500)

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- 172 Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. First Edition. A very good copy with some spotting to the fore-edge, in a bright example of the dust jacket which has three small chips in the spine and a closed tear in the front panel. \$1,750.00
- 173 Lewis, Sinclair. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. First Edition. A very good copy in a jacket which is chipped at the top and bottom of the spine. \$250.00
- 174 Lewis, Sinclair. *Cheap and Contented Labor*. New York: United Feature Syndicate, 1929. First Edition, second state. Slight soiling to the wrappers; a near fine copy. \$100.00

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