

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWENTY, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 2012

VERMONT, 1942: THE SUMMER OF IDEALISM: DOROTHY THOMPSON, THE LAND CORPS, AND ITS LEGACY

Tom Raynor

*Dorothy Thompson has just summoned me to sing out
for her land army.*

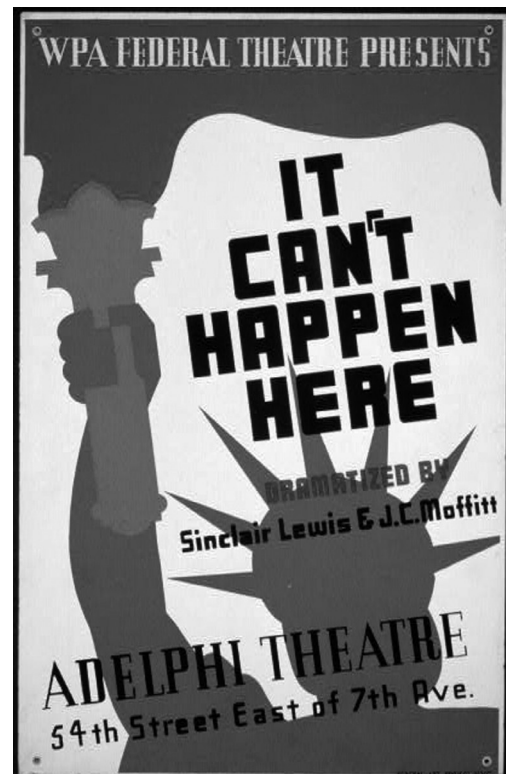
—Robert Frost

In June 1942, six months after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, American forces were reeling from their losses in the Pacific. No sure foothold had yet been gained in this or any other theater of combat. At home, wage and price controls, food and fuel rationing, and selective service had become the new norms. With good reason, Americans began to ponder the changes reshaping their lives.

A decade earlier, Dorothy Thompson had been the first to argue that Hitler and fascism threatened the survival of Western democracy. Her argument carried the day in the fierce clash between isolationists and interventionists. Now it served as the rationale for American engagement. But Thompson was "desperately worried" about the war's unintended effects. A resident of Vermont, she feared for the survival of rural communities. Even before the war, she had warned that the draft and higher wages in industry would "proletarianize" rural America, destroy family farms, and leave "nothing but factories" in their place:

The houses will fall in and the villages which live from the farms will disappear, and all the comeliness that it is will be gone, and the future of such communities seems to me a very high price to pay for a war of freedom; a grotesque price...that doesn't have to be paid if people would think and plan in another direction. (Thompson 1)

—Vermont, 1942 continued on page 4



THE FEDERAL THEATER PROJECT: IT DID HAPPEN HERE

William Severini Kowinski

Written for the Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California production. Mr. Kowinski also played Mr. Veeder.

Seventy-five years ago this week, there was a singular event in American history as well as American theater: one play opened simultaneously in eighteen cities, to overflow audiences. *It Can't Happen Here* was a play about how a fascist dictatorship might take over the United States, written

—Federal Theater Project continued on page 9

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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.

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MACKINLAY KANTOR AND SINCLAIR LEWIS: PARALLEL LIVES

Ted G. Fleener
Waterloo Community Schools
Waterloo, Iowa

It was a warm summer day in 1967 in the Missouri State Historical Society in Columbia, Missouri. I was one of a group of college students who were indexing old Missouri newspapers for research purposes. The director of the society, Dr. Richard S. Brownlee, brought in a very distinguished looking gentleman to our work area. The gentleman was very dignified, like something out of an old Walter Pidgeon movie. Dr. Brownlee said he would like to introduce us to a friend of his. His friend turned out to be MacKinlay Kantor, famous writer of *Ander-sonville* and *Spirit Lake*.

For the next few days, Kantor did research in the society files and microfiche. Kantor was famous for his great attention to historical detail in his works. He was very dignified and polite, and we greatly enjoyed having him in the library because he was courteous to everyone. That was the only time I was privileged to meet Kantor, but I never forgot him.

Sinclair Lewis and MacKinlay Kantor led parallel lives in many ways. They were both products of the Midwest, sons of the famed Hamlin Garland middle border. There is no record that the two ever met, but as widely read as both were, it is certain that they both knew of each other and each other's works. They were born nineteen years apart and their birthdays were only three days apart in the same month. MacKinlay Kantor was born Benjamin McKinlay Kantor in Webster City, Iowa on February 4, 1904. His mother was Effie McKinlay Kantor, who worked at a local newspaper to help support the family. His father, John Kantor, deserted the family before MacKinlay was born, a fact that troubled Kantor throughout his life.

Sinclair Lewis was born a few hundred miles northwest of Webster City in Sauk Centre, Minnesota on February 7, 1885. Lewis also lost a parent early in life, when his mother passed away, but his stepmother stepped into the role and was

accepted by Lewis as a mother figure. Unlike Lewis, who grew up in an established middle-class family where there was enough money, Kantor's family struggled to survive. But he did absorb the culture and mores of small town America, as Lewis had done when growing up. Kantor changed his first name to MacKinlay very early in life; the reason commonly given was that the "Mack" was more Scottish. Both Lewis and Kantor had nicknames, Lewis being called "Red" and Kantor answering to "Mack."



MacKinlay Kantor's boyhood home in Webster City, Iowa.

Sinclair Lewis's maternal grandfather, Edward Payson Kermott, served in the Civil War as a member of the Sixth Minnesota Infantry. Kantor spent a great deal of time listening to the old soldiers tell stories in front of the courthouse in Webster City. The closest Lewis ever came to combat was an ill-fated attempt to run off to the Spanish-American War at the age of

—————MacKinlay Kantor *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 Andrew Apter, David Apter, Fred Betz, Ted Fleener, Robert Fleming, Roger Forseth, Ralph Goldstein, Darryl Henriques, Bill Jennings, Jackie Koenig, Pat Lewis, Susan O'Brien, Charles Pankenier, Tom Raynor, and Mary Stroeing.

Vermont, 1942 *continued from page 1*

In the spring of 1941, Thompson presented her own “practical-as-a-pitchfork” plan for saving the farms—the recruitment of student volunteers to replace lost farm hands during the summer. Through her insistence that working on a farm was as important as working in a factory or serving in uniform, she won widespread support for her plan, including the endorsement of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. By fall, she had secured funding and built the infrastructure for a corporation to be known as the “Volunteer Land Corps.”

Early in 1942, a call for volunteers went out to high schools and colleges in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Some 2,500 youths responded to the call. Those who were accepted went on to raise the standard of performance for American voluntarism. Two decades later, one of their members, David Apter, developed the training program for the first Peace Corps project, continuing the idealistic quest for community launched in Vermont in the summer of 1942.

“I BECAME ANOTHER PERSON”

During the first few days of June 1942—as an epic naval battle loomed off Midway Island, in the Pacific—hundreds of eager volunteers converged on the town of Barnard, Vermont. Altogether, there were 550 boys and 59 girls who ranged in age from sixteen (boys) and eighteen (girls) to twenty-two. For their toil, they would receive twenty-one dollars a month and lodging with a farm family.

Thompson had arrived in mid-May to assume command of the Land Corps at Twin Farms, the imposing, 300-acre spread of land and buildings near Barnard that she and Sinclair Lewis had chosen as their home in 1928. The main residence, “the Big House,” served as headquarters and recreation center for the Corps.

On arrival in Barnard, the volunteers reported to Town Hall, where they were vetted by Land Corps personnel in an effort to match their skills with the needs of the farmers. But skills were in short supply. Some of the volunteers had never even seen a farm, and few of them had any idea of what farming involved. Worse yet, no one had realized that they would need at least two weeks to toughen up and learn the ropes.

They were fanatically determined to prove themselves—and they did. In an article in the *Volunteer*, a weekly newsletter edited by Thompson, seventeen-year-old David Apter, a high school dropout from Mount Vernon, New York, wrote: “We have stuck to the job, we have endured...[A]lthough at times it has been hard, at times we have despaired, most of us have stuck it through and after the hardships of those first weeks came to enjoy our work and love the soil and what it stands for” (Apter 1).

By then they were driving teams of horses, operating tractors, tending livestock, pitching hay, and cleaning barns. Settled into their new routine, they shared hearty meals with their “families,” joined them for Saturday night barn dances in the grange hall, and went to church with them on Sunday. Many years later, Apter remembered this “unique way of life” with nostalgia:

It was a return to the hardscrabble rural life of the Great Depression, based on a philosophy of frugality and respect for the land. I discovered that I was good with my hands, and I became another person! It was that kind of experience—you became conscious through work. (Apter)

“I AM TRYING TO TELL YOU THIS”

Altogether, the volunteers performed some 300,000 hours of labor that summer, and the farmers were more than satisfied. Some claimed they couldn’t have held their homes together without the volunteers. Writing in the *Volunteer*, Apter proclaimed, “We are helping to win the war. We will win the peace, and the security that as Americans is our proud and rightful heritage!” (Apter 1).

The 200 or so volunteers who remained in Vermont after the harvest met for a final conference at Twin Farms on the last weekend in August. They were in high spirits. A reporter who covered the event for *Life* magazine wrote, “Now the hay is in, the farmers are no longer skeptical, and the Land

—————Vermont, 1942 *continued on page 5*

NEW MEMBERS

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

Pat Daily
New York, NY

Ron Miller
Woodstock, VT

Catherine Arnott Smith
Middleton, WI

VERMONT, 1942 SIDEBAR: LAND CORPS MAY BE FILMED

(The Land Corps Volunteer, No. 6, August 19, 1942)

Mr. Stoloff, who has filmed the Free French rising in St.-Pierre and Miquelon, in a film not yet released, which is one of the finest documents yet produced in this war, wants to make a big feature film of the Land Corps—making it, at the same time, a film of Vermont country life.

