

**SOCIETY
FOR
THE
STUDY
OF**



MIDWESTERN LITERATURE

Newsletter
Volume Eight
Number Two
Summer, 1978
Annual Membership Issue

Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

Volume Eight

Number Two
Summer, 1978

The Eighth Annual Conference

The successful three-day symposium "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest," held on May 18, 19, and 20th, marked the beginning of the Society's efforts to take its place as the focal point of a developing Midwestern consciousness and a growing interest in Midwestern culture, past, present, and future.

As the attached letter, development schedule, and brochure indicate, the Society is beginning to take the necessary steps that will enable its members, together with public and private foundations, corporations, and other institutions, to join forces in the Center for the Study of Midwestern Literature and Culture, a vital organization for the study of our common cultural heritage, the dissemination of our findings, and the support of those elements that insure the continued evolution of Midwestern cultural traditions.

The success or failure of the Society's developmental program depends upon the extent to which the members support it: as life members, patrons, regular members; as participants in programs and contributors to publications; as donors of research materials; as contributors of money, and in the innumerable other ways that will make the Society's Center a viable concern. We welcome your support.

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Announcement:

Future programs -- MLA, MMLA, PCA, SSML -- and future issues of MidAmerica, Midwestern Miscellany, and the Newsletter need membership participation. Volunteers, contributors, and inquirers please write Dave Anderson.

* * *

Dr. Dorys Crow Grover, associate professor, Literature and Languages Department, East Texas State University, was presented the literature award by The Greater Llano Estacado SOUTHWEST HERITAGE quarterly at the annual meeting of the Llano Estacado Heritage, Inc., July 16, 1977, at the College of the Southwest, Hobbs, New Mexico.

Dr. Grover received a Bill Leftwich "Spanish Hat" statuette and a cash prize for her short story, "Paso Por Hombre," which appeared in Vol. 5, No. 2, Winter, 1975-76 edition of the quarterly. The award is made on the basis of creativity, economy of expression, regional applicability, and originality. Only one award is given for literature.

* * *

I am trying to compile a bibliography of Kansas short stories--stories by people connected to Kansas by birth, education, or residency. I have a good many references so far, but am wondering if the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature has information that would help me further. (I know nothing about the annual publication, MidAmerica.) Also, if I can be of help to you, let me know. I have an extensive list (with addresses) of contemporary Kansas writers.

Any attention you can give to me would be greatly appreciated. I teach Kansas Literature and short story writing at the University of Kansas, have just joined the Society for 1978, and look forward to a continuing relationship with your organization.

Thomas F. Averill
1224 Delaware
Lawrence, KS 66044

* * *

(continued)

highland haven

a fictional memoir by William Thomas

III

I made a couple more small sales during the next three weeks, and, though I looked like a piker compared to the men who were bringing in sales of fifty or a hundred lots every day, my commissions paid my expenses, and I felt better. One morning Pierce read an advertisement he was going to put in The Moorton Independent. All advertising had been in The Independent, an eight-page sheet distributed free, which didn't pretend to be anything but an advertising medium. The two dailies, The Morning Beacon and The Tribune, had refused to accept Highland Haven advertising because they thought the scheme was phony. Pierce was sore at both of them for that, and as both were trying to kill The Independent he had given it more and more advertising until he was practically subsidizing it. Every salesman carried in his kit the issues containing double-page spreads, with pictures of the proposed cathedral home, the chimes tower, the park plan, etc., to show or give to prospects. I thought all this advertising crude, for it was only cuts made from the architect's drawings with some paragraphs of slush, but I kept such thoughts to myself.

However, when Pierce read this new ad, which was to go under another picture of the cathedral home, filling a page in The Independent, he asked for criticism. It was a rehash of the sob stuff, life's darkest hour, hearts crushed by bereavement, eyes blinded by tears. Several of the men had things to say about it, but none much to the point. I didn't comment in the meeting, but afterward went to Pierce and told him what I thought.

"That ad is pretty old hat."

I knew that Pierce liked straightforward talk if a man had justification for what he said. He looked at me without answering.

"We've been saying all this too many times

the same way." From the look on his face I surmised he'd been thinking that too.

"Do you think you can do better?"

"Yes."

"All right, then, you work it up."

That's the way I started writing the Highland Haven advertising. Pierce was pleased enough with the first layout I showed him that he said there would be a check for me Saturday, and after that I was on the payroll at \$20 a week. I used the old material and said the same things, but in a more skillful way, taking care not to go too far on the sentimental side, and if I put in "life's darkest hour" I left "eyes blinded by tears and hearts crushed by bereavement" for another time. I proposed that we get out a booklet; Pierce thought a folder would be better, the Park plan and descriptive matter on one side and that Century of Business Progress chart, with a graph showing the steady increase in value of burial property, on the other. I made the layout and wrote the copy, and we had five thousand printed.

