

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWENTY-ONE, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2012



Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally Parry portray Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson in the 2012 Sinclair Lewis Days parade in Sauk Centre.

THEATER, COMMUNITY, WAR, AND MR. LEWIS

*Robert L. McLaughlin
Illinois State University*

In 1935 Sinclair Lewis became one of the first American artists to sound the alarm about fascism. In his novel *It Can't Happen Here* he painted the dangers European-style fascism presented to liberty, human dignity, and the free, inquiring, critical spirit, and showed, controversially, the ways in which the seeds of fascism exist in American society. The novel's success and the widespread production of the Federal Theater Project's stage version made fascism—both its possibilities at home and its activities abroad—a hot topic for public discussion. Much of the initial criticism of the novel argued that the European model for the rise of fascism simply doesn't apply to the United States. The seventy-seven years since the novel's publication, however, have served to show just how prescient Lewis was as, unhappily, the novel seems more and more relevant as the years go by. (How could Lewis have anticipated

————— Theater, Community, War *continued on page 4*

MAIN STREET TO EIGHTH STREET: LEWIS HOUSE AND ST. CLOUD'S SOUTH SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

*Alex L. Ames
St. Cloud State University Foundation*

St. Cloud State University has renamed a historic home located on the university campus and received funds for its restoration. To celebrate, Stearns History Museum and partners have joined to honor the home's original owners, Dr. Claude and Wilhelmina Mary Lewis.

What's in a name? When it comes to honoring the legacy of an important Minnesota family, the name of a historic building can mean everything. St. Cloud State University's decision to rename one of its buildings "Lewis House" has sparked interest in the relationship between a famous Minnesota author and his brother who lived in St. Cloud. The new name also sheds light on the history of St. Cloud's South Side, a residential area next to St. Cloud State University that many college professors and wealthy Protestants once called home.

Dr. Claude B. Lewis (1878–1957) of St. Cloud and his brother, author Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951), shared a close yet complex bond. Many of their adult interactions occurred in Dr. Lewis's historic house, now owned by St. Cloud State. This article explores Dr. Claude Lewis's historic home, his civic contributions, his relationship with Sinclair, and the experiences of Lewis family members socializing in the South Side. These stories reveal the importance of small-town community spirit to early twentieth-century life. They also underscore how differently the Lewis brothers reacted to that community spirit. Stable and steady Claude Lewis embraced it, becoming an institution in St. Cloud because of his devotion to civic improvement. The brilliant but unpredictable Sinclair Lewis

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The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter is published twice a year with help from the Publications Unit of the English Department at Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

Editor: Sally E. Parry

Publications Unit Director: Tara Reeser

Production Director: Steve Halle

Assistant and Interns: Caitlin Alvarez, Alicia Raff, and August Cassens

Please address all correspondence to: Sinclair Lewis Society, c/o Sally E. Parry, Department of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240

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SUGAR HOUSE IN BARNARD TO BE TRIBUTE TO SINCLAIR LEWIS

*Katie Beth Ryan
Valley News (Vermont)*

April 14, 2012

One of the things Sinclair Lewis enjoyed most about the years he spent in Barnard, Vermont, from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, was home mail delivery, and the privacy it afforded him.

Even though Lewis had achieved great literary success with novels like *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, by the time he came to town, “people didn’t gawk at him going to get his mail,” said Barbara Butler, curator of the Barnard Historical Society.

Much as the people of Cornish respected and protected the privacy of J. D. Salinger, Sinclair Lewis’s neighbors in Barnard paid him the same courtesy. And the rural environs proved helpful to Lewis’s literary output. At Twin Farms, the expansive Barnard property that he shared with his wife, the renowned political journalist Dorothy Thompson, Lewis huddled away in a sugar house on a hillside with a view of Killington Peak. The red-haired author didn’t go there to boil sap, but to write fiction that turned a sharp eye on the nuances of American society in the early 20th century.

There were no notes or diaries left behind in the sugar house, but “people who lived up in that area knew that’s where he went when he went to write,” said Cliff Aikens of the Barnard Historical Society.

It is one of the few physical remnants of Lewis’s time in Barnard, where he is thought to have written the novels *Dodsworth* and *It Can’t Happen Here*....

Now a group of residents are raising money to uproot the sugar house from its current site and move it to the town’s Dorothy Thompson Common. There it will stand behind a monument to Thompson, a tribute to the literary luminaries’ life in Barnard. “The logical place for this sugar house is right behind that monument, because it’s all a part of that period,” said Aikens.

That America’s first Nobel Laureate in literature lived just up the road was a source of some amusement for Barnard’s townspeople. The lavish, booze-laden parties at Twin Farms contrasted with the hardscrabble lives many residents led. The owner of the Barnard General Store is said to have come to work one morning to find Lewis’s roadster in a ditch, with the author passed out inside. Antics like these provided some entertainment in a small Vermont town in the 1930s, where radio reception was poor and the paper from Boston could take an extra day to arrive.

“Everybody loved the idea that you had two of the most important writers in the world living in little old Barnard, Vermont,” said Aikens.

Lewis and Thompson were almost certainly the most famous people to ever reside in town. But this component of Barnard’s history has largely been forgotten. Nearly all of those who were alive when Lewis and Thompson were both in residence at Twin Farms have since passed. Other than Twin Farms—now home to one of the nation’s most exclusive resorts (a one-night stay starts at \$1,300)—little remains of the couple’s life in Barnard.

In recent years, the town’s historical society has started to pay more attention to Lewis and Thompson. A decade ago, the town common was rededicated in honor of Thompson, who remained in Barnard long after her marriage to Lewis fell apart in the mid-1930s and is buried in the town cemetery.

Now, the town’s historians are shifting their focus to Lewis and the sugar house. Butler envisions it serving as a mini-museum on the common, where people can peek in and see a mannequin likeness of Lewis, sitting over his typewriter. “In little towns like this, there’s a certain amount of us who

————— Sugar House *continued on page 16*

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.

Thanks to Alex Ames, Fred Betz, Ted Fleener, Ralph Goldstein, Bill Jennings, Jackie Koenig, Will Kraemer, Peter Kurth, Pat Lewis, Richard Lingeman, Dave Lull, Joyce Lyng, Corinne Martin, Robert McLaughlin, Roger K. Miller, Ron Miller, Deb Mortenson, Susan O’Brien, Charlie Pankenier, Steve Paragamian, Tom Raynor, Katie Beth Ryan, Dave Simpkins, Mary and Dan Stroeing, Quincy Stroeing, and Eugene Winick.

Theater, Community, War *continued from page 1*

the Patriot Act and Glenn Beck?)

Interestingly, though, given Lewis's ahead-of-the-headlines tackling of fascism, as 1937 brought the Japanese incursion into China, as 1939 brought the German invasion of Poland and World War II, as 1941 brought Pearl Harbor and the United States' entry into the war, Lewis, at least in his work, seemed strangely disinterested in world events. It's not going too far to suggest that Lewis, who had always had one literary finger on the pulse of American society and another on the hot-button issues of the moment, became out of touch. At a moment when Europe and China were living a nightmare, Lewis's 1940 novel *Bethel Merriday* was a fairy tale of life in the theater. At a moment when US forces were driving the Japanese from Guadalcanal and the Allies in Europe were preparing to invade Sicily—and, moreover, a moment when Americans were being asked to pull together selflessly—Lewis's 1943 novel *Gideon Planish* offered a cynical exposé of philanthropies. Lewis himself, normally the cosmopolitan type, spent a good part of the war years withdrawn, pursuing a Thoreauvian dream in Minnesota.

How do we account for this? Globally, surely his sympathies were not with the fascist aggressors, despite a pre-Pearl Harbor flirtation with the America First movement. On the occasions he did speak on the war, he called for a lasting, democratic peace. Nationally, although he usually adopted a damn-both-your-houses attitude toward politics, he spoke out in support of Franklin Roosevelt in his 1944 bid for reelection. Personally, his heart must have gone out to his son Wells, who served as an officer in the army and who was killed by a sniper in 1944. So why does his writing ignore the war or, at most, treat it halfheartedly? I argue that it has to do with his discomfort with the particular concept of community that was promulgated in American popular culture during the war, the pulling together that was encouraged to help ensure victory.

The various media of American popular culture mobilized after Pearl Harbor to help spread messages about the war and the United States' place in it. Movies, radio, theater, comics, and fiction worked together with speeches, editorials, and fireside

chats to help Americans understand why we were fighting, why our enemies had to be defeated, why our allies had to be supported, and what each person's place in the war effort should be. While entertaining us, popular culture reminded us not to waste food, gas, or rubber. It reminded us that loose lips sink ships. It reminded us of the cruelty of the Nazis and Imperial Japanese and of the way they were making other nations suffer. It reminded us that each of us—from fighting man to housewife on the home front to children planting Victory Gardens or collecting scrap—had a way to contribute to the successful waging of the war. Perhaps most importantly, it reminded us that, despite our differences of geography, ethnicity, religion, and class, we are nevertheless one nation. Our enemies would seek to divide us so as to conquer. In order to win, we needed to pull together, act as one, become a team, recognize our homogenous community.

One could argue (in fact, Sally Parry and I have argued) that American popular culture narrated and dramatized certain myths of the war so successfully that they have lived on in the popular mind as the truth of the war. And one of the most persistent of these myths is the myth of pulling-together. Despite plentiful historical evidence that the United States during the war years was a contentious place—not only politically but economically and, especially, racially—and that even in the armed forces oversized egos and petty rivalries drove military strategies and tactics, the myth of war-era America as a time of putting aside egos and selfishness, of forgetting prejudice and bigotry, of everyone coming together in one big community dedicated to winning the war lives on. If you don't believe me, check out Ken Burns's acclaimed PBS documentary, *The War*, in which the population's pulling together into a large American community is assumed.

I propose that it is this myth of community with which Lewis was uncomfortable, for two reasons. First, it was connected with a suppression of individualism that Lewis, in *It Can't Happen Here*, associated with fascism. War films from

————— Theater, Community, War *continued on page 5*

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the last issue.

Michael Barry
Orange, CA

Bert Dold
Clearwater, MN

James Nixon
Glasgow, Scotland

Dennis Dalman
Rice, MN

David Handelman
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

GLENWAY WESCOTT: ONE OF LEWIS'S CONTEMPORARIES OF THE 1920S

Steve Paragamian

Way back when (1974) I was introduced to the work of Glenway Wescott. The other history majors were reading involved stuff, and I chose *Wisconsin Death Trip* by Michael Lesey, an upbeat title if ever there was one. Lesey quoted Wescott at several points in his dour history of the northern Midwest, and piqued my interest.

