

# SSML Newsletter

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**The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature**

**The Center for the Study of  
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**SOCIETY for the STUDY of MIDWESTERN LITERATURE**

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## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

It was wonderful to see so many of our Society's members at last May's annual meeting in East Lansing. For those of you who weren't able to attend, we broke with tradition for our 20th anniversary meeting and gathered at the East Lansing Holiday Inn, where some of us were unceremoniously bounced from the bar on Thursday night because it was filled to capacity with college kids watching the Detroit Pistons on big screen TV!

However, the lovely party Roger and Mary Bresnahan hosted after the conference ended on Saturday more than compensated for Friday night's humiliation (I've been kicked out of better places). The food served at Roger and Mary's was unbelievably delicious, especially that 20th anniversary cake! They were wonderful hosts and we deeply appreciate all the work they put into that special celebration.

Another fond memory of last May's conference was that of meeting several younger professors and graduate students, new members of the Society who were reading papers for the very first time. It's always exciting and rewarding to help initiate a young person into the mysteries of our profession, and I'm hoping we as a Society can actively recruit more new members throughout the coming year.

I had a unique opportunity to spread the word about the Society this summer when I participated in an NEH Summer Seminar on the American Playwright at Columbia. Several members of the group presented papers on Midwestern playwrights, and I encouraged each of them to submit a proposal in February to the Conference Planning Committee.

At our business meeting in May we discussed the need to recruit new members, since the Society is now 20 years old and many of our founding members may be retiring soon and may no longer be as active as they were formerly. Could each of you help with this recruitment effort during the academic year? Are there faculty members or graduate students at your institution whose research interests relate in some way to Midwestern literature and culture? If each of us could identify one potential member, provide that person with information about the Society, encourage/assist him/her in developing a paper for our conference next May, and bring that



person to the conference, we could have a very interesting and lively meeting and also help to insure that the pioneer work that Dave and the founding members have done over the past 20 years will continue through the 21st century.

To implement our recruitment program, I am suggesting to Dave that each current member who brings a new member to the 21st annual conference in May of 1991 be registered in a drawing to be held at the Friday night banquet. The new member and old member whose names are drawn will have their conference registration fees refunded. All Society members who bring new members to the conference will be introduced, along with their proteges, at the banquet and recognized for their service to the Society.

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at the MLA convention in December. To celebrate our 20th anniversary, the Society will be hosting a special program at the Newberry Library honoring Midwestern writers. Since the convention will be held in Chicago this year, a location central to many Society members' home institutions, we hope that a large number of you will be able to attend. Until then, have a good semester. Sincerely,

Marcia Noe, President  
Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

**Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature  
Business Meeting Minutes  
Spring 1990**

The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature business meeting was held as part of the Society's annual conference, The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest, at the Holiday Inn, East Lansing, on Saturday, May 12, 1990. Marcia Noe, President of the Society, presided.

The following issues were raised and considered by the membership:

1. Members were polled concerning their preferences for future SSML conference locations in East Lansing. Those present preferred a return to the Kellogg Center on campus at Michigan State University; however, the membership did not wish to tie the hands of those negotiating for space and rates for future conferences by requiring usage of the Kellogg Center. In the event that those making arrangements for future conferences felt it best to use the Holiday Inn again, the membership requested that rooms with solid--rather than hollow, moveable partition--walls be specified for future meetings. Noise transfer has been a significant problem at sessions this year.

Those attending also expressed a preference that future SSML conferences be held in conjunction with the East Lansing Art Fair if possible.

2. Discussion also arose concerning possible future homes for the Society and possible conference sites away from Michigan State University and East Lansing.

The membership recognized the work load and responsibility involved in running the Society and the annual conference, but expressed a preference that they remain at East Lansing.

In the event that the Society and/or the Conference were to move, it was felt to be important that the new site be a major city to allow convenient, inexpensive air travel for the membership.

Possible alternate sites mentioned included Chicago and Toledo.

3. The possibility of a second--or mid-year--conference at a location other than East Lansing was raised. Future discussion on this topic is expected.

The possibility of a December 27, 1990, meeting at the Newberry Library in Chicago was raised. Should this meeting take place, an effort will be made to attract previous award winners, particularly those who have won the Mark Twain Award.