As fast as the weather allowed work went on at the Park, and when the results could be seen we had some photographs taken and new cuts made. Pierce approved my ideas for publicity, and I wrote news stories and sent them to newspapers in outlying towns. I didn't know whether they printed them or not, but I felt pretty good, having my \$20 for certain every week. The copy-writing didn't take all my time, but I didn't try to sell lots any more, except when I felt like it, which wasn't often. Lloyd Barlow was sore at me because I was a dud as a salesman and because I had made a place for myself in the organization without his having anything to do with it.

It was by way of the advertising that I came to know Hubert Marsh, owner, publisher, editor, and general manager of The Independent. He had an office girl to keep books and answer the telephone, but did all the other work himself, including editorial copy to add to the theater publicity and other such stuff he printed. His only source of revenue was advertising, and his principal clients,

aside from Highland Haven, were grocers and some furniture dealers. He went about town every day soliciting advertising, and I had seen him in the Highland Haven office a few times before I knew who he was. After we became acquainted we sat and talked half an hour whenever he came. It took only a few remarks on his part to let me know that he had a more critical attitude and a more independent manner of regarding things than any of my associates on the Highland Haven sales staff, and I suppose I impressed him the same way. After two or three conversations each of us knew all there was to know about the other intellectually; that is, each, knowing the other's general point of view, knew what his attitude had to be in a particular instance.

Hubert was thirty, a tall and well-built man, with a lean, triangular face, dark red hair and mustache, handsome in an inoffensive way. He had the kind of personal charm that appeals to women and that most men respond to as well. I liked him, and we were friends soon. He'd had a year and a half of college (Butler) before he had to leave it and go to work, and had been at advertising and journalistic ventures ever since, never with much success. He'd come from Indianapolis to take over The Independent a little less than a year before. It was going well now, with the big play he was getting from Highland Haven. But the reason why Hubert had never been financially successful was clear when I saw how ready he was to express opinions that some people would like to see a man shot or jailed for. He didn't tell me in plain words that he was a member of the Communist Party, but from the way he talked I knew he wasn't just a parlor pinko, and later I saw his CP card.

I was a fellow-traveler of the Communist Party then, for I believed in the need for certain things the Communists were supposed to believe in, a more equitable distribution of the world's goods and more economic security for working people. There were probably never so many near-Communists, or so many fellow-travelers, as in 1934, but I didn't believe capitalism was so nearly done-for as the Communists professed to

think. Hubert thought it, though, and took every opportunity to say so.

"Capitalism as an economic system is dead," he pronounced. "Its vestiges may linger on fifteen years yet, but no more."

He talked at workers' gatherings and among the unemployed. He never tried to convert me, as he knew if I went the whole way it would have to be of my own accord; and once he told me I wouldn't make a good Communist anyhow, for if I should become successful in a monetary way I would desert.

Hubert was now joined in Moorton by his wife, who had tuberculosis but was lately discharged from a sanitarium in Indianapolis as an arrested case. They had two children, Jane, aged eight, and Jimmie, five. With his income increased by the proceeds of the Highland Haven advertising, Hubert had rented a little house, drab to look at but pleasant inside, and bought some cheap new furniture. Ellen Marsh was apt at arranging things and giving the place unconventional decorative touches.

In other ways too it was an unconventional household, and I like that, for convention was the rule of living with my parents, a fact I had more or less forgotten during my years of independence. At the Marshes' you did and said what you pleased, and went boldly to the bathroom. The children kept to themselves; they were so unobtrusive you forgot they existed. A pair of waitresses occupied a second-floor room, and were likely to enter or leave at almost any hour, but they were to be ignored. Mealtimes were flexible. After my first visit Ellen and Hubert asked me back to dinner, and I fell into the habit of going there often after working hours instead of going home. I would see Hubert during the day, or telephone his office and leave a message, and buy a steak or roast and take it to the house and cook it, and we had good times.

The arrangement suited Ellen, for she stayed in bed much of the day and it allowed her to rest long in the afternoon. After dinner the three of us talked or Hubert and I played chess. We talked a

lot about economic inequality and social injustice and civil liberties and other great principles and abstractions. There were plenty of examples--conditions in Germany, the Scottsboro case, Tom Mooney still in prison--and we talked about them too. As we were in agreement, every such discussion ended in condemnation of the world we lived in.