Wescott was born in Wisconsin in 1901 and died in New Jersey in 1987. Coming from a well-to-do family, he studied at the University of Chicago, travelled in Europe, and wrote poetry, before turning his hand to fiction.

What appealed to me was the lyrical, sinuous prose Wescott used, set against a tragic background. In *The Grandmothers* (1927), a narrative of the Tower family, he takes us from their settlement in pre-Civil War Wisconsin into the 20th century, as they struggle with poverty, illness, and lost opportunities, hewing out lives for themselves in the wilderness. There is a Civil War veterans' reunion, where graybeards dance "to the frenzied tunes of the sixties," like "condemned men dancing in their chains." In one haunting passage, Wescott takes us through the Tower family album, photos of men and women framed by hair curls, each with a tale of loss. In the short story collection *Good-Bye Wisconsin* (1928), we read of a young girl who elopes with an older, taciturn, and ultimately deadly lover; of a young farm couple who burn their house and can't make the case for the insurance scheme; and of a murderess

who returns home after ten years, trying to marry and make a new life. For me, the intriguing one was "Prohibition," about an alcoholic farmer struggling through a fatal Wisconsin winter. The story resonated with me because Mom's family came from Richland Center, and my great-grandfather froze to death in 1904, returning from an evening of Christmas Wassail (I'm not sure exactly what Wassail is, but I think it's something I wanna stay away from). Wescott vividly portrays the drinkers lurching to the stables at closing time, through a tarnished, frigid, and silent white landscape. The ending is horrific, funny, and thought-provoking.

There are other stories, of course. He wrote about expatriates in Europe, and even one story about homosexuality, "A Visit to Priapus." Many of my conservative friends down here describe capitalism as "creative destruction"; Wescott and, I think, Lewis and Hamlin Garland, wrote about the darker side of capitalism, the destruction, where life isn't always a new web site or an award winning sales pitch. They wrote about good folks caught "under the lion's paw" (Garland), fading into the faded sepia photos of history, and as Lesey wrote in his preface to *Wisconsin Death Trip*, "can focus who I once was, what you might yet be, and what may have happened, all upon a single point of your imagination, and transform them like light focused by a lens on paper, from a lower form of energy to a higher." ✍

Theater, Community, War *continued from page 4* —

Casablanca to *Air Force* to *A Guy Named Joe* and dozens of others stressed that the individual, the lone wolf, the guy in it for himself, was a threat to the war effort. In all of these movies the character who wants to stand out, to be a hero, to assert his individuality must learn to be a member of the team, a cog in the machine, a person who conforms to the community. This particular narrative has its purposes, especially in the context of the military, where soldiers who follow orders are valued over free thinkers, but it's also problematic in that it works against an American myth of individuality, evident in our culture from Franklin's *Autobiography* to any Western, and in that mindless conformity and the suppression of individuality are also characteristics of fascism. In *It Can't Happen Here* one of Lewis's main complaints against fascism is the way it suppresses the independent individuality of thought and action in the American character, an individuality manifested most clearly in Doremus Jessup. And one of the reasons fascism

might come to America is that, while Americans may prize individuality, they are also suspicious of nonconformists: much of the opening sequence of the novel is narrated by the voice of community groupthink, which thoughtlessly shares clichéd values and dismisses as cranks anyone who doesn't.

This connects to what I imagine is the second reason Lewis was uncomfortable with the myth of community. In much of his work he had explored the nature of community and its effects on the individual. In *Main Street* the small town community can be a good thing: unlike the city, where one lives anonymously, in the small town there are people who know you and can look after you, provide a support system when you need it (well, some of the time—poor Bea Bjornstam). But the flip side of this is the surveillance, the never-ending nosiness that becomes judgment, which can beat down anyone who tries

————— Theater, Community, War *continued on page 6*

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to stand out from the community. In *Babbitt* this spirit of community as preserver of the ideological status quo is manifested in the Good Citizens' League. The GCL is committed to making sure everyone thinks and acts the same way—or else. Give them guns and they become the Minutemen in *It Can't Happen Here*. There were a few war-era filmmakers who saw the dangers of the myth of community: think of Preston Sturges's *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, where a whole community punishes a young girl for believing the myth of community too deeply, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*, where we see how easily a community can become a mob.

I'm interested here in two projects in which Lewis was involved that address in different ways these notions of community. In 1941, near the end of his sojourn in the theater, Lewis encountered *The Good Neighbor*, by advertising executive and first-time playwright Jack Levin. He was drawn to the play perhaps because it had a good part in it for his paramour, the young actress Marcella Powers, but also because of the way it turned much of the popular-culture machine's criticism of Nazi Germany back on the United States. He ended up backing the play to the tune of over \$25,000 and directed it as well. Its pre-Broadway booking in Baltimore, the playwright's home town, was successful, but New York reviewers and audiences were less kind—it closed after only one performance—perhaps convincing Lewis to return to the business of novel writing.

The Good Neighbor is set in an unnamed American city. Hannah, a Jewish matron, owns a secondhand store in an immigrant neighborhood. Her husband, a former soldier in the Russian army, suffers from severe diabetes. She interacts, sometimes frenetically, with numerous neighbors including a salesman who studied psychiatry in Germany, a police officer who has a Master's degree in ancient history, and a black prostitute whose mother was a friend of Hannah's. Hannah's delivery boy, Whitey, belongs to the protofascist Secret Order of the Cavaliers, "10 million strong in the USA." The Cavaliers' past Exalted Chancellor has been killed in a saloon, as they believe, by "a bloodthirsty Nazi rat!" The blame is placed on Luther, a teenage boy of German heritage who is mentally handicapped. Bessie, the prostitute, looks forward to seeing a white boy lynched as her cousin was.

Part of the message of the play is that it is important to see people as individuals rather than stereotyping them based on their racial or national heritage. The police officer tells Hannah that it's easy for the Cavaliers to blame Luther for the crime because, "Well, he's German, and some people think all Germans follow Hitler." Although the Cavaliers consider Luther a Nazi, the police officer calls Whitey, the delivery boy, a "tinhorn Nazi" because of his behavior. Luther's mother, Mrs.

Kurtmann, asks Hannah to hide her son. She says, "They want my boy to die because they hate that dog Hitler, and because they think we're still Germans. But we're against Hitler, too. We've lived here all our lives. This is *our* country. But you know what they did to us in 1918? They smashed our windows, they dumped filth in our parlor.... The day my brother was killed, in the American army, in France!" Heinrich Gollner, the German salesman, is also afraid of the Cavaliers: "They speak that they are against the Nazis, that they are against Hitler, but I tell you they ARE Nazis, They are Hitlers—little Hittlers [*sic*]."

The ending is not a happy one. Hannah, a braver soldier in the cause of justice than her sailor son Dave, knocks out Bessie so that she cannot snitch on Luther to the Cavaliers. She says, "A soldier I am, just like the others. I'm fighting for Mrs. Kurtmann and her son, and Bessie and her mother and her brother, they should have the right to live like *people*, they shouldn't have to be afraid." Eventually the Cavaliers break in anyway, find Luther, and shoot Hannah when she tries to protect him. The irony of a Jewish woman dying to save a German must have seemed very powerful to Levin and Lewis.

Whatever the play's shortcomings, narratively it does an interesting job of setting up audience expectations for a melting-pot story—people of different ethnicities and national backgrounds coming together in a community, perhaps to protect that community from some outside threat. However, the play then undercuts this setup in a disturbing way. A community is formed, but it's formed in response to the anticipated lynching of a scapegoat. Mrs. Kurtmann's memory of World War I reinforces the way American society likes to define itself against an Other, a demonized group against which we can hurl our righteously indignant hatred and do so in the name of patriotism. This characteristic of Americanism is manifested in the Cavaliers, a group that gains ownership of both the hatred and patriotism through intimidation, by making others, even those who might be tolerant or generous, afraid of seeming unpatriotic or un-American. The irony here, as in *It Can't Happen Here*, is that they have become what they claim to hate—fascists. As is often the case in Lewis's novels, the biggest threat to the ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom come not from outside our borders but from within ourselves.

In 1944 Lewis set off on a very different kind of theatrical adventure: he wrote a radio play, designed to support the war effort, called *Main Street Goes to War*. There's no evidence that the play was ever broadcast. The script begins with a character called only The Man from Main Street visiting New York City and telling his host about the many modest and day-to-day

————— Theater, Community, War *continued on page 8*

MAIN STREET ORIGINAL: ROBERG WINS ORIGINAL COPY OF SINCLAIR LEWIS'S *MAIN STREET*

Dave Simpkins
Sauk Centre Herald



Dan Roberg
with *Main Street*.

The Lewis door prize couldn't have gone to a better winner. Dan Roberg of St. Cloud got lucky at the Main Street to Eighth Street Celebration in St. Cloud by winning a first edition copy of Sinclair Lewis's best selling novel *Main Street*.

Roberg became interested in literature at Sauk Centre High School. "I had some good English teachers at Sauk Centre that taught the value of studying literature no matter what you do in life," said Roberg who majored in finance and works for Stearns Bank in Albany. "Good literature teaches you about people and places beyond yourself.

"Since I grew up in Sauk Centre I felt I should read the books of Sinclair Lewis. They spoke to me. They say so much about life in the 1920s and he did a good job of describing what life was like, from the countryside to the people and how they lived back then." Roberg is currently reading through the two biographies of Lewis and his 18 novels. "It's a long project but it's interesting to see where he was at and what impact his books had," added Roberg.

Main Street to Eighth Street was a month-long celebration centered around the repurposing of Claude Lewis's house near the campus of St. Cloud State University. The event included a home tour of the South Side including the Lewis Home, the Great River Regional Library in St. Cloud held four book readings, "The Wit & Wisdom of Sinclair Lewis," and a keynote address was given by Lewis scholar Sally Parry, Associate Dean at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. In addition, three films made of Lewis's novels *Dodsworth*, *Arrowsmith*, and the Disney adaptation of the children's book *Bongo the Bear* were shown.

The first edition book Roberg won is worth from \$500 to \$3,000 and possibly \$20,000. Roberg said the book is worth far more than any monetary value to him.

Dan is a true Lewis admirer. He wrote to Dave Simpkins

this summer. "I just had to share this with you. I had a wild idea to recreate a passage from Schorer's biography regarding what Sinclair and Irving Fisher did to celebrate the 4th in 1902:

Fisher and I spend the "4th" at Fairy Lake. We do not approve of such celebrations as those which are held all over the country...we took some lunch & some books and went way out on Long Point, on Fairy... After our lunch I read the Declaration of Independence & Fisher the Constitution of the U.S. That was all of our "celebration," yet methinks it was no less acceptable [to] the great Author of Independence than are the fire-works, toy cannons, horse races, potatoe races, fat-mens races; base-ball games; lemonade stands; merry-go-round, ect. ect. of the celebrations of others. (41)



Roberg reads at Fairy Lake on 4th July.