Mr. Stoloff, who is an independent producer, brought his St. Pierre document to Woodstock, VT to show it to Miss Thompson who, he hoped, would write the comment. Miss Thompson agreed, after seeing the film.* But in an hour's conversation about the Land Corps, Mr. Stoloff became so excited about its pictorial possibilities that he asked to be allowed to return to Vermont next week, to talk with Field Agents and recruits, visit farms, see our work, and prepare a script for a full-length feature picture.

He has specialized in making films, as the Russians have done, without professional actors—films of real life. In St.-Pierre and Miquelon, he reconstructed the whole story of the revolt of the island, with the barber, the gendarmes, the children, the school teacher, the Free French youth, and even Admiral Muselier, simply repeating the actions of that first rising of any French people. We found that Hollywood itself could not produce more moving actors than these people who were not acting at all, but merely, for the films, reliving the great drama of their lives.

Mr. Stoloff believes, stubbornly, that the story of living America is more moving and dramatic than any professional

movie; that it awaits the imaginations that, with the great techniques of modern photography, will show and interpret all phases of this authentic drama. The beauty of the Vermont landscape, the piety of Vermont traditions, the puritan spirit, all suggested to him a background for a true American picture.

Such a film, honest and authentic, could do more to tell the story of our movement than anything else. Will everybody help?

Mr. Stoloff will be at the conference on August 29th and 30th—very much in the background. But at that conference, you all can help prepare the script. Think about it.

And prepare your thoughts for the more important questions of the conference: How we go on from here; how we organize and expand our corps; how we go ahead to find and select new recruits; how we manage some advance training for them. Consider what you consider the mistakes to have been. Ask your farmers for criticisms and advice, and come as their representatives, too.

In the next issue [No. 7, August 26, 1942], we shall publish a tentative program for the meeting. Come with an active mind.

**This is most assuredly DT dictating to Madeline Shaw, one of her secretaries whose name is on the masthead of the Volunteer, along with DT's and Hermann Budzislowski's—he was the research assistant that introduced DT to Maxim—and Anne Draper's. ✍*

Vermont, 1942 continued from page 4

Corps youngsters are referring proudly to 'my corn' and 'our hay'" (144).

Morale had peaked following the victory at Midway in June. Now American forces were engaged in their first land battle of the war, at Guadalcanal, while the Russians resisted the assault of four German armies at Stalingrad. Both battles would go on for months more, raising and then dashing hopes in an endless cycle. But the volunteers found comfort in camaraderie and the sense of achievement.

At that final conclave, they formed discussion groups focused on the future of the Land Corps. They played baseball and badminton, and roasted fresh corn and frankfurters over bonfires. They held a song rally, where the favorites included "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," "Oh My Darling, Clementine," and "The Caissons Go Rolling Along." And they crowded

into the Big House for a concert by a noted pianist.

Summoning up the oratorical skills she had gained as a young suffragist on the stump, Thompson addressed the volunteers on the great lawn at Twin Farms. Standing on a stone slab that commemorated the visit to Barnard by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1825, she praised them for having earned the great privilege of citizenship through service to the whole community. "I am trying to tell you this," she said:

Neither your personal life nor your social existence is a series of episodes. History is not a series of episodes. The creation of a personality and the creation of a nation depend upon the maintenance of community. (Thompson)

Vermont, 1942 continued on page 6

Vermont, 1942 continued from page 5

“SOMETHING WAS ALWAYS HAPPENING”

Years later, from a scholar’s perspective, Apter declared the Land Corps summer “a remarkable moment in American voluntarism and idealism.” From a personal perspective, he regarded his friendship with Thompson as inseparable from that moment—“one of the important events” of his life. “She encouraged me to write,” he said. “She opened up an entire world beyond my personal experience” (Apter).

He was drawn into the fluid inner circle that included Thompson’s family, friends, collaborators, and staff. He sometimes stayed in the Big House, and he remembered its “huge, rustic living room converted from an ancient barn, with a portrait of Sinclair Lewis over the mantle” (Apter). It was here that Lewis had written *It Can’t Happen Here*—that anti-fascist jeremiad that reached millions as a novel and play. And, here, Thompson pursued the relentless dissection of Hitler and Nazism that led Winston Churchill to declare her “clairvoyant.”

Thompson and Apter developed a comfortable rapport. “She was confident, self-assured, and eloquent in every situation,” he recalled. “She had a presence that’s been described as ‘overwhelming,’ but I didn’t overwhelm easily—I think that’s why she took to me” (Apter). He was entrusted with taking her son, twelve-year-old Michael Lewis, on an occasional outing. He met her husband-to-be, Maxim Kopf. Sometimes they all went to church together.

“Something was always happening, sometimes the least likely things,” said Apter. The most unlikely of his challenges was playing the lead role in *Kid Brother*, a documentary film about the Land Corps written by Thompson and directed by filmmaker Victor Stoloff. [See sidebar, “Captured on Film,” page 7.] Thompson orchestrated this and countless other projects, including her broadcasts and syndicated column, with seeming ease and enthusiasm.

As each of them would discover, they had much in common. Both had been politicized as teenagers, and both became activists who explicitly rejected the two major parties. While Thompson had always considered herself an internationalist, Apter shed his isolationism only after the outbreak of war. “She hoped our generation would accept the responsibilities of world power that hers had rejected,” he said. “She placed great hopes in us” (Apter).

In their final conversation, Thompson sounded Apter out on his interest in leading the program in 1943. But that was not to be—not only because Apter was drafted, but because the Land Corps was taken over by the federal government and became the Victory Farm Volunteers. Thompson turned her

efforts to shaping the ongoing debate on the peace settlement. Apter returned to Mount Vernon, where he was drafted and entered the Army in early 1943.

“A REMARKABLE TURN OF FATE”

In the army, Apter began thinking of college. He earned a general high school diploma through correspondence courses. He went on to college, graduate school, and an academic career in political science and sociology. In the postcolonial era then unfolding, he focused on the independence struggles of the European colonies in Africa. In 1955 he published *The Gold Coast in Transition*, a groundbreaking study of nation building.

In 1961, while teaching at the University of Chicago, he was asked by Sargent Shriver to develop the first training program for the newly created Peace Corps, the centerpiece of New Frontier idealism. Like Land Corps volunteers before them, Peace Corps volunteers would invest sweat equity in forging communal bonds in the defense of freedom. The very first volunteers were bound for Ghana, the former Gold Coast.

Before accepting the offer, Apter laid down several conditions, all of which Shriver accepted. He wanted “no CIA in it...no interference from Washington.” He wanted the final say on curriculum, lecturers, and volunteers. He later explained, “The Land Corps had been a straightforward, unvarnished, no-politics commitment to the value of community. It was unique in its structure and idealism, and I wanted no less for the Peace Corps” (Apter).

In a remarkable turn of fate, it was as if Apter had assumed the leadership role in that great endeavor suspended twenty years earlier. It was as if the Land Corps, with its “vast possibilities,” were “marching on,” as he had foreseen in 1942. But while the Land Corps had sought to restore the link between farm and city, the Peace Corps pursued a global vision of community that was scarcely imaginable in 1942.

In the decades that separated these two heroic efforts of American volunteerism, Americans learned—at great cost—the value of community. Among its most forceful advocates, David Apter and Dorothy Thompson will be remembered for rolling up their sleeves and demonstrating its vast possibilities.

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Vermont, 1942 continued on page 8

VERMONT, 1942 SIDEBAR: CAPTURED ON FILM: THE GLORY AND THE NITTY-GRITTY

Dorothy Thompson developed the story line and script for *Kid Brother*, a twenty-two-minute documentary film about the Volunteer Land Corps, in the summer of 1942. The film was shot in August, as the harvest began. Before its release, it was retitled *Farm Work Is War Work*. It is available for viewing on the Web, offering a fresh and fascinating view of the coming-of-age of “the Greatest Generation.”

Farm Work is not a documentary in the sense of life caught unawares, but a creative treatment of reality in which Thompson rearranged or staged factual elements for dramatic effect. All of the actors are non-professional, and some play themselves. The lead character, Dick Shaw, is a composite of Land Corps boys—a soldier’s “kid brother.” He is played by seventeen-year-old David Apter in an earnest and compelling performance that captures the idealism that drove the volunteers, as well as the nitty-gritty of their daily life on the farms of Vermont.

The crew who shot the film in and around Barnard, Vermont, was headed by Victor Stoloff, a writer and director who later worked with David O. Selznick, Roger Corman, and other Hollywood and European filmmakers. Cinematographer Josef Braun and composer Paul Dessau were refugees from Hitler’s Germany. Braun later won an Oscar for his cinematography

for *Martin Luther*. Dessau returned to East Germany, where he became the collaborator of playwright Bertolt Brecht.

While working on *Kid Brother*, Thompson also scripted the narration for *Little Isles of Freedom*, a film documenting the resistance of Free France on the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Stoloff had completed *Little Isles* earlier in the summer, and Charles Boyer later agreed to read the narration. The film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Short Documentary of 1942. *Little Isles* did not win the Oscar in its category, nor did Katharine Hepburn, who was nominated for Best Actress for her performance in *Woman of the Year*, in a role based on Dorothy Thompson. Before *Kid Brother* was released, the Volunteer Land Corps was taken over by the US Department of Agriculture and renamed the Victory Land Corps. The film was edited by USDA, given its new title, *Farm Work Is War Work*, and served as an effective recruiting tool for units of the Victory Land Corps across the nation.