4. A Membership Development Committee was established. Ronald Grosh will chair this committee. Donald Pady and Robert Wharton will also serve as committee members. The committee will work to increase membership and to set up a data base of members.

5. Robert Wharton suggested that much more could be done to encourage Society membership and conference participation by Theater Departments and those interested in drama. His suggestion was referred to the new Membership Development Committee, headed by Ron Grosh.

6. David Anderson's suggestion that the Society consider the possibility of writing a Dictionary or Encyclopedia of Midwestern Literature was enthusiastically supported by the membership. A committee was established to lead this effort. Philip Greasley will chair the committee. Bob Besacker, Ronald Grosh, Guy Szuberla, and Robert Dunne will serve on the committee. The committee will report its progress through the Newsletter and at future meetings.

7. The membership were informed that the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Library is now housed in the Morrill Hall Reading Room on the Michigan State University campus. At the time the decision was made to place the collection there, the Michigan State University Arts & Sciences Dean made promises that the Society would have adequate space for its collection. The acquisition and receipt of the William Thomas collection make the Morrill Hall space no longer adequate.

The membership expressed support for the Society leadership in negotiating for larger and better space while retaining control over the collection by the Society and ensuring that the collection would be maintained as a separate entity, not integrated with other library holdings.

8. The need was expressed for fuller involvement in Society planning and decision-making by Society Officers and Board. One idea for increasing continuity and involvement was movement to a system involving a succession of ascending offices, held in turn by individuals knowing that initial election would mean a multi-year commitment of their time and effort. Another idea mentioned was movement to a longer Presidential term of office.

A committee was established to examine the bylaws and report possible courses of action to the membership. Roger Bresnahan will chair the committee. David Anderson, Marcia Noe, Philip Greasley, and Marc Van Wormer will also serve on this committee.

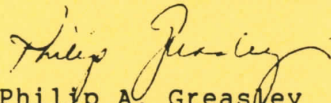
The committee is to report to the membership through the Newsletter.

9. Gwendolyn Brooks' gift to the Society, making possible the Midwest Heritage Prizes and cash awards for the best critical article and the best poetry or fiction submission of the year,

will soon run out. Discussion centered on means for allowing continuation of these cash awards in the future--perhaps at the \$50 or \$100 levels.

One idea suggested was solicitation of limited sponsorship (perhaps one award for one year) of these awards by the membership, book publishers, and other interested individuals and groups. An alternative suggestion involved budgeting the conference and setting conference fees at a level which would allow prize money--at whatever level was deemed appropriate--to be paid. The final suggestion involved offering winners in each category free conference attendance in the year following their award.

Respectfully submitted,



Philip A. Greasley  
Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, Inc.  
Recording Secretary



## BEFORE THE ACCIDENT

An excerpt from Chapter 1, "Before the Accident," in  
The Worth of the Harvest: James Hearst and His Poetry.

Jeff Sears

James Schell Hearst, born August 8, 1900, to Charles Ernest Hearst and Anna Katherine Hearst (nee Schell) of Cedar Falls, Iowa, probably could not have helped but become a successful farmer, teacher, and "man who makes poems,"<sup>1</sup> once the circumstances of his life pushed him in those directions. His people on both sides had been farmers, teachers, fine craftsmen, and lovers of books since long before his Pennsylvania ancestors heard some of the their neighbors in the next colony fire "the shot heard round the world."<sup>2</sup>

According to his grandfather, James Hearst the elder, whose name young James inherited, the Hearsts had always been, before anything else, farmers; farmers in southern Scotland, the Hearst ancestral home; farmers in northern Ireland, where the Hearst clan had emigrated in the mid-seventeenth century; and farmers in the New World, to which they had come in 1750. Perry County, Pennsylvania, became the Hearst ancestral home in the New World, and it was there that the elder James Hearst was born, in 1830. Migrating to Piqua, Ohio, with his parents, and later moving on to Rockford, Illinois, Grandfather Hearst had finally settled in Cedar Falls, where in 1864 he founded Maplehearst farm, on 160 acres of the best Iowa farmland, 3 1/2 miles southwest of town. He brought with him the seeds of New England maples and apple

trees, and a sturdy, God-fearing outspoken nature hewn out of two generations of plowing Pennsylvania granite and tasting hard New England freedom.