I rounded up my father, step-mother, aunt, and uncle and we all walked from the Boyhood Home out to Fairy Lake, read the Declaration of Independence, Constitution (with all amendments that were in effect in 1902), and the introduction and first section of the first chapter of *Main Street*, and walked back to the Boyhood Home. It was a wonderful occasion that we hope to repeat on future 4ths. Above is a picture of the shenanigans (yes, it was dreadfully hot). ☺

Theater, Community, War *continued from page 6*

things the people in his town, Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, do to support the war. We fade away from his voice and find ourselves in Gopher Prairie, in the bedroom of Dr. and Mrs. Will Kennicott. Lewis then takes us through an average day during the war, presenting several episodes and reintroducing us to many of his *Main Street* characters, twenty years after the action of the novel.

Will is awakened in the middle of the night by a call to drive to an outlying farm to operate on Barney Altbauer's wife. Will's son and medical partner Hugh is now in the Medical Corps as is the other local doctor, so Will, now sixty-seven, is treating their patients as well as his own. He gets home to breakfast in time to hear about his daughter Betty's plans for the day and her desire to learn parachute jumping. We follow Carol through her chores and errands, encountering other Gopher Prairie-ites who are doing little things for the war. The day ends with a big bond rally, after which Will finally gets to bed.

There are many ways in which the messages about the war effort are familiar to the point of being clichéd. Carol reminds the maid to save kitchen fat. (The maid! The servant shortage that befell much of the country must not have affected Gopher Prairie.) Will warns Betty not to waste tire rubber. Betty dances with servicemen whose train-transporters pass through town. Carol wrestles with her conscience over donating Hugh's rubber ducky to the rubber drive. (She does.) The family makes do with coffee and sugar rationing. All these activities are summed up when a nurse responds to one of Will's orders, saying, "You're such a bully. You ought to be in the war," and he responds, "I am." The point here is that it isn't only those in the military who are winning the war, but all the average people in average towns all across the country, doing little things that, taken together, add up to an enormous support for our war machine.

More interesting are two themes that, for Lewis, are uncharacteristically optimistic. The first is the repeated trope of businessmen doing their best to turn down business. When Carol asks Nat Hicks, the tailor, to make one of Will's suits last another year, he says, "I'm just as bad as all the other merchants in town—doing ourselves out of a lot of business—like Joe Tilton at the garage—chasing people right away from his own filling station and telling 'em to walk and save rubber." Carol says that this spirit of sacrifice is in fact "The religion of humanity." It's hard to accept any Lewis-created world where the businessmen think beyond the bottom line to the religion of humanity. But, as I hope to show shortly, this is more than an acquiescence to the formula of war-era propaganda.

The second optimistic theme is one Lewis might actually have believed: that the sacrifices people are making during

the war years might contribute to an improved postwar world. Will observes to Carol, "It's a funny new world we got, old lady. Think of an America that's quit wasting everything! I'm glad we lived to see it. We got to take some bitter medicine, but boy, what a prognosis!" Much of this optimism is based in the older generation's admiration of the young people, their idealism and eagerness. Interestingly, it was Carol's idealism and eagerness that made her an object of suspicion when she arrived in Gopher Prairie a generation earlier.

What's most interesting about the play, however, is the way it embraces the melting-pot myth that both *It Can't Happen Here* and *The Good Neighbor* critiqued. When Will has to perform an emergency appendectomy on Mrs. Altbauer, Barney, her German-American farmer husband objects that he can't afford to pay for an operation. Will tells him to buy "a couple of ten-dollar Victory bonds" instead. Barney replies,

You know, Doctor, I was born in the old country. People around here, all the Scandinavians, they think I'm nothing but an old Dutchman! Doctor—Doctor—I ain't a German now no more. I'm an American! Forty years I live here, clearing these fields, yanking out the stumps with an ox-team, building this house—building America! It's *my* America! I just wanted somebody should tell me what to do. You want I should buy bonds? I buy 'em!

Later, at the bond rally, we find out that Gopher Prairie's mayor is Otto Gross, as he describes himself, "a dumb platt-deutsch butcher." The town's representative to the state senate is Knute Oleson, who was born in Norway. The point is clear: no matter the country of your birth or your parent's birth, once you come to America, you are an American, a part of this country; your work helps to build the country, and, if you earn the respect of your fellow citizens, you can be elected to help lead the country. This implies a stark distinction with Nazi Germany, where the effort to purify the nation led to the exclusion, enslavement, and execution of people based on their nationality, race, or religion.

We can't help but wonder, however, what's happened to Lewis's distrust of communities? Has the joining together to win the war against fascism ameliorated the dangers of self-righteousness and groupthink? Probably not. But I think Lewis is doing more than adopting a formula and filling in the blanks, telling people, not what he believes, but what he thinks they want to hear in wartime. The fact that he has returned to Gopher Prairie, the setting for *Main Street*, is significant. We see a

————— Theater, Community, War *continued on page 10*

LEWIS AND THE JEWISH NOVEL

Last summer the Sinclair Lewis Society received a copy of a letter that Lewis wrote to the poet and critic Louis Untermeyer. It reads in part:

Thanks again for your interest in the possible Jew novel. Since I have seen you I have been caught up in a dramatization of "It Can't Happen Here" which will be produced by the Federal Theatre Project, and which will keep me up to my ears until October 20; then back to my present novel; then I shall give hectic thought to the Jews.

Lewis sleuth Fred Betz identified the context in Schorer's biography.

The idea of a play about anti-Semitism had been transformed into an idea for a novel about anti-Semitism. On their way to Montreal, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Untermeyer spent a night with the Lewises. They sat up until long past midnight, "and no less than five unwritten novels seemed to be brewing in the vat of 'Red's' imagination." They had hoped to get an early start next morning, but at breakfast, Lewis began to tell them about still another unwritten novel, this one to be about Jews. "What are they, what makes them what they are?" he asked. "Is it their warmth, their capacity for excitement, some kind of sublimated sensuality?" He talked on and on about this book, and the Untermeysers did not get away until after lunch. (623)

There is no record of Lewis pursuing this idea beyond the conversation he had with the Untermeysers. Louis Untermeyer, although not very well-known today, was an incredibly prolific writer of poetry, essays, and other nonfiction works, as well as an editor and translator. In 1961 he was named Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

Other follow-ups on this thread.

Tom Raynor: Although it didn't occur in the early thirties, MGM abandoned the film of *It Can't Happen Here* in February '36. Schorer recounts conflicting explanations (615-16). Will Hays of the Film Production Code Administration apparently feared "international complications and the displeasure of the Republican Party," although the Hays office denied any ban. MGM said that the project would have been too costly. Sam Goldwyn said there were "casting difficulties." (This from a studio whose tagline was "More stars than there are in heaven!") German and Italian sources alike applauded the decision, and the German Film Chamber called Lewis "a

full-blooded Communist." Schorer concludes that "the motive for stopping the film was probably less political than economic. Not only would this film have been banned in Germany and Italy and other foreign markets, but probably all Metro films would henceforth have been kept out of Germany and Italy."

Fred Betz: At the risk of appearing to be self-serving, may I refer you to my article "'HERE IS THE STORY THE MOVIES DARED NOT MAKE': The Contemporary Context and Reception Strategies of the *New York Post's* Serialization (1936) of *It Can't Happen Here*," *Midwestern Miscellany* 29 (Fall 2001): 29-43, esp. pp. 29-30 and p. 40, n. 3. The article is based on a paper given at the Sinclair Lewis Conference, July 12-14, 2000.

Charlie Pankenier: More than 10 years later, the Hollywood Jewish community is reported to have urged Zanuck/Fox not to make *Gentleman's Agreement*. Gregory Peck's agent advised him to refuse the leading role, and the film was somewhat controversial on its release. This may provide some retrospective context for the decisions made in 1936.

Ralph Goldstein: Here's an excerpt from an article on Yale Library's Judaica Collection website that refers to one of Lewis's early stories:

By 1887 there were 3,200 Jews in New Haven and a number of Orthodox shuls (synagogues), including B'nai Jacob, known as the Russian shul. The old downtown neighborhood (remembered as the Oak Street Ghetto) was poor but nourished deep family and spiritual ties. In 1917 (the year Samuel Campner, a Jew, became New Haven's mayor), Sinclair Lewis, a Yale graduate, published "Young Man Axelbrod." In one scene the main character visits New Haven's ghetto just after daybreak in late October: "Knute stared out into the street milkily lighted by wavering gas and the first feebleness of coming day; he gazed upon Kosher signs and advertisements in Russian letters, shawled women and bearded rabbis; and as he looked he gathered contentment which he could never lose."

Charles Pankenier: It was Fitzgerald who said "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Lewis possessed a sharp intellect, and I believe satirical ambivalence is evident in many of his characters, so he might have been able to reconcile (or finesse) his conflicted feelings

————— Lewis and the Jewish Novel *continued on page 16*

Theater, Community, War *continued from page 8*

small town that, in the novel, was insulated, chauvinistic, close-minded, penny-pinching, and selfish transformed because of the war into a community in the best sense of the word: a group of people who recognize their connection to people beyond the town limits, who are willing to make sacrifices large and small for a cause bigger than themselves, who, in short, are able, in response to a global emergency, to be better than they are. If it can happen here, of all places, Lewis might be saying, it can happen across the nation. It is also interesting that Lewis has returned to the characters of Will and Carol Kennicott. In *Main Street* much of the tension between Will and Carol is the result of their differing attitudes toward the world: Carol is a romantic and an idealist, while Will is mired in the mundane, checking the furnace and getting out the storm windows. In *Main Street*

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earned notoriety by scorning the humdrum ways of small-town culture. Despite his distaste for provincial communities, however, Sinclair (and his family) spent much time in the South Side, drawn by the kindness of Claude Lewis and the doctor's neighborhood friends.

Who was Claude Lewis, this brother of a world-famous author? What were his home and the South Side neighborhood really like in the early twentieth century? How did the South Side treat Sinclair Lewis, and how did Sinclair Lewis treat the South Side? Most importantly, what significance do Lewis House's new name and historic legacy hold for the community today?