But I didn't want to talk about it all the time, and was as well pleased when Hubert went somewhere of an evening to speak, and I could chat with Ellen. She was twenty-eight, had little formal education, but had read a lot and knew modern fiction well. She always got the point of my jokes, and we never ran out of things to say. Talking to her was the nearest thing to an intellectual life I had.

Infrequently somebody else would be there, and we played bridge. But aside from me Hubert and Ellen had no friends in Moorton, and almost the only other visitors were Communists, always staying overnight on the way to or from Cleveland. They were all from Cleveland, and always they'd been bumming on the road, and almost always they needed clean clothing, a haircut, and a bath. One I almost got into an argument with, a little man of forty or so, bald and wearing nose glasses with a chain. His face was washed and shaved, and his shirt was clean. He looked like an innocuous professor, and I thought about how, if the times weren't out of joint, he might have been a professor in a small liberal college or a big liberal university where his doctrines would have been tolerated.

He gave Hubert and me an unmerciful beating at chess, the two of us playing together against him. He looked at some papers out of his brief case while we consulted on moves, and when we had moved a piece he glanced at the board and without deliberation made a reply that spoiled our plan of attack. After he won five straight games, we agreed there was no point in keeping that up, and just talked.

As there is only one subject a pure Communist can talk about, there was frequent mention of a dialectical materialism, economic determinism, and capitalist apologetics. He quoted one

writer after another from Marx and Engels to Lenin, and I didn't dispute any of his statements, but asked if he had read Vilfredo Pareto. I think he didn't like to admit he hadn't but was afraid to maintain he had read Pareto for fear I had. I said Pareto had been professor of political economy at the University of Lausanne.

"Then he was certainly a reactionary. Lausanne is a stronghold of reaction."

"I think it isn't right to dogmatize on somebody unless you know something about him."

He looked at me with a gaze of amused tolerance that unmistakably branded me a bourgeois nincompoop. Hubert didn't say anything, and Ellen said it was time for her to go to bed. I said it was time for me to be going home.

That was the only time such a thing happened, and it didn't matter, and I went oftener to the Marsh house and earlier in the afternoon. Ellen insisted I didn't disturb her rest and that she wanted me to come; and Hubert was glad enough to find dinner under way when he got there. Occasionally we went to a cafe of an evening, but aside from that and an infrequent movie we hardly ever went out, because of Ellen's state of health and because it entailed spending money. I lent Ellen books, and we all enjoyed one another's company, and had good times.

IV

Spring was long coming, but as soon as the ground was dry enough to work there was progress at the Park. The roads were staked out and the principal ones cut through, and that leading from the entrance was stoned for a hundred yards. The old house that was to be occupied by a caretaker was repaired, and when its outer woodwork had been painted it looked attractive. Pierce continued to talk grandiloquently about the sunken gardens and the chimes tower, and every two or three weeks he exhibited a new drawing of the cathedral home (whose plan had been changed half a dozen times), but so far these were only on paper.

"The cathedral home," he said, "will be available for weddings and parties too."

That struck me as incongruous, as I think it did everybody. Pierce instantly interpreted our reaction.

"There's nothing wrong with that," he assured us, and explained that such was the accepted practice in other (more urbane) communities. A mark of civilization was the sophisticated view, he asserted; there was really nothing irreverent about conviviality in the midst of the dead.

The notion seemed to me akin to the Greek idea, and I let it go at that. Pierce also described plans to devote certain blocks in the Park to exclusive use by various organizations. There was to be a Veterans' Block, a Masonic Block, an Eagles' Block, and others as need arose. I dare to say there would have been a Navaho Block if the Navahos had established the practice of dying in Moorton in sufficient numbers. Nothing was said about negroes, for there was some race prejudice in Moorton. But the sales force understood that if a negro family wished to bury in Highland Haven, they would not be denied the privilege, and a number of lots had been sold to negroes, both for use and for investment.

"On April first," Pierce continued, "there will be a burial. Then the land is no longer taxable."

He kept saying that all through March, without telling how he was going to get somebody to die at the required time. When the date came, there was a burial sure enough. A corpse had been waiting. Pierce had promised the family a free burial if they would allow it to be first in Highland Haven. Lloyd Barlow, Carl Pendray, and I were delegated to go with the undertaker's assistant and get the corpse from the mausoleum.

After we pulled the coffin out of the crypt, the undertaker's assistant said "Let's see if he's still all right," and proceeded to open it.

"You fellows look first," Lloyd Barlow said. "If he's all right, I'll look."

He was almost all right, just an old

thin-faced man lying there, with a spot of mold on his cheek. I thought he smelled a little, but couldn't be sure whether the smell came from the corpse or from the whole place we were in. We closed the coffin and carried it to the hearse.