In 2010, thanks to the efforts of Paul Carnahan and the Vermont Historical Society, *Farm Work Is War Work* was discovered in the National Archives. A video transfer can be viewed on the Website of the Internet Archive: <http://www.archive.org/details/FarmWorkIsWarWork>. ☞

VERMONT, 1942 SIDEBAR: LETTER TO TOM RAYNOR FROM ANDREW APTER

August 17, 2011

Dear Tom,

I can’t thank you enough for your hard work. Your “liner notes” and interview with my father really put this film and his life into wonderful perspective, and my only regret is that he did not live long enough to actually see it. His Vermont years were incredibly formative in shaping his respect for hard work, manual labor, the craftsmanship of farm tools, and a tempered radical sensibility. As kids my sister and I would sometimes roll our eyes when he would tell his farm stories, and wax romantic about his heroic days, but in fact his stories were closer to the truth than I realized. What is so ironic for us is how this teenager, who was already a self-styled Marxist, agnostic if not atheist, a secular Jew, and a critic of establishment America, became, in this film, such a youthful American icon. I also appreciate the point you bring out that his early experience with

the Land Corps shaped his influence on the first Peace Corps program in Ghana that he directed with Sargent Shriver.

It is a bit of an uncanny experience to see the footage of the young man who I heard so much about in his stories acting in this role. In life, as in film, the boundary between theater and reality is permeable; each bleeds into the other so that his recollections, and my version of them, take on a cinematic quality. Making this film available is a real gift to us, and also opens up the historic significance of this small but influential Volunteer Land Corps program.

There are so many serendipitous twists in what followed. After my father was drafted and went through basic training, he got papers to ship out to what would have been the Italian campaign in the war, and at the last minute was diverted to become a medic in US army bases instead. Given the terrible carnage in Italy, he may well never have returned, and I would

————— Letter to Tom Raynor *continued on page 8*

VERMONT, 1942 SIDEBAR: FILM STILLs FROM *FARM WORK IS WAR WORK*



Vermont, 1942 *continued from page 6*

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Acknowledgments

Sincere thanks go to Karen Weis, of the National Agricultural Library, and Fred Pond, with the Vermont Historical Society, who helped locate sample issues of *The Land Corps Volunteer*. This newsletter was a forum for the volunteers, as well as the medium through which Thompson shared her analyses of the war with them. *The Volunteer* is not included in the Thompson papers at Syracuse University and was apparently unknown to her biographers. It provides the only known confirmation that Thompson wrote two film scripts in the summer of 1942. Besides support with archival work, Fred Pond also reviewed the manuscript. ✍

Letter to Tom Raynor *continued from page 7*

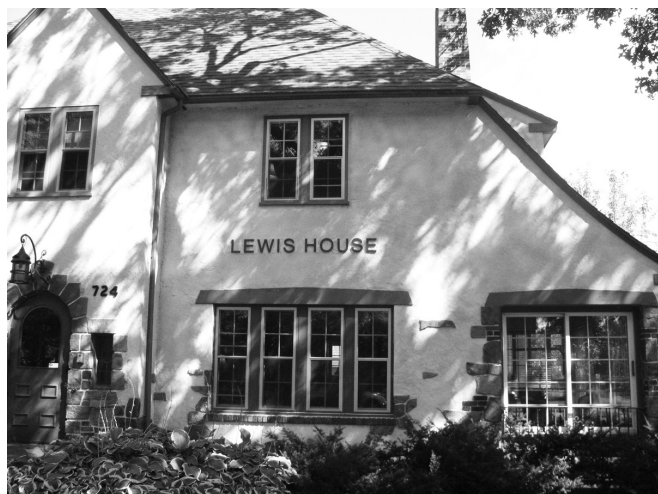
not be typing this message. On the other hand, after the film, he was offered a role in a Broadway production that his mother would not allow him to take, and he shrugged it off. Who knows, perhaps another Gregory Peck cut short? Instead, he followed his academic vocation, spear-headed a whole new kind of political science case study of postcolonial “New Nations.”

Anyway, this short propaganda recruiting film is a treasure, and quite a film gem, given the talents of Thompson,

Stoloff, and Braun. The montage and camera angles are brilliant. As for my father’s intuitive acting, what impresses me is how much he communicates with such restraint and understatement—qualities that did NOT carry over into the lecture podium or dinner table, where he held court with endless passion and enthusiasm. We miss him. Thanks for this treasure.

Andrew ✍

ALUMNI HOUSE AT ST. CLOUD STATE RENAMED LEWIS HOUSE



St. Cloud State University has renamed its Alumni House the Lewis House in honor of Sinclair Lewis's brother Dr. Claude Lewis. Pat Lewis, a member of both the Sinclair Lewis Society and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, noticed that the university had recently been changing the names of some of its buildings to those of the original owners and wrote to the university in 2010, requesting that the Alumni House be recognized as the Lewis House since Claude Lewis had built the house in 1926. The house was sold to Mrs. Allen Atwood in 1964 and to the state of Minnesota for the university in 1972.

Dr. Lewis was an influential member of the St. Cloud community, as a practicing physician for over fifty years, helping to start the first nursing school in the area, as well as serving as the first administrator of the St. Cloud Hospital. He

Federal Theater Project *continued from page 1*

by Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

This 1936 production was the most ambitious effort of the Federal Theater Project, part of the Works Progress Administration, which sought to break the cycle of economic depression in the 1930s by employing millions of Americans in construction, conservation, and other endeavors, including the arts.

The two people most directly responsible for the Federal Theater Project were Harry Hopkins, the Roosevelt advisor who ran the WPA, and Hallie Flanagan, the Federal Theater's first and only administrator. They were Midwesterners and had been classmates at a small liberal arts college in Iowa, Grinnell College, where the arts were considered part of the fabric of life and knowledge. After a stint at Harvard, Flanagan returned to

supported St. Raphael's Hospital as well, devising an innovative hospital records system there, and was the first doctor in St. Cloud to have X-ray equipment. He died in 1957.

The house was built at the cost of \$30,000, making it the most expensive house built in St. Cloud that year. Lewis Society members who attended the Sinclair Lewis Conference in 2000 visited the house and received a tour.

Claude Lewis is Pat Lewis's great uncle by marriage, as she is married to Richard Lewis, son of Sinclair Lewis's other brother Fred (See the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 17.1, Fall 2008 for an article on Fred Lewis).

There will an event to celebrate the renaming of the Alumni House of St. Cloud State University to the Lewis House on Friday afternoon, June 8, 2012, starting at 2:30 p.m. in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Sponsored by the Stearns History Museum, the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, St. Cloud State University, the Sinclair Lewis Society, and several other organizations, the event will feature information on St. Cloud's historic South Side neighborhood, a keynote and discussion led by Sally Parry, and a showing of the movie of *Arrowsmith*. Please call the Stearns History Museum for more information and to register for the event (by June 1). The phone number is 320-253-8424.

Thanks to Pat Lewis for sending material for this article, including a 1994 paper by graduate student Kathie King, "Lewis-Atwood House, 724 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud, Minnesota," which provided background information on the construction of the house and its history. ✍

teach drama at Grinnell and became one of the first women to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship, which she used to observe how theater was done in European countries, including Russia, during its most creative period.

She then taught at Vassar, where she developed experimental theater productions. She had just returned from another tour of European theater, in Italy and Greece, when Harry Hopkins called her to Washington. Hopkins knew theater and knew her work, but more surprisingly, so did Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt. He knew about her because he'd been a Vassar trustee.

But she was doubtful she was the right person, and a little

Federal Theater Project *continued on page 10*



A scene from the 1936 Seattle, Washington production.

overwhelmed. Hopkins persisted and brought her to a gathering of people already involved in the Federal Art, Music, and Writers Projects. They all had spent some time in small towns, and they talked about the music teachers who had never heard a symphonic orchestra, the drama teachers and the children who had never seen a professionally performed play. She was impressed that none of them doubted that she would find talented actors and other theater professionals on the relief rolls, capable of creating good theater and taking it everywhere. Hallie Flanagan joined up.

The Federal Theater Project had two defining features: its primary purpose was to employ as many theater professionals as possible, and its mission included making the fruits of their work available to as many Americans as possible.

Together this meant creating theater across the country beyond New York, and bringing it to the people, with low ticket prices and by taking shows to new venues, including parks, hospitals, and the streets, for free. There were deliberate efforts to include minorities, as participants and as audiences. Emphasizing employment meant that while there was little money for materials, there were plenty of people to apply their creativity, ingenuity, and enthusiasm to create productions with large casts and even larger ambitions.

But those most responsible for the Federal Theater Project also had large dreams for an American theater and its role in lifting the country out of its Depression while creating the framework for the future—in the words of Hallie Flanagan, “not an art which would be an occasional unrelated accompaniment to everyday existence, but a functioning part of national life.”

In a time of relentless hardship for many, with “one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished,” as President Roosevelt said, many of the Project’s original productions were

socially conscious. The Living Newspaper wedded journalism to theater in a new way and pioneered new multimedia techniques.