AT HOME WITH DR. CLAUDE AND WILHELMINA LEWIS

The Dr. Claude and Wilhelmina Lewis residence sits at 724 Fourth Avenue South, on the corner of Fourth Avenue South and Eighth Street. Built in 1926, the house has been a landmark of St. Cloud's South Side for 86 years. The Lewis family figured prominently in the civic and social life of the city. Dr. Lewis had established a local medical practice in 1905, after graduating from Chicago's prestigious Rush Medical College. His fifty-year career earned admiration from patients and the regional medical community alike, in large part because of his efforts to encourage the development of the city's medical institutions. Lewis played a pivotal role in the foundation of the nursing school at St. Raphael's Hospital in 1908. Twenty years later, he worked with the Sisters of Saint Benedict toward the construction of the St. Cloud Hospital's Mississippi River facility.

Mrs. Lewis had her own medical credentials. Trained as a nurse, she worked for several years at Rush Hospital in Chicago, where she first met Claude Lewis. Wilhelmina volunteered with the American Red Cross during the Second World War and held

Goes to War, World War II has provided a means for them to synthesize their attitudes. As we have seen, the community's efforts for the war are mostly small, practical things, things Will can engage in naturally, but they are being done in support of an idealistic campaign to remake the world and make it fit for freedom, an ideal Carol can take to her heart. At last the husband and wife can work together instead of at cross-purposes.

Perhaps these war-years plays represent something of a synthesis in Lewis as well. He was enough of a cynic to recognize the dangers of community, especially the facile pulling-together promulgated by the pop culture of the time. But he was enough of a romantic too to see the possibilities community, especially outward-reaching, selfless community, could offer a world in crisis. ✍

an esteemed position in St. Cloud society. She was a member of St. Cloud's Reading Room Society and hosted many meetings and gatherings at her gracious South Side home.

What impressive gatherings they must have been. Lewis House's elegant design complemented its location in St. Cloud's premier residential district. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis chose the Tudor Revival style for their residence. The house was modeled on English homes of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This style was popular in the 1920s, when architects and their clients craved fanciful European looks. According to noted architectural historian Dr. William T. Morgan, "homes built during this era reveal a high degree of craftsmanship and choice of high quality materials." Dr. Lewis and his wife certainly spared no expense in the construction of their home. Costing an astronomical \$30,000, the new residence was the most expensive house built in St. Cloud in 1926. It was designed by St. Cloud architect Louis Pinault, also responsible for St. Cloud State University's Stewart Hall and Bishop Busch's residence (now the diocesan chancery) on Third Avenue South. When it was built, a *St. Cloud Daily Journal-Press* article hailed Lewis House's "English style," befitting its location in St. Cloud's traditionally British, Protestant neighborhood.

LITERARY CONNECTIONS

Were it just for its association with Dr. and Mrs. Lewis as well as its architectural merit, Lewis House would deserve recognition as a local landmark. But today the house is also an icon because of its connection to Claude Lewis's brother Sinclair, Nobel Prize-winning author of *Main Street*. Sinclair

————— *Main Street to Eighth Street continued on page 12*

**SINCLAIR LEWIS PANEL PRESENTED
AT THE AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**

Corinne Martin, a Sinclair Lewis scholar working on a doctorate at Ohio State University, organized and chaired a panel, “Feminine Figures and Scientific Discovery: Current Criticism in Sinclair Lewis Studies,” on behalf of the Sinclair Lewis Society for the 2012 American Literature Association Conference which was held in San Francisco in May. Below are the abstracts of the papers that were presented.

“SCIENTIFIC PROPERTIES: ARROWSMITH AND THE OWNERSHIP OF KNOWLEDGE”

BRIAN MATZKE, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Early in his novel *Arrowsmith*, Sinclair Lewis describes his eponymous protagonist’s schooling at the fictional Winnemac University: “It is not a snobbish rich-man’s college, devoted to leisurely nonsense. It is the property of the people of the state.” This depiction of Winnemac University as a school with a commitment to public education establishes a recurrent tension in the novel between knowledge production as a public good and knowledge production as private property. Repeatedly, Martin Arrowsmith attempts to establish control, and indeed, ownership, over his intellectual labor, in contexts where everyday life, university bureaucracies, and even scientific ethics intrude on his research. This paper traces that tension, particularly as it manifests in Arrowsmith’s development of a bacteriophage, a virus whose most salient property is its ability to destroy bacteria.

The process, by which a natural property becomes the property of its discoverer, and in turn “public” property, was of serious concern both to Lewis and to his collaborator, the biologist Paul de Kruif. The same year that *Arrowsmith* was published, the US Patent Office awarded the first patent for generic chemical structures, paving the way for much of the work done by the modern pharmaceutical industry. In *Arrowsmith*, as in de Kruif’s nonfiction book, *Microbe Hunters*, the figure of the romantic scientist is deployed in implicit contrast to the increasingly privatized “snobbish rich-man’s” model of scientific discovery emerging in many industries.

“USE HER EYES, USE HER VOICE, USE HER SOUL: GENDERED CONS AND THE ECONOMICS OF EVANGELISM IN *ELMER GANTRY*”

MATTHEW SEYBOLD, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE

Criticism of Sinclair Lewis’s *Elmer Gantry* has long focused upon the hypocritical hucksterism of the “eloquently drunk” protagonist, who belongs to a long line of wayward Protestant preachers in American literature, including Arthur Dimmesdale, Theron Ware, Asa Griffith, and Hazel Motes. But, unlike these analogues, who are uniformly undone by the sinful allure of secular sirens, Gantry is seduced *into* the church, most notably by a fellow Protestant performance artist, Sharon Falconer. My paper focuses upon how Falconer, even more than Gantry, is a descendent of a frontier evangelism, which is inextricable from the American archetype of the confidence-game. Falconer inherits not only the “cash-value” theology of itinerant antebellum ministries, many of which lit the day with hellfire jeremiads only to descend at night into Dionysian excess and leave town the next morning with both financial and social capital, she also embraces another paradigmatic con, that of quackery, in the form of faithhealing. Lewis demonstrates repeatedly how Falconer’s femininity allows her to charm and beguile to an extent that even the uber-cunning and charismatic Gantry cannot get away with, but her inability to deceive herself as he does, proves to be her fatal flaw, a flaw which Lewis also suggests is gendered.

““THINK WHAT THE BABY WILL SEE’: FEMININE DESIRE AND FUTURITY IN *MAIN STREET*”

CORINNE MARTIN, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

For Sinclair Lewis’s 1920 novel, *Main Street*, the American New Woman represents both a critique of mainstream American culture and the ultimate triumph of that culture. Carol’s desires are fueled by fad and fashion: the book seems to be suggesting that the phenomena of the New Woman can’t outlast the monolith of American culture, American heteropatriarchal morality. The culture industry creates desires in Carol Kennicott that it cannot possibly fulfill. Carol desires “beauty and strangeness” that is not found in the everyday life of the American small town. But even Carol’s search for something more in the Washington, DC, of the World War I moment does not result in the fulfillment of her desires. When Carol returns to Gopher Prairie after the war, she sees the “shadow of her desires” in the streets—almost as if her “rebellion” leaves an imprint for future generations to fill. Lewis’s novel seems ultimately unconvinced of the power of the New Woman to shake

———— Sinclair Lewis Panel Presented *continued on page 17*

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Lewis made a name for himself criticizing the close-mindedness he felt marked American society, especially in small towns.

The author was born on February 7, 1885, to Dr. E. J. and Emma Lewis. Of New England stock, the couple had recently moved to Sauk Centre, Minnesota, a pioneer town with a population of 1,200. Young Sinclair had two elder brothers: Fred, born in 1875, and Claude, born in 1878. From an early age, Sinclair showed the signs of great intellect and biting cynicism that became his trademarks. After graduation from high school, Lewis enrolled at Yale University and pursued a career in journalism and publishing. He soon began to write novels that garnered both acclaim and criticism for his portrayal of American culture.

Lewis, whose bookish nature and cultural interests had set him apart in Sauk Centre, drew on childhood memories when writing some of his novels. Works such as *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Dodsworth*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Elmer Gantry* earned Lewis a reputation as one of the most perceptive social observers of his era. His commentary extended beyond criticism of provincial areas to issues as wide-ranging as racism and women's rights.

Unable to content himself in any one place for long, Lewis continually traveled around the country and world. Despite his fame, wealth, and glamorous lifestyle, the author never escaped the disenchantment of his youth. Lewis received the most acclaim for novels that exposed American society's shortcomings, with which he had become familiar in his early years. Those novels won him international recognition, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930.

Residents of St. Cloud's stylish South Side were eager to associate themselves with the cultural prominence of Sinclair Lewis and his family. Perhaps they secretly hoped that connections to the famous author would enhance their own status. Dr. and Mrs. Claude Lewis included their neighbors in social functions held during visits Sinclair and his family made to St. Cloud.

But ingratiating Sinclair Lewis into South Side society posed risks, as his brother and sister-in-law learned on several occasions. Just because Sinclair was famous did not mean he was polite. Wilhelmina Lewis enjoyed bringing the famous author to St. Cloud to lecture to various social groups, though she always feared what snide comments the cynic might slip into his remarks. If elder brother Claude was the ideal gentleman, younger brother Sinclair's flippancy toward the airs of wealthy small-town residents found expression at South Side social functions. An intoxicated Sinclair would embarrass his brother with long-winded speeches at the dinner table. On one occasion, a very drunk Sinclair Lewis stumbled in late to a dinner party (thrown in his honor) at the South Side home

of physician Dr. C. F. Brigham, Sr. Lewis rested his feet on the dining room table before lashing out at his would-be dinner companions. Astonished guests bid a premature farewell to a disgusted Mrs. Brigham. Lewis never again entered the Brigham house. We may be sure that Dr. Lewis chastised Sinclair for this and other embarrassing incidents. Rational and coolheaded Claude was one of the few people in a position to challenge the world-famous author's unruly behaviors. Lewis House was the scene of frequent arguments during Sinclair's visits.

Whatever his dinner party antics, Sinclair Lewis was an international celebrity. His cultural prominence meant that many straitlaced South Side ladies (not including Mrs. Brigham) were willing to overlook Lewis's social blunders in order to associate themselves with his fame. This was particularly the case when the author himself was not present to upset South Side social standards. In 1927, Sinclair Lewis's wife and son, Wells, made a trip from their home in New York to Minnesota. (Sinclair was away in Europe.) Much to the delight of South Side society, the noted author's relations spent several nights with Dr. and Mrs. Lewis at their Fourth Avenue home. A July 8, 1927 *St. Cloud Daily Journal-Press* article described the reception the Lewis family received. "In compliment to Mrs. Sinclair Lewis of New York City, Mrs. C. B. Lewis entertained at an afternoon tea yesterday at her home [at] 724 Fourth Avenue South. Hours were from three to six during which time seventy friends called." Wilhelmina Lewis stationed various society ladies in different rooms of her house to manage the day's festivities. No doubt the friends to whom Wilhelmina Lewis assigned these special duties took it as a mark of honor to assist in welcoming the famous visitors.