At the Park they were ready, the tent over the grave, the lowering device in place, and the artificial grass mat over the mound of earth. Seven or eight relatives were there, and the preacher; Pierce, in a derby hat and a Chesterfield overcoat and with his solemnest, most dignified manner; some members of the Board of Trustees; and several of the sales force. Two of the other salesmen helped us set the coffin over the grave.

There was a burial, but the cathedral home was still a promise, and, as Highland Haven was the subject of controversy, people were saying it would never be built. Some of the less astute salesmen also were learning, little by little, what was necessary to make Highland Haven a success, and knew that if a week went by without the usual number of big sales it was possible that obligations falling due could not be met and everything might be stopped by court order. The scheme was apparently complicated and essentially simple. The initial success of Highland Haven depended on a constantly increasing supply of new money. If the intake ever ceased to be a jump ahead of the outgo, the jig was up. The "income" which the investor began at once to receive was not legitimate earnings on his investment but was only the periodic return of a portion of his principal.

As for deeds to lots in Highland Haven Memorial Park, they performed the office of certificates of stock; but they were necessary because the promoters could get by under the real estate law (all of us salesmen were licensed to sell real estate) whereas under the securities law the scheme would have been fraudulent. By the time I found that out I was too far into it to retreat, and I was getting my little share of the take.

There were prolonged dull periods when almost everybody became worried. Every-

body but Pierce. If he had doubt as to the ultimate success of Highland Haven, he never let the sales force know. He could sense the feeling of defeatism, and something new came out of his bag of oratorical tricks.

"You can get anything you want," he said. "Anything. A house, a car, a boat, a trip to Europe with your wife, a college education for your daughter. You only have to want it enough." He pulled a roll of bills out of his trousers pocket, peeled off four, and tossed them onto the table. Three were one-hundreds, and the last was a five-hundred. He held it up so that nobody could miss seeing its denomination. "Anything you want," he repeated, as he slid the bills back into his pocket.

It was simple, the way he put it. Wanting things enough gave you such certainty of getting them that nothing could stop your acquiring the money to get them with. He told of buying a one-hundred-thousand-dollar life insurance policy, and of securing a fine house in Cleveland because he was able to offer ten thousand cash. To separate truth from falsehood in this was something I didn't try; but those bills he flashed were the real article, and he bought motor cars one after another. He had come to Moorton with a three-year-old Plymouth, and when I first knew him he had a Buick, which he smashed up; his next car was a Chrysler, and later he had a Lincoln.

After my first sale I had made only a couple of other little ones, but I was writing the advertising regularly, and it was getting better and bigger. We had a double-page spread in The Independent every week, and often the back page besides. Sometimes we got out a whole section of eight pages, half newspaper-page size, as part of The Independent, and I wrote the editorial matter as well as the advertising, concocting as much new stuff as I could think of and rehashing the old. It was tedious writing publicity, but I liked doing the ads, and I did some nice ones, with a literary touch. I quoted Alexander Pope: "Be not the first by whom the new are tried"; and followed with the statement that if everybody observed this maxim we would still be using stone fist hatchets and

living in caves, that the essence of progress lies in exchanging the old for the new; and went on to explain that as the stagecoach was replaced by the railroad train, the sailing vessel by the steamship, the buggy by the automobile--so the old-fashioned cemetery had been rendered obsolete by the modern memorialpark, which, though in the modern trend, was tested by years of experience. Pierce liked that one especially; he quoted it in sales meeting every day for a week, and after that when he made speeches to groups of visitors at the Park.

There the road construction and landscaping went on as fast as men could work. The caretaker's house was fixed up enough to show to people, and special appointments were made for groups, such as Ladies' Aid societies, Sunday-school classes, and fraternal and social clubs. Four or five salesmen drove them over the Park in cars, stopping at points of vantage, and at the caretaker's house Pierce or one of the crew managers gave them a talk. They were mostly women, but that was all right, because the sales emphasis was shifting from investment to "utility", and the buying of a lot to bury on is a family matter.

Pierce put me in charge of the program for visitors, which had to be run to a schedule, for three or four groups were shown over the Park during a day. I made talks myself, and started by saying that as I had been a teacher I would talk to them as I would to a class, and it worked all right.

Reed, the undertaker who was collaborating with Pierce, got three or four more burials right away, and within a month there were a dozen, all receiving free grave markers. Reed also moved several bodies from other cemeteries, and anybody who bought a lot could have such removal done free. After the first twenty burials they began to come voluntarily. The other undertakers, who had been aloof, changed their attitude because they had to. Within two months after the first, Highland Haven had more than forty burials, and it looked as if nothing could stop its success.