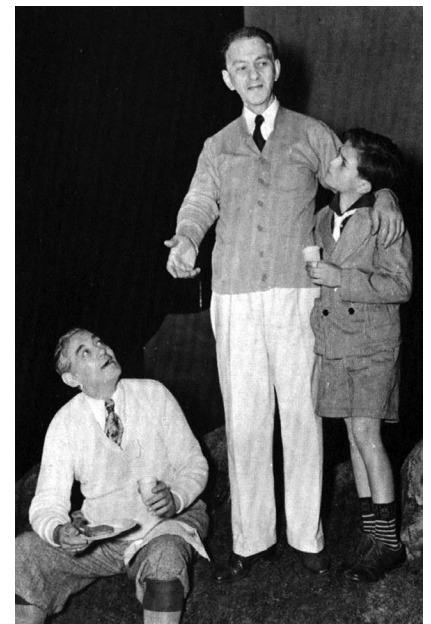
But Federal Theater did much more. The Project produced classic plays for new audiences, such as Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, featuring Orson Welles in his first starring role. But it didn’t play just to the usual audience for classic revivals, Welles noted. “One had the feeling every night,” he said, “that here were people on a voyage of discovery in the theater.”

In addition to integrated productions, there were sixteen African American units—or Negro units as they were called then—which offered opportunities for black technicians as well as actors in non-stereotyped roles. They did classics and modern plays, and they did new plays by new black playwrights. The Harlem unit’s *Macbeth* (directed by Welles) was reimagined as the story of a Haitian dictator. The Federal Theater took this powerful and very popular production out on tour, to Dallas, Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, and Cleveland.

The Project brought “Hamlet to every hamlet,” as one actor said. But it also mounted the first American production of T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. It staged *Arms and the Man* in San Diego, Ibsen’s *Ghosts* in Miami, *Uncle Vanya* in Los Angeles, *Ah, Wilderness!* in Des Moines, *Room Service* in San Francisco, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in Springfield, Illinois.

The Federal Theater brought plays in French to Los Angeles, in German to New York, in Spanish to Florida, in Italian across Massachusetts, and in Yiddish on both the East and West coasts.

There were plays about American history, including local history. Several were produced on the very spot they were about, such as one about the founding of Roanoke, Virginia



Sidney Lumet (right) was a child star in the 1936 New York production.

DANGEROUS WOMEN: A REVIEW OF *DANGEROUS AMBITION: REBECCA WEST AND DOROTHY THOMPSON: NEW WOMEN IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND POWER* BY SUSAN HERTOGE (NEW YORK: BALLANTINE, 2011)

*Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University*

Rebecca West and Dorothy Thompson were two of the most celebrated female journalists of the first half of the twentieth century. Their observations, especially about issues connected with the rise of fascism prior to World War II, won them readers worldwide. Therefore I came to this dual biography with the hope that I would learn about what they thought behind the scenes and how they were able to be so successful in the primarily male world of political reporting. Unfortunately I found out a lot about their lives, but little that would make me admire them more.

Susan Hertog's biography seems as though it were written by a romance novelist. We find out that both West and Thompson were often unhappy, had health problems, and were neither very good spouses nor mothers. Hertog frames them in the introduction through the cult of True Womanhood of the Victorian era, a conceit that simplifies their lives and leads to much overwriting. She also refers to them and their friends by their first names, which gives the whole affair a rather gossipy feel. Here is an example early on, in which she describes Thompson's marriage to her first husband Joseph Bard. "He had taken a chaste girl and made her both a woman and a man with his bestial sexuality, and had then discarded her" (5).

The book is organized by alternating chapters focusing on Thompson and West. They knew each other, travelled in some of the same social circles, and attended some of the same parties. They considered themselves friends, helping each other's troubled sons. At times the connection between them though is forced, as in part of a chapter where Hertog gets inside Thompson's mind as she dresses for a party and thinks about what she'll say to West as they commiserate over their husbands' misbehaviors.

There are two biographies of Thompson that cover her life well, so the main interest for readers may be the comparison between the two. Thompson's mother died when Thompson was eight, from an herbal concoction given to her by her own mother to induce an abortion. It was felt that there were already too many children in the Thompson family, since the father was only a parson with a limited salary. Both of her parents were British, her father from the north of England and her mother from Scotland. Hertog romanticizes this, noting that Dorothy

was the first child in the family to be an American citizen. "Dorothy would always love American ideals but her British bloodline gave her the clarity and perspective of one who was at once a bona fide native and a rightful critic" (54). She was educated at Syracuse University and did not marry for the first time until she was in her late twenties. Hertog goes into great detail about her love life and when it was lacking, a recurring theme throughout the book.

West's early life was also unhappy as her father abandoned the family when she was eight. When she was nineteen she started a long-term affair with H. G. Wells who was forty-six. "His powerful intellect and riveting eyes transformed the misshapen Wells into an irresistibly attractive Lothario" (39). Their illegitimate son Anthony was publicly identified for many years as West's nephew and became a source of tension and unhappiness to them both since they seemed to alternate between fighting over him and ignoring him. There is lots of description of Wells's affairs, mutual suffering, his abandonment of West and her feeling of abasement. We read about her many affairs as well, her suicidal thoughts, and her psychoanalysis where she discovers that she was abused by her father, something that colored her relationship with men.

That Hertog is not much of a literary analyst is clear from her discussion of Lewis's writing: "The people in his life became the raw data of his allegorical satire; their frailties reflected the social maladies and distortions of postwar America as he saw them" (99-100). I've read lots of Lewis, and allegorical satire is not what he writes. Hertog doesn't seem very familiar with very many early Lewis novels, and tends to dismiss his career after the Nobel Prize, as many critics have done. She seems to believe that Lewis wouldn't have received the Nobel without Thompson. "Dorothy, in no small measure, had managed to bring him there [Stockholm], and she must have felt the infinite joy of carrying him with her to the heights" (165).

The relationship between Lewis and Thompson was a troubled one with lots of blame on both sides. In early 1933 Thompson became pregnant with a second child, but after a

Dangerous Women *continued on page 12*

Federal Theater Project *continued from page 10*

that proved so popular that it is still running, every summer.

Federal Theater broke the barriers between so-called high art and low, by producing slapstick comedy and modern dance, musicals and vaudeville (more than 2,000 performances), and even circuses (one employing the young Burt Lancaster). There was puppet and marionette theater, and the Project introduced the concept of adults performing children's theater to America. One of its most popular productions was *Pinocchio*, a favorite of adults as well as children. Walt Disney and his technical staff saw it eight times in Los Angeles, shortly before Disney made *Pinocchio*, his next animated feature, and copied aspects of the set. (There's no record, however, of Disney attending another Federal Theater play called *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*.)

Many productions played for months, and some forty-five major productions toured through cities and small towns. Sixty-five percent of all FTP productions were given free in

hospitals, churches, parks, and CCC camps.

The total cost of the Federal Theater Project was estimated at \$22 million, or as actor Burgess Meredith said, half the cost of a battleship. Playwright Arthur Miller—who worked in the playwriting unit—estimated that four or five FTP actors who went on to lucrative careers probably paid back the cost of the entire program in income taxes over the next fifteen years. "I'm not exaggerating," he said. "Their income tax probably paid for the whole damn thing."

There were problems—bureaucracy, all kinds of conflict, censorship and internal politics, but mostly the Federal Theater Project was destroyed after just four years by external politics, by the same forces that would return to create the Blacklist and McCarthyism.

The WPA and New Deal programs in general left a visible

Federal Theater Project *continued on page 13*

Dangerous Women *continued from page 11*

serious fight with Lewis, had a miscarriage. Thompson also had an affair with the novelist Christa Winslow and brought her back to Twin Farms to live with Lewis and their son Michael. In fall 1933, the trio moved to a house in Bronxville with Michael. After Thompson left on one of her frequent speaking tours, Lewis told Winslow to leave. Ironically, she went to stay with Grace, Lewis's first wife, and her new husband, Telesforo Casanova.

The romantic and social ups and downs of both Thompson and West dominate the book. The aspects of it where they are both investigating the rise of fascism in Europe are fascinating, and one wishes that there were more of a focus on what made them into the dogged reporters that they were. Hertog recognizes Thompson as the inspiration for *It Can't Happen Here*, noting that "It is Hal's cleverness and literary imagination one reads, but it is Dorothy's voice that one hears, as goodness and virtue (relatively speaking) are pitted against satanic evil" (240). The temptation to overstate is evident here as well since Lewis's whole point is that fascism can grow up organically from a lazy and/or demoralized people. The evil of fascism is not some sort of supernatural or satanic issue, but something that can happen if the "free, inquiring, critical spirit" is crushed.

After Thompson and Lewis divorced, Thompson married again in 1943, to sculptor Maxim Kopf, but she faced a number of problems including ill health, an addiction to medication, and an unhappy relationship with her son. Thompson also became violently anticommunist and was stripped of her column in the

Herald Tribune in 1945 and the *New York Post* in 1947. She became one of the founders of WOMAN, World Organization of Mothers of All Nations, a movement to encourage women to join together to bring about world peace. Although originally supportive of the establishment of a Jewish state, she grew to oppose it, calling the Jews "alien invaders," a stance that many thought indicated that she was anti-Semitic. Her final statement to the world may have been her book *The Courage to Be Happy*, published in 1958, with reflective essays on geniuses, acceptance of old age, and her "unhappy love affair with the world" (378). The book had good sales and good enough reviews. Thompson died three years later in 1961, in Lisbon while visiting her grandchildren.

The sections on West similarly discuss her political writing, her long but not very happy marriage, her vexed relationship with son Anthony, and her journalism on civil rights after the war. Hertog sums up their problems as "Out of sync with their time, yet deeply, longingly feminine, neither knew how to be a woman" (260). West lived twenty-two years after Thompson died, and wrote seven more books in that time period. The book becomes unbalanced because West wrote a lot that is quickly summarized. Thompson's main strength was in her political reporting while West wrote more broadly, in journalism, fiction, and nonfiction. The imbalance in what they wrote may have been the reason for Hertog's focus on the drama of their lives, but she doesn't do justice to their thinking and the important part they played in the first half of twentieth-century world history. ✍

Federal Theater Project *continued from page 12*

legacy with buildings and bridges that still stand and serve, parks that still shimmer in the sunlight, murals that still grace the walls of post offices and court houses across America. While the legacy of the Federal Theater Project is less obvious, it is just as real.