It was one thing for the South Side to forgive Sinclair Lewis's personal rudeness. It was quite another for them to honor Lewis and his family despite the salvos he hurled against Midwestern society in his novels. Had the women who attended Wilhelmina Lewis's 1927 tea ever read *Main Street*, Lewis's most famous book? Lewis sometimes gave harsh treatment to the main character of that novel, Carol Kennicott. Wife of an affluent Minnesota doctor, Mrs. Kennicott attempts to bolster her self-importance by bringing high culture to her small-town home of Gopher Prairie. With her social ambitions and civic projects, Mrs. Kennicott shared much in common with many South Side ladies. Yet those same ladies flocked to Dr. Lewis's house when Sinclair (or, in July 1927, his family) was in town. How could this be?

South Side residents must not have viewed themselves—

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their community — as reminiscent of *Main Street*'s Carol Kennicott, or her fictional home of Gopher Prairie. St. Cloud was larger than Gopher Prairie as Sinclair Lewis had portrayed it. Many South Side residents were wealthy, educated, and well traveled. Perhaps Dr. Lewis's South Side neighbors felt they had more in common with glamorous Sinclair Lewis than with residents of the small towns he ridiculed. It seems unlikely, however, that Lewis, who rubbed shoulders with the world's great artists and intellectuals, would have agreed. We can only imagine what Sinclair would have thought of the July 1927 tea party his sister-in-law hosted for his wife and son, had he been present to enjoy the cooing of Dr. Lewis's awestruck neighbors!

CONTRASTING LIFESTYLES: CLAUDE AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

It is unsurprising that Sinclair failed to join his wife and son on their Minnesota excursion. He frequently spent many years as far away from Stearns County — the proverbial "Main Street" — as possible, before returning to Minnesota with an idea for a story set in his home state. But then he would vanish again as quickly as he had arrived, forever bouncing back and forth between the Midwest and the wider world. Even in Europe's greatest cities, Sinclair was conflicted and lonely.

Dr. Claude Lewis's career lacked the glitz and glamour of his brother's. But the longtime St. Cloud resident possessed some of Sinclair's best characteristics (including bold vision and great intellect), combined with the down-to-earth practicality one might expect from a seasoned medical professional. This meant that Claude Lewis had little trouble carving out a pleasant life for himself, unlike his famous brother. While Sinclair probably never could have found happiness in small-town St. Cloud, Claude did so quite naturally. Like his brother Sinclair, Claude was able to recognize challenges faced by towns in the Midwest. Unlike his brother, he *stayed* in the Midwest to address those challenges. The significance of Lewis's efforts at growing St. Cloud's medical institutions to meet the needs of the city and region ought to be appreciated today.

Dr. Lewis's positive spirit and ambitious vision made him a natural leader in trying times. Sister Julitta Hoppe, O.S.B., served as administrator of St. Raphael's Hospital from 1923 to 1929. For years she had worked closely with Dr. Lewis, whom she respected and admired. Sister Julitta remembered that, in 1905 (very shortly after his arrival in St. Cloud), Dr. Lewis expressed dissatisfaction with the fourth floor of St. Raphael's. While the rest of the hospital was constructed of brick, the fourth floor was made of wood. "The top floor was unusable as it was too cold in winter and too hot in summer,"

Sister Julitta explained. Dr. Lewis "made the remark to the Sisters that they should all work together while they were still young to make money to rebuild the top floor of brick so that it could be used."

On October 10, 1905, not long after Dr. Lewis made this comment, St. Raphael's wooden fourth floor caught fire, destroying the floor and damaging the entire building. Dr. Lewis helped the Sisters keep their spirits up in these difficult times. According to Sister Julitta, "Dr. Lewis...remarked, 'Well, Sisters, we are still young and we aren't rich yet, but we'll rebuild anyway!' Following the fire, the patients had been taken to St. Joseph's Home for the Aged...and to private homes in St. Cloud," Sister Julitta continued. "Dr. Lewis and one of the Sisters made rounds to the homes to dress and care



Claude Lewis (far left) and Sinclair Lewis (second from right), 1949.

for the patients."

Dr. Lewis had been instrumental in founding St. Raphael's Training School for Nurses, later known as the St. Cloud Hospital School of Nursing. The school educated nearly 2,700 nurses in the 79 years of its operation (between 1908 and 1987). In an era when few career paths were readily available to women, the nursing school provided a local option for female professional education. One hundred-five-year-old Lidwina (Laddie) Hennen Kray, now of Sauk Rapids, enrolled at St. Raphael's Training School in 1928. Kray remembers that the hospital's doctors — including Claude Lewis — also taught student nurses as part of their duties. The students, in turn, began work at the hospital very early in their course of study. While "we student nurses didn't have much to do with the doctors," Kray notes that Dr. Lewis "was very personable. I got along with him fine." Kray became acquainted with Lewis's kind and observant nature. "This one day, there was a snow storm,

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and my home was in Richmond,” Kray recalls. Dr. Lewis was walking down the hallway with a nursing supervisor. “He was saying to her, ‘I wonder if that Hennen girl got in from Rich-



Claude and Mary Lewis’s grandchildren in front of the Lewis House, St. Cloud: (from left to right) Lewis Agrell, Bradford Lewis, Jeff Agrell, and Mary Stroeing.

mond?” Kray remembers. “I said, ‘Yes doctor, I’m walking right in back of you!’ He said, ‘I knew you would make it!’”

Dr. Lewis, a Presbyterian, was highly respected by the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict, who owned and operated the hospital in St. Cloud. As a physician who kept abreast of the latest advancements in medical technology and treatment, he could offer the Sisters guidance in their efforts to provide state-of-the-art medical care to the region. It was Claude Lewis, not a Sister, who in 1925 announced plans for construction of the St. Cloud Hospital on the Mississippi River. The large and technologically advanced new hospital established St. Cloud’s reputation as the region’s medical hub. It has served the area ever since. Dr. Lewis served as chief of staff at St. Raphael’s Hospital from 1921–1923. He held the same position at St. Cloud Hospital from 1932–1933 and 1938–1939. Lewis was respected as an efficient but caring leader, paying attention to large-scale projects as well as minute details of patient comfort and care.

Dr. and Mrs. Lewis were well known to many important people in the medical community and beyond. But they cultivated friendships with more than just civic leaders and society matrons. Indeed, their sense of community spirit, which shaped Dr. Lewis’s lasting professional achievements, embraced even the youngest South Side residents. One might assume that old-fashioned Lewis House would have seemed scary to kids growing up in the 1940s. But the house was a favorite place for Bill Riggs and his brother, Bob. The two youngsters, who lived next door to the Lewis House, got along great with the doctor and his wife. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis went out of their way to make Bill and his brother feel welcome in their home. Mrs.

Lewis, whom Bill remembers as “very motherly,” always had homemade cookies for the boys. The observant medical professionals even made sure the kids stayed hydrated while playing outside. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis “had a Culligan water cooler that [they] could have had in the kitchen, but [they] left it out on the porch, and the Riggs boys could help themselves! We loved Dr. Lewis,” Bill Riggs remembers.

Dr. and Mrs. Lewis enjoyed a happy marriage. In 1942, the couple entertained a group of friends in their home to celebrate their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. After dinner, guests were treated to a “unique surprise entertainment” organized by Lewis friend Allen Atwood. Atwood, a prominent St. Cloud attorney, transformed Lewis House into a courtroom and put the modern condition of marriage on trial. “Couple after couple took the ‘witness stand’ to be quizzed for some time by Attorney Atwood about their courtship days, whether their marriage was a success or failure, to name the worst fault of their spouse, what are the requirements for a happy marriage, etc., etc.,” a subsequent newspaper article reported. After the trial, the gathering declared unanimously that Dr. and Mrs. Lewis had the best answers to Atwood’s interrogations.

Despite differences in their temperaments and lifestyles, not to mention their frequent altercations, Claude and Sinclair Lewis enjoyed a close relationship throughout their lives. Perhaps Claude felt a sense of fraternal responsibility to rein in his fiery younger brother. As a physician, Claude may very well have looked at Sinclair as one of his neediest “patients,” requiring frequent advice and even a stern word or two. While it would be difficult for many of us to be known as the sibling of a celebrity, Claude was likely familiar enough with Sinclair’s personal demons not to envy his brother’s lifestyle. What is certain is that Claude cared deeply for Sinclair and, when the author behaved himself, enjoyed his company. Like his famous brother, Claude relished travel. Their relationship culminated in Claude’s partial retirement, when the two adventurers undertook a string of trips together. The pair traveled throughout most of Europe, including Scandinavia and the Mediterranean. “Dr. Lewis wrote extensive descriptions of his travels and gave many colorful lectures about the countries he had visited,” reported the *St. Cloud Daily Times*.

But Dr. Lewis’s legacy did not rest on his exotic journeys around the world. Rather, it was his staying power in St. Cloud that made him a community institution by the mid-twentieth century. The sheer longevity of his local medical practice, combined with his stellar track record, made Dr. Lewis as central a feature of the St. Cloud cityscape as the hospital building he

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had helped to construct. A newspaper article published after his death in 1957 attested to that. “Not too long ago, Dr. C. B. Lewis died. And with him went an era,” the article began. “It was the period of the frank, outspoken, hard working practitioners who [were] unaided by antibiotics, miracle drugs, and modern conveniences.” Claude Lewis symbolized a hardy, “pioneer” era in the life of the city, when a doctor’s reliability and trustworthiness counted for everything.

Sinclair Lewis had died six years before his elder brother Claude. If Claude’s memory inspired feelings of gratitude for the guidance he provided to St. Cloud’s medical community, the passing of Sinclair had sparked international speculation about the author’s tumultuous final days. All the complexities that had shaped Sinclair Lewis’s greatest works bubbled to the surface in his later years. “Sinclair Lewis, as I knew him during his last year, was a restless, lonely man, constantly looking for something he couldn’t find, or, if he found it, no longer wanting it,” wrote a Lewis confidante for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1951. Writing a decade before Sinclair Lewis’s death, novelist Sherwood Anderson spelled out a key feature of Lewis’s personality. “Here is a man writing who, wanting passionately to love the life about him, cannot bring himself to do so.”