The investment sale went on too, and more and more people began to think Highland

Haven a good thing. In May I got a break. After I commenced writing the advertising I hadn't tried very hard to sell lots, but I was told of another old woman who had B&L deposits, and I went to see her. She had about \$5000 in two Building and Loans, the Moorton and the Home. Her books were worth something over \$3000 on the market. I didn't get them at once, but I kept going back to see her, knowing that if I didn't appear too eager and was careful not to say anything that might offend her I had a chance to get them.

One afternoon I thought: I'll go and see Mrs. Baldwin, and if I don't do any good this time I'll give her to somebody else for a share in the commission.

She greeted me like a friend. "I've been waiting for you to come back," she said. "I've decided to make a deal with you."

I didn't dare think at the moment what those words meant to me; I pretended to myself that it was a problem in arithmetic, and got the contract forms filled out properly only after having first put the carbon paper in the wrong place. My commission was \$470, and for a few days I was so happy I wanted to tell everybody. But that wasn't necessary, for on the blackboard in the salesroom was the list of Mrs. Baldwin's lot numbers bracketed with my name. And I thought: if I can make money as easy as this in the burial park business I'll never go back to schoolteaching.

I bought some clothes and a couple of tires, and had some work done on my car. There were always books I wanted, and I got some of them, though now I had little inclination to read. I took Ellen and Hubert to dinner, and we had champagne. I put \$300 into postal savings.

On Memorial Day there was a ceremony at the Park, with a speech by one of the candidates for nomination to the governorship, and a band from the local unit of the National Guard. We had more groups of visitors, many from the surrounding country and towns, and the fame of Highland Haven continued to spread. It was advertised on the radio. In Moorton it was an institution: you could be for it or against it, you could believe in it or not believe in it, but you

couldn't ignore it. There were more removals from other cemeteries, and more unsolicited burials, and people could buy lots on a time-payment plan. The officials of the old Moorton cemetery were worried about losing business and didn't know what to do about it.

The Veterans' Block was dedicated, with ceremony. The price of a lot in other blocks was raised to one hundred dollars. Pierce bought straw hats for the staff, and began having weekly luncheons at the Pilgrim Hotel, where (to give the still diffident men more confidence) everybody had to make a short speech; he ceased to talk about sales for investment and talked wholly about sales for use. There were prizes and bonuses for the salesmen. Pierce and Hendrix took the trustees to Chicago in their cars for three days at the World's Fair. Pierce was very pleased with himself just then. But he was never overpleased, and never lessened a whit his effort to stimulate the salesmen. I knew Pierce was no altruist. He was a slick promoter, and about as slick as they come. But he was a remarkable man, and I was constantly being reminded that he was a remarkable man.

(To Be Continued)

STORY PRESS
7370 South Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60649

I started STORY PRESS in 1978 both because of my interest in the short story and because of my perception that the short story was in rather desperate straits in America. In both the large commercial houses and the small presses, books of collected stories were hard to find--commercial presses dismissing the genre as unprofitable, small presses being primarily concerned with poetry. I approached friends in Chicago and Philadelphia about the possibility of starting a press. With their financial support, and money of my own, I was able to come up with the capital. My father, whose work as an editor equipped him with knowledge I lacked, lent his time.

We have no illusions about the market for the short story. All of us have other jobs which provide the money for this endeavor. We don't expect to make a profit. Our hope is simply to return our initial investment so that we can do another book. Short press runs, reasonable sales to libraries and the literary-minded will allow us to continue, and to produce about two books a year.

My acquaintance with Norbert Blei began in 1964 when I was a student of his in a suburban high school. Over time, we became friends. For years I'd been reading and admiring his fiction, so that when the idea of the press occurred to me, he seemed a natural first choice. His work was very good: he had not yet published a book; and I wanted his stories to reach a larger audience. Like others, he's been pretty much ignored by the Eastern literary establishment. We seek, through his book, to make him known and to advance the cause of the regional short story. This book is the first in a continuing series of Illinois writers. We publish in simultaneous hard and soft bound editions; this one is beautifully designed and illustrated by Oak Park artist Emory Mead (no relation). THE HOUR OF THE SUNSHINE NOW will be available in some bookstores, but we urge people to order directly from the press.

Richard Meade

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Society for the Study of Midwestern
Literature Newsletter

Volume eight, Number two

Published at Michigan State University
with the support of the Department
of American Thought & Language

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East Lansing, MI 48824

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Study of Midwestern Literature

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