These 1,200 stage productions in thirty-five states, reaching an audience of three million, were only part of what the Federal Theater Project accomplished. The Project also produced 3,000 radio programs a year, aired over commercial stations and networks. Together these productions themselves inspired major motion pictures, and radio and television shows for at least a generation. The performers, producers, directors, and writers it nurtured and nourished went on to great accomplishments in all these media.

The legacy for American theater itself is wide-ranging. These productions led to innovations in lighting and other technical capabilities, as well as educational and outreach aspects of theater productions. Apart from keeping institutions alive in a bad time and inspiring new ones, the Federal Theater pioneered aspects of how community theaters operate and how theaters conduct and use research. In the relationship of some theater units to their communities, they provide insights and experience in locally based theater and theater of place.

Its legacy is also found in theater we take for granted now—Shakespeare in the Park, historical pageants, street theater.

Together with other Federal Theater programs, this legacy lives in aspects of theater education, communication, play translation, and even the use of theater for psychological and physical therapy.

This legacy is embedded in new generations of regional- and community-theater artists and audiences. Above all, it lives



A scene from the 1936 Birmingham, Alabama production.

in the unbroken chain of astonishment produced by the artistry, commitment, skill development, and mentoring that the Federal Theater continued and enhanced in those dark days when so much in America stopped.



A scene from the 1936 Tampa, Florida production.

The Federal Theater provided a legacy of possibility, including evidence that a theater of meaning is possible in America, and that it can reach through the fourth wall to engage and enrapture a popular audience. That's one reason that the production of *It Can't Happen Here* remains worthy of celebration.

Today the themes of *It Can't Happen Here* still resonate—with people aligned all along the political spectrum. It's famous on the internet for the line, "When Fascism comes to America, it will come wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross." However, that line actually doesn't appear in it.

The Federal Theater production was controversial from the day it was announced. "Some people thought the play was designed to reelect Mr. Roosevelt," wrote Hallie Flanagan. "Others thought it was planned in order to defeat him. Some thought it proved the Federal Theater was communistic; others that it was New Deal; others that it was subconsciously fascist."

It was too much for a couple of cities. New Orleans officials feared it, St. Louis officials wanted to change its intent, so both productions were withdrawn. But theaters that embraced it were allowed to make it their own. The all-black production in Seattle emphasized what fascism does to minority groups,

Federal Theater Project *continued on page 14*

**DANGEROUS COMMENTS: A REVIEW OF *DANGEROUS AMBITION:*
REBECCA WEST AND DOROTHY THOMPSON: NEW WOMEN
IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND POWER BY SUSAN HERTOG**

Charles Pankenier

In *Dangerous Ambition*, Susan Hertog draws intricate parallels between H. G. Wells, Sinclair Lewis, Rebecca West, and Dorothy Thompson; the relationships and their consequences have the quality of Russian nesting dolls, encompassing even their damaged sons. The jacket blurb for the book tells of “lives caught up in the cross currents of world events and affairs of the heart”; in that light, the themes and elements of Dorothy Thompson’s biography that underpin *Ann Vickers* are especially resonant.

Several aspects of the book caught this reader’s eye:

- There are enough interior monologues, “must haves,” “could haves,” and psychologizing (informed, to be sure) to warrant an occasional raised eyebrow.
- The author’s gloss on West’s metaphysics can be impenetrable. And, there is more “telling” and not enough “showing” of the power of Thompson’s insight and analysis to explain her career breakthrough, significant influence, and enduring grip on her public.
- The central thesis of *Dangerous Ambition* is of a piece with Hertog’s earlier (somewhat controversial) biography of Anne Morrow

Lindbergh and her struggle to reconcile the personal and professional. Here we have a cautionary tale of early feminism, where both intimate and social expectations of a wife and mother are fatally undermined by the protagonists’ sometimes knowing, sometimes heedless, pursuit of self-actualization, exacerbated by intellectualized psyches that caused both women to deal more successfully with love as an abstraction than a reality.

As much as they were “society’s,” it may be that those expectations are actually Mrs. Hertog’s, a self-described “housewife and mother of three.” It may be that the book’s “Dangerous” characterization reflects a present-day personal, as much as a decades-old societal, judgment. And it may be that the narrative’s relative weighting of personal failings versus professional accomplishments and Mrs. Hertog’s treatment of the choices made by her protagonists demonstrate that the personal is indeed political.

Despite this somewhat cloudy lens, the book brings considerable depth and insight to understanding the troubled Lewis-Thompson relationship as well as to the personal projection and wish fulfillment that echo throughout the latter half of *Ann Vickers*. ✍

Federal Theater Project *continued from page 13*

as did the Spanish version in Tampa. Each theater staged it differently—in Birmingham it was done as a big political rally, in the Brooklyn-Queens production, the set suggested a whole town. The Yiddish version in New York, playing to recent refugees from Germany and Austria, was set against an encroaching darkness.

On opening night, the head of the League of New York Theaters called it “a bold adventure in a field we all ought to enter if we really want to keep the theater throughout America alive.” By night’s end, telegrams from other cities—Bridgeport and Cleveland, Miami and Indianapolis, Omaha and Denver, Tacoma and Boston—told of capacity audiences and popular acclaim.

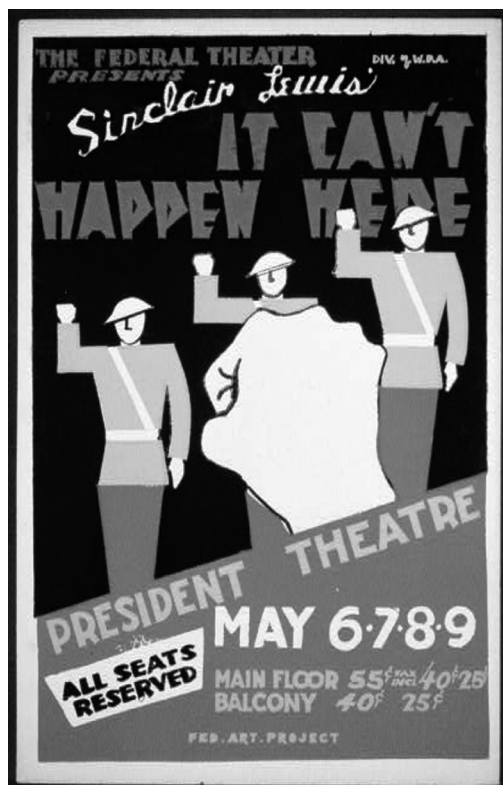
Also opening successfully that night were two productions in Los Angeles (one in Yiddish), plus productions in San Francisco, Newark, Detroit, Bridgeport, and Yonkers. Federal Theater productions opened later in nine more cities, including Philadelphia and Des Moines.

It Can’t Happen Here played long runs in New York and elsewhere, and six units took it on tour. It was so popular that in 1938 Sinclair Lewis rewrote the script for a commercial run, in which he played the hero. It was revived several more times.

But with the same play in twenty-one theaters in seventeen states, nothing like that October 1936 opening night of the Federal Theater production had ever happened before. And it has never happened since. ✍

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE—75 YEARS LATER

Richard Lingeman



Something very exciting happened this past fall. *It Can't Happen Here*, the play version of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 political novel, was read in theaters from coast to coast in homage to this still timely novel about the dangers of fascism in American society.

The following is an article written by Lewis biographer Richard Lingeman for the *Nation*.

Published on the *Nation* (<http://www.thenation.com>) November 2, 2011.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE (CAN IT?): Fascism in America? Nah, it can't happen here, people said. But Sinclair Lewis, Nobel Prize-winning author (and a *Nation* contributor), challenged that shibboleth in his 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, a dystopian fantasy in which a folksy, Huey Long-style demagogue is elected president and soon becomes an American Hitler. In 1936 the WPA Federal Theater Project mounted twenty-two simultaneous nationwide productions of the novel, which Lewis and John C. Moffitt adapted for the stage. In October [2011], in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of those productions, about twenty-four theater companies and universities across the country staged readings of Lewis's play.

The instigator was California actor and comedian Darryl Henriques, who calls the Federal Theater Project “the greatest flowering of theatrical talent the country has ever witnessed” and says his idea for the revival “had everything to do with what’s going on in America.”

“We have a form of fascism that hides behind the illusion of elections, a government that is wholly owned by the corporations and consistently ignores the well-being of its citizens in order to enrich the rich.”

Most of the readings took place on October 24—the date of Black Thursday, the 1929 stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression. In Seattle Arne Zaslove mounted a lavish reading with the Endangered Species Project, dedicated to putting on “the great plays you seldom see.” Producing director Mark Seldis of the Ghost Road Company in Baldwin Hills, California, says of its performance, “It was clear from audience reactions that *It Can't Happen Here* certainly resonates today.” Mike Smith Rivera of Burning Clown Productions, who held a reading in New York with the WorkShop Theater Company, says “much of the discussion was centered around” Lewis’s prescience “in foreseeing many of society’s present-day problems”—problems currently dramatized by Occupy Wall Street.

As Federal Theater Project director Hallie Flanagan once put it, dictatorship comes in “an apparently harmless guise with parades and promises... [but] the promises are not kept and the parade grounds become encampments.”