Sinclair Lewis’s cynicism left the world with novels that shaped perceptions of early twentieth-century American life. But that same critical nature prevented the author from finding personal happiness. News of Claude Lewis’s death may not have made the *Saturday Evening Post*, as had his brother’s. But Dr. Lewis enjoyed the inner peace and fulfillment that had always evaded his brilliant relation. This contentment is indicated by the strong networks of friendship Dr. Lewis and his wife built in the South Side—and the entire St. Cloud community. It is little wonder that Sinclair Lewis, who had the world at his feet, felt drawn to the South Side. It was one of the few places where the lonely wanderer could enjoy the comfort of family in a close-knit community. “Sinclair Lewis struggled to turn his back on the Midwest,” wrote scholar John Koblas. “Somehow, he always returned to his native soil.” It was soil that Claude Lewis never left behind.

A NEW NAME FOR AN OLD HOUSE

Today, Lewis House stands as a quiet reminder of the influential family who lived in the home, and their famous relation who visited them there. The building was one of many historic homes absorbed into the St. Cloud State University campus between the 1940s and 1980s. Since 1973, the structure has been home to the St. Cloud State University Foundation and Alumni Relations offices.

Craig Wruck, St. Cloud State University Vice President for University Advancement, has an office in Lewis House’s sun porch. From there, he enjoys views of the St. Cloud State campus, Barden Park, and the South Side neighborhood. “From my office I can see the university’s library, the park, as well as many historic South Side homes,” Wruck commented. “This reminds me every day of the important history in this part of town, and just how deeply rooted the relationships are between the neighborhood’s old families, including the Lewises, and the university.” The association that St. Cloud State shares with the Lewis family is a point of pride for Wruck, and for the entire university community. “Dr. and Mrs. Lewis were certainly models of professional commitment, civic responsibility, and South Side hospitality,” Wruck noted. “Moreover, we are fortunate to have an historic space associated with the life of Sinclair Lewis on our campus.”

Richard Kelly is a South Side resident, St. Cloud State University Alumni Association board member, president of the St. Cloud Historical and Neighborhood Preservation Association, and chair of the St. Cloud Neighborhood Coalition. He agrees with Wruck about Lewis House’s new name. “Renaming Lewis House highlights the historic connections between the campus and the community,” Kelly observed. “Higher education, now in the form of St. Cloud State, has been a part of the South Side neighborhood since 1869. The South Side is closely and firmly identified with St. Cloud State. Lewis House’s renaming shows that the school is a good neighbor, and appreciates other good neighbors who created our community, such as the Lewis family.”

In September 2011, a St. Cloud State University maintenance worker climbed a tall ladder that leaned against Lewis House’s façade to dislodge letters that spelled out the word “Alumni” on the front of the building. He replaced them with letters spelling out the surname of the prominent St. Cloud citizens who built the house over eight decades before. Little else changed that day. Business went on as usual for university employees at work inside Lewis House. But with its new name and increasing fame as an important historic site, Dr. Lewis’s front door will surely attract more than a few visitors curious to peek into St. Cloud’s medical and literary past.

Special thanks to Patti Lewis, Sinclair Lewis Foundation volunteer and Lewis family member; Mary Mathews, South Side neighborhood resident; Mary Shaffer, St. Cloud Hospital Archivist; and Dr. Sally Parry, Sinclair Lewis scholar and Associate Dean at Illinois State University, for reviewing this article. Their assistance was essential at every step of this project. (Any errors, however, remain my own.) ✍

Sugar House *continued from page 3*

think the history should be preserved and saved. Otherwise, it gets lost,” Butler said.

The sugar house was long ago converted into a living space with an addition and was most recently occupied by Helen Kaman, a part-time Barnard resident who died in 2010. Kaman had been a close friend of Butler, with an equal fervor for the town’s history. Butler, knowing that her friend wanted to preserve this piece of Lewis’s legacy, approached Kaman’s family about a plan to relocate the sugar house, sans the addition, to a more prominent spot on the town common.



Lewis’s sugar house, Barnard, Vermont.

“Barbara was able to come up with the idea of finding the people who could move it and restore it and keep it for its historical value, which we knew would make her so happy, that it would be kept alive that way,” said Kaman’s daughter Beanie Kaman, of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Moving any structure is a costly effort, in both time and dollars; Aikens estimated that it will cost \$7,500 to relocate the sugar house to the Thompson Common, and more money will be required to maintain the sugar house once it’s in its new home. The Barnard Historical Society shied away from

funding the endeavor due to the anticipated cost, but the project has received a major boost from John Noffo-Kahn, a part-time Barnard resident who has promised to match each donation for the project. A local builder, Jim Mills, has offered to move the structure. “It’s going to be a money pit, there’s no question about it,” said Aikens. “But the thing is, it’s history, and significant history.”

After seeing an advertisement in the *New York Times*, Lewis purchased the 300 acres in Barnard for \$10,000 in the late 1920s, shortly after he married Thompson, who had wanted to live in a place where she could enjoy “frosty mornings.”

Lewis himself was a wanderer, traveling frequently to New York and to Europe, but there was something that drew him to a small town in Vermont. He didn’t stay the rest of his life, but the time that he did spend in Barnard is what matters to the town’s historians. “Here is a man (who) could live anywhere: the French Riviera, the Swiss Alps. But he chose to live in Barnard,” Aikens said.

Donations for the sugar house project may be sent to the Barnard Historical Society, P.O. Box 124, Barnard, VT 05031. Checks should be written to the Barnard Silver Lake Association/Sinclair Lewis Museum Committee. ✍

Lewis and the Jewish Novel *continued from page 9*

about labor leader(s), as well. I agree with Jim Hutchisson that the subject did not lend itself to Lewis’s writing style. And I agree with Susan O’Brien: Lewis was a keen judge of his own writing and faced an unpalatable choice: bring all of his satirical talents to bear and risk collateral damage to the labor movement, or be reduced to pamphleteering on its behalf (see *It Can’t Happen Here*, a work, Schorer tells us, of which Lewis did not think very highly). Whether by inaction or conscious decision, he chose to do neither, perhaps wisely.

Sally Parry: “Young Man Axelbrod” is definitely one of Lewis’s best short stories. Axelbrod is a self-taught scholar, an autodidact (love that word) who sees Yale as his holy grail. It doesn’t live up to his expectations—except for one fabulous night. It’s reprinted in *Go East, Young Man: Sinclair Lewis on Class in America*, a Signet Classic book.

Bill Jennings, Australia: I re-read “Young Man Axelbrod” recently in a US anthology. What a sad, sad story but uplifting at the end. I’ve read nearly all of Lewis’s novels; “gems” like this story, though, are more evidence of why he earned the Nobel. I appreciated reading the letters on the proposed Lewis “Jewish novel.” Most of your correspondents are male. I’ve liked Lewis’s writings since discovering them 40 years ago. My wife, also a retired English teacher, independent-minded in her reading, has read Lewis’s main novels. She recognised their narrative skill and the intellect and ideas behind them, but he’s not her favourite author. (I have the same difficulty in having her read Richard Dawkins!) She succeeds, however, in having me read a lot of her authors. Does Lewis, though, have more appeal to male rather than female readers? In your case it’s clearly not so but an idea to think about. ✍

IN MEMORIAM: KIRK SYMMES AND BILLIE FRANNEY

Kirk Symmes, a long-time member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, died March 2012. He was a proud graduate of Yale University and at the 2005 Lewis conference presented on Lewis as “Historian of the ’20’s; Prophet of the 2000’s.”

Billie Franey, daughter of Judge Mark Nolan, died July 2012 at her home in White Bear Lake. She provided invaluable help to Susan O’Brien who delivered a presentation on Judge Nolan at the 2010 Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre, which was subsequently published as “Mark Nolan and *Cass Timberlane*” in the spring 2011 *Sinclair Lewis Society*

Newsletter. Mrs. Franey and several other relatives of Judge Nolan attended the presentation. Susan writes, “Thank you both again for your considerable help with the Judge Nolan presentation. As is obvious now, if Sally had not suggested it two years ago, it never would have happened; I could not have done it without Billie’s consistent and generous support, including direct access to much family information. Billie became a friend, and was extremely pleased with the paper and article. She continued to express gratitude through early this year. As part of Christmas 2011, Billie sent copies to many members of her family in the US and England.” ✍

Sinclair Lewis Panel Presented *continued from page 11*

up American society: Main Street ends not with Carol’s speech about fighting the good fight, but with Kennicott’s quotidian question about where they left the screwdriver. However, the fact that Carol’s second baby is a girl means something about the generations of women to follow. When Carol wonders, “Think what the baby will see and meddle with before she dies

in the year 2000,” we locate the utopian impulse of Carol’s desires not in the dead-end of the post-World War I moment, but in the future signaled by Carol’s female child. This paper discusses the feminist project of books like *Main Street* that suggest utopian alternatives to the present in female desire, particularly in the prospect of future female bodies/energies. ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Sally Parry was interviewed by the California Council for the Humanities for their Searching for Democracy 2012 initiative. Both a short and long version of the interview is available at <http://www.calhum.org/search/results/33bd8cf837168591bcb0ff7533d3bf3e/>.

She talks about California Reads selected book *It Can’t Happen Here*, written by Sinclair Lewis during the Great Depression and published in 1935. *It Can’t Happen Here* tells the tale of how American voters are manipulated by a presidential candidate who rises to power during tough economic times and creates a fascist regime. This underappreciated classic by one of America’s greatest novelists, as relevant today as ever, imagines a chillingly undemocratic America and reminds us

of the fragility of our democratic institutions. The Council has created a reading guide for students and teachers.

“I wish that the book seemed cartoonish and old-fashioned and sort of a historical curiosity,” says Parry. On the contrary, “In some ways, the novel is a cautionary tale about what happens when citizens do not take their part in a democracy.”

Look for interviews with the other California Reads authors and find out more about Searching for Democracy at their website.

Peter Kurth’s biography of Dorothy Thompson, *American Cassandra*, has been reissued in eBook by Plunkett Lake Press at <http://plunkettlakepress.com/ac.html>.

The opera of *Elmer Gantry* won two Grammys this year. Robert Aldridge, chair of the music department at Montclair

State in New Jersey, and Herschel Garfein, professor of music at New York University, took home two awards, for best classical composition and best engineered classical recording. They thanked MacIntosh and Otis, the literary agents for Sinclair Lewis, “who entrusted us with this great American novel.” There are clips from the opera itself that you can Google on YouTube.

The opera debuted in 2007 at the Nashville Opera, and made its New York area debut at Montclair State’s Kasser Theater in 2008. The *New York Times* called it an “intoxicating experience: a new American work that set out to honor both its source material (the great Sinclair Lewis satire of evangelism) and its new medium.”

Both awards were for a live recording of the opera *Elmer Gantry*, performed by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and that city’s Florentine Opera Chorus. William Boggs, artistic director of Opera Columbus, conducted the performance, which was released last year on CD. William Florescu, former Columbus Light Opera general director, produced the CD as general director of the Florentine Opera.