By the year of James Schell Hearst's birth, Maplehearst had expanded by another quarter section, to 320 acres; and Grandfather Hearst, now 70 had years earlier let the running of it shift to his second son, James' father, and retired to his trees and bees. Nevertheless, Grandfather Hearst stood as a strong example to his eldest grandson. It would be 1951 before Hearst would say anything specific about any member of his family in his poems; but when he finally did, it was to praise his Grandfather Hearst, in a poem called "Orchard Man":

Grandfather came from a town meeting country,  
A meeting house man with no give to his morals . . .

In Black Hawk county in the Red Cedar Valley  
he laid down his corners and sighting from these  
to a slow roll of ground he raised up a farmhouse,  
a simple white farmhouse surrounded by trees.

But . . . these plains of abundance seemed almost a sin  
he was awed by a farm that was nothing but land.

He withdrew to an orchard encrusted with beehives,



with man more than honey his theme of research,  
 where he taught his grandsons with tough righteous spirit  
 the difference in duty to state and to church.

His principles never spared anyone judgment  
 though his eyes were less stern than the words that he spoke  
 when he was correcting a neighbor's opinions . . .  
 he was mostly disliked by respectable folk . . .

The man who came begging got more than he asked for  
 while Grandfather helped him chop wood for his food  
 he examined faith and his concept of duty  
 the tramp usually left us as fast as he could . . .

When he took to his bed Grandfather requested  
 that this grave be marked by a New England stone  
 as if he and granite had something in common,  
 he died as he'd lived, unafraid and alone.<sup>3</sup>

Grandfather Hearst died in 1907, having already planted in his  
 namesake the seeds of endurance, and a deep distrust of those who  
 profess a "hypocritical morality."<sup>4</sup> The visual symbol of the New  
 England heritage he brought to his grandson was the maple grove  
 he had planted on his Cedar Falls homestead before he had done  
 anything else. Breaking the flat Iowa sod with his John Deere  
 steel plow, he had thrown handfuls of maple seeds into the

furrows; an acre thick with silver maples still dominates the skyline near the old Maplehearst site.

Maplehearst farm, where James' father, his two Hearst uncles, and two of his four Hearst aunts were born, as well as James and his older sister (Helen Louise) and his two younger brothers (Robert and Charles J.), was a charming and busy combination of Hampshire/Poland-China hog raising, purebred Shorthorn cow milking, corn fields, oat fields, and alfalfa fields--not to mention his grandfather's apple orchard and his mother's garden and chickens. The work at Maplehearst, as on all farms at the turn of the century, was done at the slow, steady pace of horses and hands. Few poets have roots that sink as deep into the soil of the world's agricultural center, and Hearst would remain immersed in the life of this farm until he moved to town 43 years later. And he would always remember the farm in his poetry, especially the farm of his boyhood: how "day stretched into twilight," how "tired horses shake their harness," how each day the Hearsts and their many hired men and women travelled "their evening paths, the patient network that binds <their> facts to <farmers> for life."<sup>5</sup>

Respect for education was also a given in the Hearst family. In 1876, the Iowa State Normal School, now the University of Northern Iowa, was founded in Cedar Falls, in a building originally erected to house Civil War orphans. Since then until



Hearst's death in 1983, a Hearst was associated with the school for all but five years of its history. Hearst's mother, who had attended Cornell College at Mount Vernon, Iowa, was secretary to I. S. N. S. president Homer W. Seerley until her marriage. Hearst's Aunt Mary was a lifelong faculty member at I. S. N. S., first in the Department of English and later in the Department of Religion. Hearst's father, nationally known as a farm leader and cofounder of the American Farm Bureau Federation, was never associated with I. S. N. S., but he too was dedicated to education. With his inherited New England belief in putting science to practical use, he helped initiate the famous short courses for farmers which are still conducted by Iowa State University in Ames.