The participants in the nationwide reading included the following:

- The Living Theatre in collaboration with the Accidental Repertory Theater, New York
- Burning Clown Productions in concert with the WorkShop Theater Company, New York
- San Francisco Mime Troupe
- Cleveland Public Theatre, including a reading of a short excerpt of *Centennial* by David Hansen, based on the original production of *It Can't Happen Here* at Cleveland’s Carter Theater in 1936
- Brūka Theater, Reno, Nevada
- University of Wisconsin–Madison
- Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, Washington
- Syracuse University Department of Drama, Syracuse, New York

————— *It Can't Happen Here* continued on page 17

MacKinlay Kantor *continued from page 3*

thirteen. Kantor was a war correspondent in both World War II and Korea, where he flew on several combat missions. He



*MacKinlay Kantor
in the 1940s.*

received a Medal of Freedom in 1950, primarily for his work as a war correspondent. Lewis, of course, was a Gold Star father, losing a son in World War II to a sniper's bullet. No flag flies on Kantor's grave in Graceland Cemetery in Webster City, perhaps because he was not officially a veteran. However, several reports suggest that he acted with great bravery and received training as a gunner, which was totally against the rules of war for noncombatants. He was certainly a veteran of combat situations. Most accounts of his Medal of Freedom note his great service to the armed forces. His military connections were so extensive that the famed Army Air Corps General Curtis LeMay utilized Kantor's expertise when writing his autobiography.

Both men became aware of their interest in a writing career at a very early age. When Kantor was eighteen, he won a statewide contest sponsored by the *Des Moines Register* under the pseudonym of Sheridan Rhodes. Thus began a writing career that lasted until his death in 1977. Lewis wrote some in high school, but his first byline of note came when he wrote for the *Yale Literary Magazine*. Both men published early novels, which did not hint at the greatness that was to come. Kantor and Lewis both considered themselves newspapermen. The difference was that Kantor had much deeper experience in the area, including writing a column for some time for the *Des Moines Tribune*. Lewis, according to even his own accounts, did not seem to have the instincts for the newspaper business. He lost three newspaper jobs in rather quick fashion, including a short stint with the *Courier* in Waterloo, Iowa. To the end of his life, however, Lewis considered himself a newspaperman at heart.

Both Kantor and Lewis received many major awards in their lives. Kantor received at least five honorary degrees after the publication of *Andersonville*, his Pulitzer Prize opus. The one of which he was most proud was the honorary doctorate from Drake University, where his parents had met so many years before. He told his son that he felt his mother's presence at the ceremony. Lewis also received many honorary degrees,

perhaps the most well known being the 1936 honorary doctorate from Yale University.

Kantor never attended college, telling friends and family that his "university" was the Kendall Young Library in Webster City. Lewis graduated from Yale University in 1908. The one prize that they were both awarded was the Pulitzer Prize, Lewis being nominated for *Arrowsmith* and Kantor for *Andersonville*. Of course it is well known that Lewis turned down his prize, but he was still named by the Pulitzer committee as a recipient. In 1930, Lewis received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although Kantor often felt that *Spirit Lake*, which he truly considered his finest work, would put him in Nobel Prize contention, the honor eluded him.

Another interesting parallel for Kantor and Lewis was that if they needed a little cash, they were usually able to sell a short piece or a serialization to a magazine. Between them, they wrote thousands of articles for magazines. Kantor became especially well known for some of his detective stories, and there are many internet links that go into detail on that aspect of Kantor's career as a writer. He even wrote a police novel, *Signal Thirty-Two*.

Both Kantor and Lewis had life-long battles with alcohol. They would stay sober for periods of time and then return to heavy drinking. Kantor's son, Tim, recounts his dad's struggle with alcohol in his biography, including one time when Tim flew to Des Moines to drive his dad back east because the alcohol had taken such a hold on "Mack" that he did not feel he could make the trip. Mack somehow got the car from Webster City to Des Moines to meet his son.

Lewis had a problem with alcohol that was well documented, including the concern raised by his brother, Dr. Claude Lewis, who warned that he would be dead in a year if he did not quit drinking. Of course Lewis did not quit drinking and he died in 1951. Kantor seemed to view alcohol as a necessary companion. In his book, *Missouri Bittersweet*, he talks about an occasion when he and his wife Irene replenished their liquor supply. In another chapter, he sits in a northwest Missouri bar while interviewing a person for a story and has a few drinks of whiskey with another gentleman. He made note of the fact that he and his friend limited themselves to three drinks apiece, which seemed to give the impression of the very model of moderation.

Perhaps the other great parallel in the lives of these gentlemen is their contributions to the movie industry. Both had movies based on their work that received several Oscars.

—————MacKinlay Kantor *continued on page 17*

It Can't Happen Here continued from page 15

- Spotlight “Still Got It” Players in conjunction with Spotlight Players, Canton, Michigan
- Atlantic Stage, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
- Fuse Theater Ensemble, Arena Stage, Portland, Oregon
- Great Basin College, Elko, Nevada
- The Rogue Theater, Tucson, Arizona
- The Thorne Street Parlour, Los Angeles, California
- Dell’Arte International, Bluelake, California
- Random Radio People broadcast, KMUD radio 91.1 FM
- The Blank Theater’s Living Room Series, 2nd Stage Theatre, Hollywood, California
- The Ghost Road Company & Trade City Productions, The Village Green Clubhouse, Baldwin Hills, California
- The Desert Rose Playhouse, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Le Petomane Theater Ensemble, Louisville, Kentucky
- Locust Productions, Kirkwood Theater, Des Moines, Iowa
- The Antaeus Company, Deaf West Theater, North Hollywood, California
- Illinois State University’s School of Theater
- Theater Gigante, Milwaukee, Wisconsin ✍

MacKinlay Kantor continued from page 16

For Lewis, it was *Elmer Gantry*, filmed after his death, which garnered many awards, including Best Actor, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Screenplay. For Kantor, it was *The Best Years of Our Lives*, based on his novel in blank verse, *Glory for Me*, which delineates in great detail the lives of veterans returning from war. The movie received seven Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Screenplay. A list of the written works of these authors that became movies is a very extensive one. Kantor first broke into the film industry in 1936 with *The Voice of Bugle Ann*. His last work of note for film or television was *The Andersonville Trial*, filmed in 1970. Lewis first found a place in the film industry with his *Free Air*, filmed in 1922. *Elmer Gantry*, adapted from the novel of the same name, reached the big screen in 1960, marking the last major film made from a Lewis novel.

In the end, both Kantor and Lewis died of illnesses related to their struggles with alcohol. In the final chapter of their complex personal stories, both of them were laid to rest in the soil of the hometowns in the Midwest from which they had emerged. Kantor and Lewis both had long, enjoyable, tormented, productive, and adventurous lives, and like Robert Louis Stevenson’s sailor, they are both home from the sea. The two writers are finally at rest in the place that knew them best and to which they always kept returning, even in death.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Craig Biggs, cemetery sexton of Graceland Cemetery in Webster City, Iowa for his assistance in locating the grave of MacKinlay Kantor and those of other family members. We visited to clarify information on more than one occasion. Craig was very helpful and professional. I am also appreciative to Larry Stone, writer and photographer from Elkader, Iowa for locating the Kantor gravesite on a visit to Webster City and taking some photographs of the family plot. I appreciate the support of Dr. Sally Parry for encouraging my idea that a short piece on the parallel lives of Sinclair Lewis and MacKinlay Kantor might be of interest to the members of the Sinclair Lewis Society. A special thanks to Ketta Lubberstedt-Arjes, Reference Librarian with the Kendall Young Library, for her assistance in locating some photos for use in this article and for assisting me in locating the boyhood home of MacKinlay Kantor. The Find A Grave website has also been very helpful, especially in locating the grave of Edward P. Kermott. I would also like to thank MacKinlay Kantor for his kindness and willingness to take the time to talk to some young college students, myself included, on a warm June day in 1967 in the Missouri State Historical Society in Columbia, Missouri. He left an impression of creative genius and enjoyment of people in the world around him. The honor of meeting him has remained with me to this day. I hope this short piece helps shed some light on both Kantor and Lewis, true sons of the American Midwest. ✍

IN MEMORIAM: DAVID D. ANDERSON

Long-time Sinclair Lewis Society member and university distinguished professor emeritus, Michigan State University, David Anderson died December 3, 2011. Dr. Anderson grew up on the shores of Lake Erie, where he was inspired by stories of the Great Lakes and by accounts of local history. In 1942, he served in the amphibious forces of the US Navy; participated in the Anzio Landing; earned a Silver Star and five battle stars; and when his ship, P.C. 621, was torpedoed and sunk, a Purple Heart. He also served in the US Army during the Korean War. He received his Ph.D. in English from Michigan State University in 1961, where he went on to teach first in the Department of English, and for the bulk of his career, in the Department of American Thought and Language, from which he retired in 1994. During 1963–64, he was a Fulbright lecturer in American literature at the University of Karachi, Pakistan. Author, editor, and biographer, Dr. Anderson's primary scholarship focused on Ohio and Midwestern literature. A foremost authority on the life and letters of Sherwood Anderson (no relation) and co-founder of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, Dr. Anderson lectured throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and

the Americas. He published thirty-seven books and hundreds of articles as well as poems, a novel, and a collection of short stories. For the past several decades, Dr. Anderson had been invited by the Swedish Academy to nominate candidates for the Nobel Prize in literature. His many awards include honorary doctorates from Wittenberg University and Bowling Green State University, and the Ohioana Career Award for Professional Accomplishments in the Arts and Humanities, in which he joins past recipients, who include Arthur Schlesinger, Toni Morrison, and John Glenn. Donations in Dr. Anderson's memory may be made to the Greater Lansing Area Food Bank, the Patricia A. Anderson Library Endowment Fund for Children's Books at Michigan State, or the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. Condolences can be made at www.palmerbush.com <<http://www.palmerbush.com/> Visit the Guest Book at <http://www.legacy.com/guestbook/lmj/guestbook.aspx?n=david-d-anderson&pid=154929856&cid=full>.