Minnesota Reflections, a website that is under the auspices of the Minnesota Digital Library, has many photos of buildings, manuscripts, and texts connected to Sinclair Lewis. It can be found at <http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/search/searchterm/sinclair%20lewis/order/title>.

In “How Highbrows Killed Culture” in the April 2012 issue of *Commentary*, Fred Siegel notes that “It is one of the foundational myths of contemporary liberalism: the idea that American culture in the 1950s was not only stifling in its banality but a subtle form of fascism that constituted a danger to the Republic.... Throughout the opening decades of the 20th century, American liberals engaged in a spirited critique of Americanism, a condition they understood as the pursuit of mass prosperity by an energetic but crude, grasping people chasing their private ambitions without the benefit of a clerisy to guide them.... This critique gave rise to the ferment of the 1920s, described by the literary critic Malcolm Cowley as the ‘exciting years...when...the young intellectuals seized power in the literary world almost like the Bolsheviks in Russia.’ The writers Cowley referred to—Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and Waldo Frank especially—had ‘a vague belief in aristocracy’ and a sense that they were being ‘oppressed’ by the culture of Main Street. But they believed America could be rescued from the pits of its popular culture by secular priests of sufficient insight to redeem the country from

the depredations of the mass culture produced by democracy and capitalism. They were championed not only by leftists such as Cowley, but also by Nietzscheans such as H. L. Mencken, the critic and editor whom Walter Lippmann described in 1926 as ‘the most powerful influence on this whole generation of educated people’ who famously mocked the hapless ‘herd,’ ‘the imbeciles,’ the ‘booboisie,’ all of whom he deemed the ‘peasantry’ that blighted American cultural life....

“America’s failing was its ‘lack of an intellectual aristocracy...secure in its position and authority’ so that it could constrain people from ‘thinking and acting...like the characters in a novel by Sinclair Lewis,’ a man whose novels offered a stinging portrait of the stifling conformity of middle-class bourgeois life.”

WCCO-TV came to Sauk Centre to film a documentary about Sinclair Lewis and his Sauk Centre in May. The focus was on *Main Street* and how it was received by the citizens of Sauk Centre during the 1920s and now. Pat Lewis and Joyce Lyng were among those interviewed.

Entitled “Sinclair Lewis: Life to the Max,” it can be found at the following link: <http://youtu.be/qJJHJAuwnjQ>.

Maurice Sagoff’s shrinklit version of *Babbitt* was scanned for Google Books. It is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/4xpj7bj> and is very funny.

Roger Miller writes, “I just read the latest Sinclair Lewis newsletter with all of the content about *It Can’t Happen Here*. Immediately after that I read the June 4 & 11 issue of the *New Yorker* and was struck by this comment by the late novelist Anthony Burgess in an essay he wrote (in 1973) about his novel *A Clockwork Orange*.”

“It is significant that the nightmare books of our age have not been about new Draculas and Franksteins but about what may be termed dystopias. ...Sinclair Lewis, in *It Can’t Happen Here*—a novel curiously neglected—presents an America that becomes fascist, and the quality of the fascism is as American as apple pie. The wise-cracking homespun Will Rogers-like President uses the provisions of a constitution created by Jeffersonian optimists to create a despotism which, to the unthinking majority, at first looks like plain common sense. The trouncing of long-haired intellectuals and shrill anarchists always appeals to the average man, although it may really mean the trouncing of liberal thought (the American Constitution was the work of long-haired intellectuals) and the elimination of political dissidence.”

2012 is the 100th anniversary of *Hike and the Aeroplane*, Lewis's first novel, written under the pen name of Tom Graham.

WEB NOTES

Susan O'Brien reports: Sinclair Lewis appeared today (Feb. 26, 2012) on TCM in the Warner Brothers short documentary, *Cavalcade of Academy Awards*, as he presented one of the 1939 Oscars. "He was handsomely turned out in a very formal tuxedo and gave a short but eloquent speech of acceptance for Sidney Howard's Adapted Screenplay, *Gone with the Wind*. Howard died on his Massachusetts farm in a tractor accident in 1939 so was receiving the award posthumously. Howard also wrote the screenplays for *Arrowsmith* and *Dodsworth*.

"Also in this documentary, Fay Bainter presented the award for best supporting actress to Hattie McDaniel, the first such award given to an African American actor, for *Gone with the Wind*. Ms. Bainter played Fran in the original Broadway version of *Dodsworth*, and was a very dignified and talented actress who helped make that play a big success.

"I was taken by how well Lewis gave his speech. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful, to see him at this event and hear his voice, and I hope others caught it."

I have a strange request. I think I remember reading a reference to a man named Martin Mahoney of Tonkawa, OK, in one of Sinclair Lewis's books, maybe *Main Street*?—On the Kennicott's trip.... Can you confirm this is correct? My husband's grandfather owned the Mahoney Hse & Garage/Livery in Tonkawa, and they got their land by running from the Cherokee Strip in 1889. I would appreciate any help. [Success! Martin Mahoney appears in *Main Street*. He is a former livery stable keeper and then garage owner in Gopher Prairie. He has a number of Perry prints of pictures in his office. Ole Jensen appoints him to the Library Board. (Perry is Roland Hinton Perry, a New York City painter and sculptor who specialized in portrait painting but also did statues of folks as diverse as General George Greene and Dr. Benjamin Rush.) The information is from the invaluable *A Guide to the Characters in the Novels, Short Stories, and Plays of Sinclair Lewis* by Lewis Society member Samuel J. Rogal.]

I am researching the Marion, North Carolina, labor strike (1929). Sinclair Lewis visited the town and reported on conditions there. His articles were eventually compiled into a 32-page booklet, *Cheap & Contented Labor*. I am seeking out experts in the field who might be able to provide a little background on Lewis's involvement with the event. I am a native of Marion myself.

I would appreciate it if you would please forward my request to anyone who you think might be willing to help me with my quest, if just a little. Thank you for your kind assistance. My main objective is to better understand, to the extent possible, Lewis's attitude and interest toward the labor movement in general and the South in particular. Obviously he had some interest in the Southern movement; otherwise he wouldn't have bothered to take the Marion assignment. At least that is my assumption. Mike Lawing, author of *The Marion Massacre*, told me that there were stories of Lewis's life being threatened while in town, yet he stayed and finished the assignment.

I realize there is probably no definite answer to any of this, but still I am interested in getting your personal opinions and thoughts about what his general mindset might have been toward these issues. [This writer was referred to Richard Lingeman for assistance.]

I am an arts reporter at the *Winston-Salem Journal*. I am writing an article about the coming world premiere of a dramatized version of *Babbitt*, which the University of North Carolina School of the Arts will present in early April [2012]. David Rambo, a producer/writer of *CSI* for several seasons, did the adaptation.

Questions:

*Are there any other adaptations of *Babbitt* in circulation? If so, who did them and how did they fare?

There have been several stage adaptations of *Babbitt*. The last new adaptation was done in southern California in the spring of 2006. This version was written by David Rambo and done as a staged reading at A Noise Within. My notes say that a fully staged version was planned for next year, but I never heard whether that took place. I have heard that there is an experimental theater version of *Babbitt* being written but I don't know how close that is to being ready.

There was also an audio version of the novel that was done by LA Theater Works in the late 1980s and rereleased in 2007 starring Ed Asner. I see that is still being sold on Amazon.

There have actually been two film versions of *Babbitt*, a silent version and a version in the 1930s starring Guy Kibbee. Edward Andrews also played the role of George Babbitt in the movie of *Elmer Gantry*.

*What's the key to doing a successful adaptation of this novel?

I think the key to doing a successful adaptation is to decide what the spirit of the play is and the narrative arc and go from there. I know that adapters often try to be too careful and make sure that they are doing due justice to the novel and so leave in too much—too much plot, too many characters, and the work can get very muddled. George Babbitt is such a wonderfully realized character that I think another adaptation of the novel would be great.

Will Kraemer writes: In 1971, I attended a talk given at the University of Minnesota Journalism School's Thomas Heggen Room by Max Shulman, creator of *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* TV series among many other things. I found myself standing near a very well dressed man wearing expensive and, to me, unfamiliar aftershave. Journalism professor Mitchell Charnley introduced the man as Max Shulman, who described himself as a commercial writer, as opposed to a literary writer.

At some point during his talk, which I figure was a standard, oft-repeated talk, Shulman recounted that as a young, aspiring writer, he had sent some writing to Sinclair Lewis for a professional opinion. "Get a job in a grocery store," was Lewis's advice. Shulman glibly stated that he'd already worked in a grocery store so he became a writer instead.

Recently, while reading about Shulman in *Behind the Cameras* Vol. II (Nodin: Minneapolis, 1997), a book about Minnesotans in the movies, I came across a mention of Lewis's grocery store comment to Shulman.

I am writing from a documentary production company in Minnesota, and I am doing some research on the name "Sinclair," which seems to have almost an imprint on this area. There are a couple of streets in the town of Minnetonka, MN, with the name Sinclair in it, and there is also a housing development that is part of the Clover Fields development in Chaska, MN, that is named The Sinclair. My question is whether you know or have come across any evidence that these streets and complex were named in honor of Sinclair Lewis? I know that the housing complex was built in the last decade or so, but I don't know about the naming of the Minnetonka streets. I did read that Sinclair Lewis had a second home on Lake Minnetonka so that may be a reason for naming streets after him. Any help that you can give would be appreciated. [I'd like to think so, but I don't know for sure. The name Sinclair comes from Dr. George Sinclair, a dentist friend of Lewis's father who lived near Ironton, Wisconsin. Lewis had homes at various times throughout the state so it wouldn't surprise me

if some municipality wanted to name something after one of Minnesota's most famous sons. Good luck on your search. If you find out anything more definite, do let me know.]

Student queries

Hello! I am a sophomore at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois. I am in an honors American Literature class, and as of right now, we are writing our research papers on famous American authors. I chose Sinclair Lewis. I am trying to find literary criticism on his short story, "The Hack Driver," but am having trouble finding it. I was wondering if you could help point me in the right direction by showing me sources I could include in my citation? [Alas, there is very little written on "The Hack Driver." The student was directed to more general scholarship on Lewis.]

Hello, I'm a student from China, and I am writing a thesis about Lewis's novel *Gideon Planish*. I will really appreciate it if you can send me some information about the literature review of Lewis because I can hardly find them in China. I really want to do some real work about Lewis. Thank you very much if you can help.

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

The Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center and Boyhood Home of Sinclair Lewis has been designated as a State and National Historic Site and has received the coveted Award of Merit by the National Historical Society.