The Hearsts also had a genuine love of good books. Grandfather Schell, a cabinet maker from Bavaria, could spin a wonderfully complicated fairy story as deftly as he could handle a wood chisel; his grandchildren knew Grimm's fairy tales in German long before they could read them in English. Grandfather Hearst, true to his New England upbringing, would often read Whittier's "Snowbound" aloud on a winter's evening. A troop of dedicated aunts on both sides--Aunt Viola, Aunt Mary, Aunt Ida, two Aunt Jennies, and more--made Christmas and birthdays the occasion of new books and magazine subscriptions for the children. Even Hearst's younger brother Robert, the least inclined to indoor activities, was known to sit down occasionally with the latest

Rover Boys adventure.

But it was James' mother who particularly urged, and sometimes enforced, her taste for good literature on her children. She made good poetry a part of their everyday lives, as when she and James recited alternate stanzas of "The Wreck of the Hesperus" while doing dishes together. And when James, at age 9, won a copy of Horatio Alger's Rags to Riches for memorizing the most Bible verses to be recited in Sunday school, his mother threw it in the fire. They would not, she said, have such trash in their home.

When young James became old enough to begin developing his own literary tastes, his first turn, like that of all farm boys with vivid imaginations, was toward the romantic. For though he was eager, like his brothers, to graduate from chicken chores to a man's work, he always felt that farm life "was a hard process to adjust to."<sup>6</sup> Or, to echo his thoughts more bluntly: "Who would want to be a farmer and work his ass off?"<sup>7</sup> He found escape in thoughtless farm-boy pranks, like sticking a corn cob in an old plowhorse's "rear end"<sup>8</sup> to see if she'd go a little faster. But he found his happiest escape in literature, especially the novels of Sir Walter Scott:

I found myself moody, irritable, stubborn, resentful of my share of the chores. Sometimes I knew I had been adopted



and made to do the hardest work of anyone. . . .

I loved a corner where I sat hidden with a book . . . My folks had a set of Scott's novels and when I became old enough to read them I found my nirvana. I can still hear my father coming into the house and asking, "Where's that boy?"<sup>9</sup>

Following this romantic enlightenment, Grandfather Hearst's maple grove saw many reenactments, Tom Sawyer style, of these and other adventure stories. Tending toward the "dreamy" (his own adjective), James was learning a lesson commonly taught in his day: that the world of everyday experience and the world of literature should not touch.

The only real break from the farm's rigid routine came on Sundays. Yet James also felt oppressed by his Grandfather Hearst's strict Scotch-Presbyterian sabbath. Earlier generations of Hearsts, originating in the Scottish lowlands, had been "sternly moral"<sup>10</sup> Nonconformists persecuted during Great Britain's civil and religious wars of the seventeenth century. Grandfather Hearst stood equally firm. "The Sunday was the Sabbath," Hearst wrote, "and on the Sabbath one did not run and play, nor whistle and shout, nor throw a ball, nor even have a fire in the cookstove."<sup>11</sup> Sunday mornings meant driving to the Congregationalist Church in Cedar Falls for a sobering sermon;

Hearst would write of these sermons that afterward "I had a solemn face as I did the chores/And wondered if I could be trusted another week."<sup>12</sup> In the afternoons the children were delivered to the instruction of one of their father's unmarried sisters, whom James regarded as a sort of Protestant nun. This was perhaps the least painful part of Sundays for him, since he owed to these sessions his solid command of the Bible. Biblical phrases, incidents, and lessons learned on these Sundays echo through his poetry, as part of his Hearst heritage and of the vernacular of American farm life:

. . . Dig for yourselves, turn the earth,  
 miraculous manna waits on your need  
 for last judgments when meadows lie down  
 in a tempest of frost . . .

Come, spit on your hands, . . .

. . . I tell you the day  
 crouches beside us watching,  
 and you are not saved.

Let the spade welcome the hand  
 that builds on rock.<sup>13</sup>

For all this, though, Hearst's father and grandfather were gentle and cheerful men, at least when they were not giving him one of the "endless lectures"<sup>14</sup> which he would remember into old age.