[A more complete obituary was published in the *Lansing State Journal* on December 7, 2011.] ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Tom Raynor sent in some pictures of Twin Farms in connection with an essay on Dorothy Thompson and the Land Corps (see page 1). He says, "I would love to stay there, too. I came across a very recent article about the resort and the redesign of accommodations by world-class designers. The cheapest off-season nightly rate is Red's room @ \$1,300 off-season. Dorothy's room fetches \$1,500, and a cottage goes for \$3,100. Add eighteen percent service charge and state tax, and we're talking about an average rate of more than \$2,000. And you must remember to give them plenty of notice if you cancel:

Due to our intimate size, any cancellations affect us significantly. Consequently, we adhere to a strict cancellation policy. Your payments, less \$200 per room booked, will be refunded if we receive notification of cancellation not less than sixty days prior to your arrival.

And what a room the "big room" was! According to Kurth, it was Red's idea to gut the barn and connect it to the main house with what Dorothy called "an obscurely wrong loggia." The project cost about \$20,000, which was twice what he had paid for the entire spread, including buildings!

It is well known that Sinclair Lewis provided plots to Jack London in the early part of the twentieth century. What

may be less known, is that London was also an accomplished photographer, and took many pictures on his travels, some for hire for the Hearst Syndicate, *Cosmopolitan*, and the *Woman's Home Companion*. In a recent book, *Jack London, Photographer*, by Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Sara S. Hodson, and Philip Adam (University of Georgia Press, 2010), many of London's photographs are on display, some for the first time. Divided into six chapters, the authors provide context for the photos and some historical and biographical background. The chapters are "The People of the Abyss," based on London's visit to the poverty-stricken East End of London, and which became a book, *The People of the Abyss*; "The Russo-Japanese War, 1904", "The San Francisco Earthquake, 1906", "The Cruise of the *Snark* 1907–1908" which became a book of the same name which details sailing to Hawaii, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands; "The Voyage of the *Dirigo*, 1912" where he and Charmian sailed around Cape Horn; and "The Mexican Revolution, 1914." Sinclair Lewis Society member Jacqueline Koenig was among the benefactors that made this fascinating book possible.

Roger Forseth reports that *Main Street* is free on Kindle for those readers who have the device. *The Job* and *Free Air* are free on the iPad as well so perhaps Lewis will get a boost from folks who want to download primarily free texts.

Good news for fans of classic westerns. The National Film Preservation Foundation has released *Treasures 5: The West, 1898–1938*, a boxed set of DVDs in the series *Treasures from American Film Archives*. It's a three-disc, ten-hour collection of documentaries, travelogues, newsreels, and films focusing on the west or at least the movie version of the west. Among the films is the 1926 film of Lewis's *Mantrap*, directed by Victor Fleming, and featuring Clara Bow as a flapper in the northern woods.

Writershouses.com, a website entitled "Where Stories Live," was started by A. N. Devers in 2010 to focus on "writers' spaces and the art of literary pilgrimage." It includes a database, pictures, a blog about houses that the webmaster has visited, and even a gift shop that currently features prints of different houses and plans for other products. One can browse the contents by author, state, or city, and the website is starting to expand to other parts of the world as well. There is a link for the Lewis Boyhood Home with a photograph and other information.

WEB NOTES

Honorable Sally E. Parry
Executive Director, Sinclair Lewis Society

We have received your donation of books for Mother of Civilization Library today dated 15/11/2011. The books have already been checked and properly cataloged in the library. They are now available for use by everyone. Harry Sinclair Lewis books are great addition to our library Program.

They will really help our people to gain more knowledge about internationally the well-known first American Nobel Prize Winner's contributions to literature. We hope that your generosity will be followed by many school, college, and university students and alumni in District Dadu Sindh.

Yours Sincerely,
Rashid Anees Magsi
Project Manager
Mother of Civilization Library

I am trying to research my great uncle, Phil Miller, who seems to have played the role of Doremus Jessup in the 1936 Cleveland production of *It Can't Happen Here*. I wonder if you, or any members of your society, might suggest where I might find any photographs of that production or, indeed, any other information about him. [Editor: Thank you for writing. There was actually a nationwide reading of *It Can't Happen Here* in over twenty theaters across America to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the original production. You should e-mail Darryl Henriques at pointoforder@juno.com who has been doing a lot of research on this. He may be able to help.]

Would you be so kind to help me out with a little research I am currently conducting: How many (biological) grandchildren (grandsons and granddaughters) did Sinclair Lewis have?

[Editor: Lewis had two biological children. Wells, with his first wife Grace Hegger Lewis, was killed in World War II. His second son, Michael, born to him and Dorothy Thompson, was married twice and had three children between the two marriages, Gregory, John-Paul, and Lesley. The three grandchildren are all still alive.]

I'd like to ask for your help with a question regarding Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. Some editions of the novel are subtitled "The Story of Carol Kennicott"; most are not. This subtitle is also missing from the cover of the first edition. I am curious as to whether this subtitle was penned by Lewis or added later by a publisher or editor. I could not find an answer to this question anywhere. Could you please shed some light on this issue, or direct me to a source that might be able to answer that question? [Editor: Thank you for writing. The original title is *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. That is in the original publication by Harcourt, Brace and Howe and the subsequent reprintings by Grosset & Dunlap. It does not always show up in other reprintings, probably because the first two words by themselves are more striking than the novel with the subtitle.] Thank you for your reply. I asked the question because *Main Street*, a superb and underrated novel in my opinion, is often touted as the story of Gopher Prairie and, by extension, of small town America. In my opinion, it is more the story of Carol Kennicott than of Gopher Prairie. It seems that Sinclair Lewis would have agreed. I also asked the question on an online literature forum, and was mocked for nitpicking.

I am just reading *Babbitt*, and in connection, an essay by the Icelandic Nobel Prize winner Halldór Laxness, where he tells about the inspiration he got from Sinclair Lewis in his early life. Do you know this essay? Perhaps they are not translated into English. Anyway, I think Lewis has a Scandinavian approach to things and people and society in his works. I myself write to you from Denmark.

I have a request, through a Boston author researching a new book on Charles Lindbergh. He is trying to determine for certain whether there is any truth to the supposition that Lindbergh's mother, Evangeline, was the role model for Carol Kennicott. This statement is made on page 28 of A. Scott Berg's biography, *Lindbergh*, with no footnote as to source that I can find: "Decades later some believed she was the model for Carol Kennicott, the stifled heroine in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, a novel based on the author's hometown of Sauk Centre, not fifty miles from (Lindbergh's home in) Little Falls."

Neither Lingeman nor Shorer, nor other books on Lindbergh, mention this. Has anyone else heard of this? Can you verify or put it to rest? In my mind the dates do not match up; Lindbergh did not become famous until 1927, *Main Street* was published in 1920, and there is no indication Lindbergh and Lewis knew each other in youth. In any case, Lindbergh was a solitary young man who did not make friends easily

and would probably not have sought out the bookish young dreamer from Sauk Centre; their interests were miles apart. I am aware that after Lindbergh became famous, Lewis made a connection with *Trail of the Hawk*. "Why dont [sic] Grosset start intensive campaign Trail Hawk, which is really story Lindbergh," Lewis cabled Harcourt after the 1927 flight (Schorer 485). Wouldn't Lewis have mentioned it if he knew Lindbergh in this reference?

Evangeline Lindbergh arrived in Little Falls in the spring of 1901. Lewis left for Oberlin in the early fall of 1902. This also makes it unlikely, in my mind, that Lewis would have known her or much about her, since by the time she came he was busy studying for and preoccupied with his entrance exams for Yale. She was not yet settled in the town, camping out while their home was built. Further, Evangeline had a public reputation for very tempestuous behavior, inconsistent with Carol's character. In Berg's *Lindbergh*, "Lindbergh maids regularly gossiped about their mistress's wild temper and even wilder spending habits" (28). The only link I can find would be Evangeline's unhappiness with small-town Little Falls, after growing up in the big city of Detroit. Thanks again for any help you can give, particularly any fact-based references. [Editor: I have not heard that Lindbergh's mother was a model for Carol Kennicott. Lewis drew primarily from his own experiences for *Main Street* although the correspondence he received afterward from many different people reflected the fact that he touched a nerve. Many people thought that he was writing about their small towns or about themselves. A lot of the women who wrote felt that he must have great empathy for them. One could probably find such unhappy and dissatisfied women in nearly every town in the Midwest. A couple of years ago we ran an article in the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* on Carl Sandburg's wife and her affinities with Carol. Little Falls is close by Sauk Centre; we actually drove there after one of the Lewis conferences. It's another nice small town and the house he lived in was big, at least bigger than the Lewis house.] [Robert Fleming writes: "I don't know of any connection between Lindbergh's mother and Carol K, but Lewis rather oddly anticipates Lindbergh in *Trail of the Hawk*. That hard-to-find book is now widely available through Amazon (and as I recall through the Gutenberg Project).]