Congratulations to Joyce Lyng who was named the new president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation this year. She replaces Colleen Steffes who served for five years. There are three new members of the Foundation: Jo Glinnon, Vice President; Al Coenen; and Alice Karackas.

At the annual meeting in February, the report of outgoing president Colleen Steffes included news of a new television and DVD player for the Interpretive Center as well as a new sign. The Board of Directors is busy organizing and updating the archives and there are some repairs being done to the Boyhood Home.

Over 400 people visited the Boyhood Home in 2011, and there were visitors to the Boyhood Home and Interpretive Center from overseas including France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands, and from nearly all of the fifty states.

—Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently. [Thanks to Jacqueline Koenig for her contributions to this section.]



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CATALOG 174

220. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday Doran, 1938. \$300.

First edition. A small owner's name on the front pastedown else fine in near fine dustwrapper with a bit of rubbing.

219. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921. \$475.

Eighteenth printing, published about six months after the first printing. A solid, very good or better copy, lacking the dustwrapper. Signed by the author on the front fly. Lewis's first major success, a realistic portrayal of Midwestern life, and the first of several important novels for which he became the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. A signed copy of a major title, albeit a later printing. Johnson High Spot of American Literature.

218. —. *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1914. \$450.

First edition, first issue. Noted author and collector Barton Currie's copy with his bookplate on the front pastedown, a little foxing on the foreedge, very near fine, lacking the rare dustwrapper. The author's second book, and the first book published under his own name.

Robert Dagg Rare Books
3288 21st Street, #176, San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: (415) 821-2825
Email: mail@daggrarebooks.com

77. Lewis, Sinclair. *Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$450.

First edition. Fine book in a fine bright dust jacket, virtually as new. Beautiful copy of the first collection of Lewis short stories.

76. —. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926. \$1,850.

First edition. Review copy with rubber stamp on front flyleaf: "advance copy." A fine book in an unusually bright crisp dust jacket that has had two long tears to rear panel, and one shorter one to spine panel, expertly repaired with Japanese paper. Nonetheless, an exceptionally fresh copy of a scarce jacket with virtually no paper loss.

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CATALOGUE 204

89. Lewis, Sinclair. *Original Unpublished Manuscript "Suggested Treatment of Gideon Planish"*. Los Angeles: 1943. \$1,250.

Original Sinclair Lewis unpublished manuscript, a film treatment of his novel, entitled "Suggested Treatment of Gideon Planish," 6 mimeographed pages, 1943, in very good plus condition. Stapled to the manuscript is a cover of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film studio memo on blue paper from Williams James Fadiman, who oversaw script development for MGM, sent to the tiny handful of film producers at the studio in Culver City, California, dated August 3, 1943 over a crossed out date 7-21-43 that says, "Mr. Lewis, who is now on the lot and available for discussion with any interested producer, offers this six-page outline as a possible treatment for his recent *Gideon Planish*. To refresh your memory, a synopsis of the novel is attached." Accordingly, behind the treatment is a 33-page mimeographed summary of the novel written by an MGM story reader dated 2-15-43 (written months before the April 19, 1943 release of the novel). A number of books written by Sinclair Lewis were made into films including *Babbitt*, *Dodsworth*, *Arrowsmith*, *Cass Timberlane*, and *Elmer Gantry*. Lewis, however, never received screen credit for writing a treatment or screenplay. Therefore, this treatment for his novel *Gideon Planish* is unusual and may be unique in his writing career. No matter the interest of MGM, no producer at this or any studio ever decided to turn the novel into a movie. In his treatment, Sinclair Lewis

was very aware of how the novel would translate into film. In his introduction Lewis writes: "In making the film I would start it more than half the way through the actual book and would, without changing the characters as they appear in the book at all, suggest the invention of a number of new incidents along with the present incidents already in the book to portray this dramatic story of trying to hold love and not be ruined by the torrent of big city philanthropic activities."

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SALE 483

182. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$390.

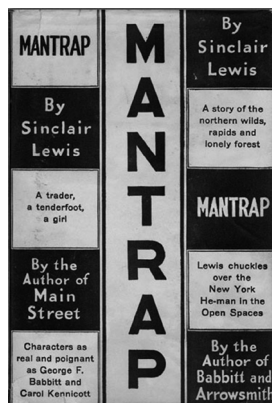
First edition, first binding. With the rare dust jacket. Blue cloth lettered and stamped in orange, jacket. First binding with the "G" in "Gantry" on the spine strongly resembling a "C." All jacket flap corners evenly clipped with the publisher's printed "\$2.50" price at the end of the front flap text (just above the publisher's imprint). Near fine in a very good jacket.

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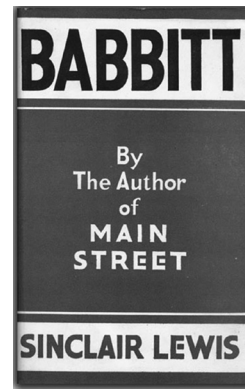
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Email: info@sternrarebooks.com



85. Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$10,000.

First edition. A fine copy in a dust jacket with a tiny chip at the top of the spine; very minor wear and some short tears. An exceptional copy.



84. —. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$10,000.

First Edition, first state. A fine copy in a price-clipped dust jacket with a tiny tear at the top right-hand corner of the front panel, which has been strengthened on the blind side with a little archival tissue. In a custom cloth clamshell box with a leather label (a little worn).

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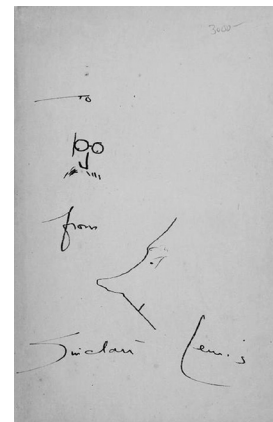
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Serendipity Books Auction

Sunday, February 12, 2012



1129. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920. \$800-1,200.

First edition, later printing. Original orange and blue cloth; dust jacket. Custom cloth clamshell case. Covers detached, spine worn; jacket toned and split at folds. Inscribed and signed by the author with two drawings on the front free endpaper: "To [drawing of a bespectacled and mustachioed man] from [self-portrait in profile] Sinclair Lewis." Jacket by C.K. Stevens depicts the Rosebud Movie theater, possibly an inspiration for fellow-Midwesterner Orson Welles.

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 Email: ralphsipperbooks@cox.net

SPRING SALE LIST

144. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Man who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. \$2,500.

First edition. Hardcover. A fine copy in an especially fine dust jacket with just a bit of wear at the spine.

143. —. *Cheap and Contented Labor*. New York: United Textile Workers, 1929. \$750.

First edition. Laid in is a letter from the United Textile Workers to Lewis's secretary at the time, Louis Florey, forwarding a copy of *Cheap and Contented Labor*. Near fine.

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A Miscellany of Rare Books & Manuscripts: Catalogue 34, Literature & Illustrated Books

21. Lewis, Harry Sinclair. *History of the Class of 1907*. New Haven: Yale University, 1907 and eight letters from or relating to Sinclair Lewis. \$22,500.

Blue cloth, re-backed with original spine laid over, 450 pages, very good condition. This yearbook was signed by nearly every member of the class of 1907 including "Harry" Sinclair Lewis. This use of his first name in his signature is highly unusual. Lewis stopped using his first name by 1907 when his personal diaries reflected the change from his earlier "Harry S. Lewis" and "H. S. Lewis" to "Sinclair Lewis" in his final college diary. Other signatures in the yearbook include Pop Warner. This collection was used as the basis for an article titled "On a First Name Basis" published in the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* Fall 2005.

E. (Elias) Robert Stevenson and (Harry) Sinclair Lewis were close friends from Yale who maintained contact throughout their lives. Stevenson became a newspaper man and spent most of his career as an editor at the *Republican-American* in Waterbury, Connecticut. He was the model for the character Doremus Jessup in Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. Lewis visited Stevenson and toured the brass factories in Waterbury while doing research for a labor novel he never completed, signing this yearbook on one of those visits. A group of letters from Lewis (and others) to E.

Robert Stevenson, a few related newspaper clippings, and a copy of the article "On a First Name Basis" are part of this grouping:

2-6-31 Letter from Lewis regarding Billy Sunday & Cornelius Vanderbilt "roast."

6-4-36 Letter from Lewis—going to be in Waterbury next week, "not for publication."

7-28-36 Letter from Lewis—Greetings

2-17-37 Letter from Lewis regarding Supreme Court legislation—refers to Dorothy Thompson's column in *Herald Tribune* today.

6-11-37 Letter from Lewis—not going to the Yale reunion.

7-3-?? Letter from Dorothy Thompson regarding a nice editorial.

7-12-51 Letter from Ethel Fairmont Beebe regarding Harrison Smith research (author of *From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Sinclair Lewis 1919-1930*, published in 1952).

8-17-54 Letter from biographer Mark Schorer asking ERS for information regarding Sinclair Lewis, specifically relating to sociological data on Waterbury he may have provided Lewis for his labor novel.

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Highlights include a number of photographs (1922-1963) including a 1922 portrait by E.O. Hoppé inscribed by Lewis and a 1930 portrait inscribed by Lewis to editor and publisher A.S. Frere; a number of letters and notes (1923-1938) including a two-page letter to Selden Rodman in which Lewis discusses a number of fellow writers, including Archibald MacLeish, H.L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson; an original illustration (1931) depicting Lewis's brawl with Theodore Dreiser titled "He Who Got Slapped/Punch Is Mightier Than Pen"; an original etching (1941) inscribed by Lewis to E. Maurice Bloch; a signed first edition of *Free Air* (1919) in the scarce original dust jacket; an advance review copy of the first trade edition of *Arrowsmith* (1925) in the scarce original dust jacket; first editions of *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott* (1920), *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* (1928), and Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* (1934); first editions in dust jackets of *Babbitt* (1922), *Elmer Gantry* (1927), *Dodsworth* (1929), *Ann Vickers* (1933), *Work Of Art* (1934), *The Prodigal Parents* (1938), and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947); signed first editions of *Bethel Merriday* (1940) and *Cass Timberlane* (1945); a first edition of *Why Sinclair Lewis Got The Nobel Prize* (1931); the signed limited edition of *Arrowsmith* (1925) with this copy additionally inscribed by Lewis to Herbert Evans; a limited edition of John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1926); an archive of contracts and an original script for the radio adaptation of *Dodsworth* produced by the Theatre Guild (1946) including contracts signed by Lewis, Walter Huston, and Jessie Royce Landis; and the original dust jacket art of the English edition of Lewis's *World So Wide* (1951) painted by the Hungarian artist Biro. Items in this collection are priced individually. Please contact Clouds Hill Books for more details and an illustrated catalogue of the collection.

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