Yet despite Hearst's respect for them, he felt there was a measure of needless rigor in them which he would try to resist in himself throughout his life. James often felt that his father in particular simply worked too hard (even if it wasn't always at farming), and showed too little of his affection for his family. In his poem "Father" (1976), Hearst find fault with himself, and with his brothers and sisters, for following the tone his father set:

. . . blizzard winds  
shook the house, snug as squirrels  
we burrowed in our quilts  
until morning came . . .

The upstairs (was) an arctic cave . . .

but father

braved it and we heard him downstairs  
shake the hard-coal stove  
until its isinglass eyes  
glowed red . . .

But no one said, thank you,  
or praised him, or simply,  
we love you.<sup>15</sup>

A fascination with words, and the urge to write, followed young James' interest in romantic novels. He had read every book in

his country school's small library well before he entered the eighth grade, and at the same time he had tried his own hand at writing. The first in a thirty-year line of literary admirers and mentors was his eighth-grade teacher, a young woman named Olga Lundell. She praised the verse which he shyly confided to her, and set him the task of putting the stories in their literature text into rhymed couplets. Two lines remain:

And to the poor dog he would not give a bone,  
So he was turned into a black stone.<sup>16</sup>

There is some question as to whether there was actually a bone in this story, or whether James added one himself for the sake of the rhyme. In any case, he was enchanted with Miss Lundell's attention. "Do you wonder," he wrote, "that I loved her?"<sup>17</sup>

When James graduated from Miss Lundell's class in 1913, he entered Teachers College High School (the Iowa State Normal School had become Iowa State Teachers College in 1909), and in his first term in English he scored 97 out of a possible 100. But he quickly learned from his adolescent peers that boys were not supposed to do nearly that well in any subject, so the next term his score in English was a more acceptable 74. A "C" average in all subjects was James' goal in high school; and of course poetry was, at least for the moment, out of the question. Hearst's strongest memories of his high school years were beating



crosstown rival Cedar Falls High in football 38 to 0, pitching semipro baseball in little towns all over Eastern Iowa, and meeting his future wife Carmelita Calderwood at a basketball game with her school, East High in neighboring Waterloo.

When the time came for James to plan for life beyond high school, he decided to enroll in the premedical course at Iowa State Teachers College. Though he had always had a special responsibility on the farm as the eldest son, four of his uncles and one aunt were M.D.s, so a father inclined to support whatever decision his son reached could find no reason not to give his blessing. Besides, though James would join Xanho, a predominantly athletic fraternity on campus, he still commuted home every day to help with the work of the farm. And James' help was as important as ever, as his father became increasingly involved in politics; James' first year of college coincided with America's involvement in World War I, and with the stirrings of the postwar controversy over farm price supports that would command the attention of farm leaders for the next twenty years.

James' interest in writing revived in college, to the point that he found himself enrolled in more literature course than a premed advisor would have found advisable. But in those classes he learned much that would impede his progress as a writer. He learned that literature in English meant English literature--the Romantics and Milton, mainly. He learned that poetry meant

strict prosody; Milton's free-verse play Samson Agonistes, for example, was studied only in summary form, while Paradise Lost, with its ten syllables in (almost) every line, was given all emphasis. And every high-sounding abstraction possible was gleaned from Wordsworth, Keats, and the rest--Duty, Love, Truth, Beauty, etc. American poetry? One could allow that the New England poets had shown some refinement and culture; but the verse (if one could call it that) of that itinerant newspaperman Walt Whitman was considered to show nothing but a vulgar disregard for all standards, poetic or moral. (There was a rumor that the Cedar Falls superintendent of schools was a secret admirer of Whitman, and that he and a small group of friends sneaked off to a cabin outside of town to read Whitman's more physical poems aloud to each other.) Little was seen in American letters that could aspire to the English models, which of course were the only models considered worthy of a true poet's aspirations.