I am a professor of history at the University of Missouri, and presently engaged in writing a biography of Dale Carnegie. In Mark Schorer's biography, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*, he talks briefly about several lectures that Lewis delivered in the late 1930s that featured a critique of Dale Carnegie, "the Bard of Babbitry" (634). I am having great difficulty locating

the manuscripts or outlines of these lectures. Do you know where they might be located? Any help with this matter would be greatly helpful to me, and deeply appreciated.

Would you kindly provide me a sample copy of the latest issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*? I am preparing a series of lectures on the Life and Times and the Writings of Sinclair Lewis, which are a part of a life-long project of mine, Literature and Medicine. I am focusing on the effect, the impact, of writers' medical problems on their writings.

I have a first UK edition/third impression (published by Jonathan Cape) of *Babbitt* signed and inscribed by Sinclair Lewis to someone called Joseph Thorp. The inscription is dated May 8, 1923 and signed above the London place name, Battersea Park. I speculate that Lewis may have been staying there. The inscription reads: "To Joseph Thorp from one to whom he is about to give a drink—his friend Sinclair Lewis." This suggests that the pair might have been (or were about to be) in each other's presence and that Lewis was perhaps signing and handing over the book while being entertained with a drink by Thorp—possibly in Thorp's home. I would be grateful if you could throw any light on the above, including for example on any time Lewis spent in England and also the identity of Joseph Thorp. [Editor: I can find little on Joseph Thorp (1888-1962). Apparently he was a writer, and the texts I found included *The Other War* and *Friends and Adventures*, the latter published by Jonathan Cape which means that Lewis may have met him through his publisher. I can give you some more general information about Lewis's time in England. He was actually there twice as an adolescent, earning money for college by working on a cattle boat. He was always an Anglophile as is evident in *Dodsworth*. In the spring of 1923 he was in the process of writing *Arrowsmith* and had spent the earlier part of the year with Paul De Kruif in the Caribbean doing research. In April he spent some time with H. G. Wells whom he greatly admired. Over the next two months he travelled around England a good deal, to Bath for Easter, weekending with Lord Beaverbrook and Lord and Lady Astor. He and his wife Grace also lived for two months in London at the time before moving on to France over the summer. He travelled in Europe a good deal during his life and often visited England.]

From a Mongolian academic looking for the contact for translation rights. [He was directed to McIntosh and Otis.] Thank you, very much for your informative and kind response!

It is indeed helpful for me. Now I am able to continue my hunting for obtaining the translation permission. Sinclair Lewis is very famous among those Mongolian people who graduated from universities and institutes in Russia during the communist regime or who have very good command of Russian language. After the breakdown of Soviet Russian Dictatorship any Mongolian did not study Russian language. It is very sorry. Russian language was the real window that we can look to the real world during that isolated time. Only one positive side of that time was the possibility to find all famous books of American writers in Russian language. Very cheap!

Now in Mongolian Bookstores they are selling two books by Sinclair Lewis: *It Can't Happen Here* and *Go East, Young Man*. I bought the second one edited by you. The letter to the Pulitzer Prize Committee included in your book and The Nobel Prize Lecture by Sinclair Lewis will be included in Mongolian publication.

By the way, I am reading the newest issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* sent by you. Interesting and helpful! Especially the part with the title "The Characters" gave me more detailed ideas and insights regarding the characters in *Arrowsmith*.

Tom Raynor wrote: For the folks in the Sinclair Lewis Society:

Here's a link to Hal's film debut, and probably his only appearance on screen. (Am I right?) The movie is a thirty-three-minute version of *Camille* made in 1926, featuring appearances not only by Hal, but by his buddy, H. L. Mencken, as well as Ethel Barrymore, Charles Chaplin, Clarence Darrow, Dorothy Gish, Anita Loos (in the title role), Somerset Maugham, Max Reinhardt, and others too numerous to mention. The movie opens with Paul Robeson as Alexandre Dumas, fils, busily penning *The Lady of the Camellias* while sipping something or other—absinthe?—for inspiration. He succeeds in conjuring up several frightening apparitions, all played by Hal!

SPOILER ALERT: The movie is anything but a faithful adaptation of the original, which probably says a lot about the quality of the Prohibition hooch that must've gone down in the making!

Here's the eleven-minute clip that's posted on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xpUIXXq_iE

The entire thirty-three-minute version can be downloaded here:

<http://www.movstreaming.com/actor,sinclair-lewis-11943.html>

And here's a review of *The Last Dandy*, a biography of Ralph Barton:

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1357771.The_Last_Dandy_Ralph_Barton

I hope this comes as a surprise to you, as it did to me. It's not mentioned by Schorer, but I understand that one of Mencken's biographers refers to it.

[Fred Betz writes: See Marion Elizabeth Rodgers: *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005). "For all his criticism of the movies, Mencken appeared in a film himself, but it was never commercially released. When the caricaturist Ralph Barton informed Mencken that he was filming a production of *Camille: The Fate of a Coquette* with Anita Loos in the title role, he beseeched Mencken to be in it. The film had a cast of characters unlike any assembled before or since, with Mencken portraying the founder of Prohibition, Andrew Volstead, and Kaiser Wilhelm. Hergesheimer played the ghost of Valentino" (320). No mention of Lewis, however.]

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

The 2011 Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference was a great success, attracting over 100 participants for a keynote address, a panel discussion, and three workshops. Patricia

—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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SALE LIST

Forster, E.M. *Sinclair Lewis Interprets America*. Cambridge: Harvard Press for Harvey Taylor, 1932. \$75

First edition. Stapled wrappers. Fine. One of 100 numbered copies signed by Taylor for private distribution. Highly laudatory statement by Forster about Lewis's abilities to populate and breathe life into the towns and cities of middle America that Europeans had previously been unable to visualize. Very scarce.

Hampl, author of the award-winning memoirs *A Romantic Education* and *The Florist's Daughter*, provided the keynote, speaking on personal experience that is at the heart of so much great literature. Therese Zenk, author of *The Country Doctor Revisited*, focused her workshop on simple and practical exercises that beginning writers can do to identify what they want to write about. Award-winning poet and playwright Barton Sutter recited some of his own poetry and gave advice on experimenting with different forms of poetry and rhythm in order to write. The third workshop was led by University of Iowa rhetoric professor Brooks Landon, who spoke on creating sentences that are well-thought-out and controlled. The Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference is now the longest-running writers' conference in Minnesota.

Sinclair Lewis is popular in Japan, and in July 2011, forty-six Japanese junior high school students from Okinawa visited the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home. For the past fourteen years, Japanese students have had an exchange program with St. John's College in Minnesota and have visited Lewis sites as part of their visit. They also visited the grave where they prayed and laid flowers on his gravesite.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1914. \$250

Early reprint. Fine in attractive, near fine dustwrapper with a little offsetting on the rear panel and a very small chip at one corner of the crown. The first book under his own name by the first American author to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. This jacket reprints the original jacket art—a jacketed first edition would cost several thousand dollars.

— . *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921. \$750

Twenty-first printing, published six months after the first printing. Rear hinge slightly tender, still a nice and bright, near fine copy in a nice, very good plus dustwrapper with a split at the bottom of the front spine fold. Lewis' first major success, a realistic

portrayal of Midwestern life, and the first of several important novels. A relatively early jacketed copy, and scarce thus. The first printing in original jacket is a rarity.

— . *Mantrap*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$200

First English edition. Owner name on the half-title, else an unusually fine and bright copy, lacking the dustwrapper. Author's eighth book under his own name, and basis for the 1926 film directed by Victor Fleming and featuring Ernest Torrence and Clara Bow. A lovely copy.

— . *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1927. \$850

First edition, first issue with "Gantry" spelled "Cantry" on the spine. An exceptionally fine and bright copy, lacking the dustwrapper. Advance Review Copy with slip laid in. A notable novel about a corrupt evangelist, memorably filmed in 1960 with Burt Lancaster and Shirley Jones, who both won Oscars, as did the screenplay of director Richard Brooks.

— . *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1928. \$650

First edition. Fine in a near very good dustwrapper with some loss at the crown. A flawed but presentable copy.

— . *Work of Art*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1934. \$125

First English edition. Fine in attractive, very good dustwrapper with a bit of fading to the spine and a number of small nicks and tears. The rise, fall, and resurrection of an American hotel-keeper.

— . *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943. \$75

First edition. Fine in a lightly worn, very good dustwrapper with some rubbing and short tears.

— . *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1943. \$25

Second edition. Spine slightly faded, else near fine in near fine, lightly soiled dustwrapper with some light wear to the ends of the spine and edges of the panels. Donald Ogden Stewart wrote the

screenplay for the 1947 George Sidney screen version starring Spencer Tracy, Lana Turner, and Mary Astor.

— . *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, 1949. \$200

First edition. Fine in near fine, lightly worn dustwrapper. A nice copy of this novel about the Minnesota frontier.

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NOVEMBER MISCELLANY

69. *They Still Say No*. By Wells Lewis. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939. \$250

First edition. Very good in a bright unfaded dust jacket which is split along the front flap fold. An uncommon novel by the son of Sinclair Lewis.

68. *Sinclair Lewis: A Biographical Sketch* by Carl Van Doren. With Bibliography by Harvey Taylor. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1933. \$250

First edition. Presentation copy from Van Doren to noted Cleveland bookseller Peter Keisogloff. With a secondary presentation below the first indicating that the book was given by Keisogloff in 1951. A fine copy in a near fine dust jacket, a little darkened at spine. Nice association copy of an uncommon book.

67. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927. \$850

First edition. First issue binding with G on spine resembling a C. Near fine copy in a very good dust jacket, bright and crisp but with two longer closed tears to front panel, a shallow chip at top of rear panel and some rubbing to spine panel. Nice copy of this classic novel of religious fundamentalism.



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