So James packed a full load of abstractions into his still rather formless rhymes. Then he met a young instructor named Brock Fagan. Fagan had a reputation on campus: he used tobacco (pipe smoking had not yet become a symbol of academic respectability); he had only a bachelor's degree in a world of solid M.A.s and Ph.D.s; and he was just iconoclastic enough to tell an impressionable boy fresh off the farm that he could express in verse, directly and concretely, the life he knew. "Leave Beauty,



Truth, and Duty to people who don't know an abstraction from a horse turd," Fagan announced. "Why don't you write a poem about filling silo?"<sup>18</sup> This defiance of convention was just the boost that James, uncertain of himself among the stuffy standardbearers of culture, needed. He became one of Fagan's best students, and Fagan later became Hearst's close friend, spending many weekends at Maplehearst "hoeing thistles and drinking beer."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, had all gone according to plan, James S. Hearst would probably have gone on to become a good doctor, and a tolerable amateur writer of poems about his boyhood on the farm. But Decoration Day, 1919, saw a change in plans.

1. James Schell Hearst, in an interview with the author, May 31, 1980.
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Concord Hymn," in Whicher, ed., Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957), p. 415.
3. In Man and His Field (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1951), pp. 25-26.
4. quoted by James S. Hearst, in an interview with the author, May 24, 1980.
5. In The Sun at Noon (Muscatine, Iowa: Prairie Press, 1943), pp. 20-21.
6. in an interview, May 24, 1980.
7. "The Weedcutter," in Poet and Critic, 15:2, Fall 1982, p. 6.
8. "Young Poet on the Land," in Clarence Andrews, ed., Growing Up in Iowa (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1976), p. 47.
9. "Young Poet," p. 55.
10. Fremont Older, The Life of George Hearst (published privately, 1934).
11. "Young Poet," p. 51.
12. "Birthplace," in Limited View (Iowa City: Prairie Press, 1962), No. 42.
13. "Instead of Honey," in Snake in the Strawberries, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979), p. 4.
14. in an interview, May 24, 1980.
15. in Snake, p. 74.
16. quoted in "Young Poet," p. 44.
17. "Young Poet," p. 44.
18. quoted by James S. Hearst, in an interview, May 24, 1980.
19. in an interview, May 24, 1980.



TWO BY TOM BOYD

Gene H. Dent

They are mostly out-of-print now, although occasionally they can be found in used bookstores, garage sales, or mixed in with the paperbacks at the Salvation Army and Goodwill stores. Their authors, having earned a modicum of kudos during their lifetimes, are mostly forgotten now. Yet, their immortality survives through the printed pages of their works, though time and acid paper eventually will have their way. And many of these writers created highly readable and, perhaps, even significant works of literature.

One such Midwestern writer, Thomas A. Boyd (1898-1935), wrote a half dozen or so novels and biographies, and appeared to be reaching the pinnacle of his literary prowess when his life was cut short by pneumonia. His first novel, *THROUGH THE WHEAT* (1923), is a novel of the First World War, that ranks high in that genre for its realism and character development, and quite frankly, makes Hemingway's *FAREWELL TO ARMS* pale in comparison to sights and sounds of combat.

During his short career (his last novel *IN TIME OF PEACE* is a sequel to his first), Boyd drew heavily from his Ohio experience near Defiance. All three books, biographies *MAD ANTHONY WAYNE*, *SIMON GIRTY: THE WHITE SAVAGE*, and the novel *SHADOW OF THE LONG KNIVES*, concern themselves with the opening of the Ohio country and subsequently all the remaining western territory.

*MAD ANTHONY WAYNE*, (Charles Scribner's Son, 1929), focuses exclusively on Wayne's military career from the time he lead a troop of Pennsylvania Volunteers during the Revolutionary War, until he commanded America's entire standing army and defeated the coalition of Indian tribes under Blue Jacket and Little Turtle at the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794). It was to be his last military campaign. After the protracted Treaty negotiations, Wayne returned to his home at Waynesboro near Philadelphia. Shortly after he succumbed to gangreen brought about by gout. He was 54.

During his nearly flawless military career, Wayne "distinguished himself by taking Stony Point with only the bayonet as a weapon, by holding Chadsford at the Battle of Brandywine, by his attack on Cornwallis at the

James (river), by driving both British and Indians from the Georgia Colony, and by his fighting at Germantown and Monmouth."

Boyd's narrative moves apace, and he handled the complicated movement of troops and armies with concise clarity. The reader need not be a military expert or even a history buff to understand what is happening on the battlefield. Boyd, however, does seem to give short shrift to the political aspects of the war, and although the reader is told that Wayne's early career was to suffer under the pompous and incompetent General Arthur St. Clair, the reader is never certain how this came to pass. All in all, the biography is a splendid read, if one can find a copy.

SHADOW OF THE LONG KNIVES, (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), precedes his Anthony Wayne biography by one year, and is a fictional account of the twenty years from Lord Dunmore's War (1774) to the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794). Boyd's protagonist Angus McDermont is a thinly disguised amalgamation of Renegade Simon Girty and British trader Alexander McKee. The story is seen through McDermont's eyes, and offers an intimate insight into the thinking of the English and the Indians who bitterly resented the incursion of American settlers into land promised them by Lord Dunmore. Boyd's development of McDermont is quite interesting as we watch the American scout become aware that his association with the British through the years has left him a turncoat in the eyes of American compatriots. His allegiance to the English is one of habit rather than patriotism.

It is also interesting to note that the far-reaching effects of the War for Independence seem to have little impact on the frontier where the settler strives desperately to survive. It is only when the Americans send an expedition (actually five expeditions over a period of twenty years), do the local people realize what has been going on in the rest of the country. Boyd, in both books, has a fine sense of time and place and history. This, too, may be a difficult book to find, but is well worth the effort.

Other books by Boyd include LIGHT-HORSE HARRY LEE, THE DARK CLOUD, POOR JOHN FITCH, and POINTS OF HONOR. Try them, you'll like them.

Gene



## My Lake Erie

David D. Anderson

From the very beginning of my memory, the lake was always there -- the lake that was, in my Uncle Bob's words, "a long stone's throw from the back porch," in Lorain, Ohio. And most vivid among those earliest memories are the night sounds -- of tugs chugging upstream on Black River, fighting the current, with an ore boat in tow, of the long, lonesome, regular blast of the foghorn from the lighthouse on stormy nights, and of that one memorable night -- I think I was five -- when machine gun and rifle fire shattered the summer stillness as the Coast Guard caught a rum runner close in shore. The latter memory is mixed with dozens of later sounds, real from the war or make-believe that began with Scar Face one Saturday afternoon, but the call of the tugs and the foghorn, both long since technologically displaced, are still with me, and on quiet nights I hear them yet, with, in their background, a muted obligatto, the interminable roar of the surf, of man and nature locked in endless combat, the lake driving endlessly, voraciously at the beaches and the sea walls and the cliffs and houses behind them.

The lake, I think I knew intuitively, long before I experienced it, simply was; part of its majesty and attraction was its sublime indifference to those of us who knew it from the beginning of our conscious lives. Intrinsic to those early memories is that of my third-grade classmate, Tommy Furst, gap-toothed grin and all, who disappeared with his sled under the ice one Saturday afternoon in February, 1933, and the fascination combined with fear that accompanied his funeral and then my furtive lake front excursions for a long time afterward.

Other early memories combine that same fascination and fear: the blood-spattered deck and shattered deck house of a rum runner my father had taken my brother and me down to the Coast Guard station to see; the teen-age boys diving in the lakefront fill-in dump for unbroken bottles of beer or booze dumped by the Federal Prohibition agents, which were then sold for a dime or a quarter to adults standing by. Alas, by the time I was

old enough to dive in the debris-strewn water or to go on a fast overnight speedboat run to Port Stanley or Leamington, Prohibition was only a memory, a mixed memory of horror and excitement to those of us who became aware of a larger world in those years between 1929 and 1933 along the south shore -- now, more fashionably, the North Coast -- of my Lake Erie.

Other early memories are intrinsically tied to my memories of people and the lakes: the only grandmother I knew, who insisted upon using the formal term "Lake Erie" when I, at four or five, and innocent of capitalization, secretly corrected her. It was "the lake;" I'm sure that I knew no other and believed no other was possible.

The lake is intrinsically tied to my earliest and most vivid memories of my grandfathers, both of whom loved the lake, each in a different way, and they taught me to see it in both of their lights. My mother's father, Grandfather Foster, born in Detroit, had sailed the lakes in schooners as a young man, and even in old age his passions were sailing and swimming, both of which he passed on to my brother and me. When we learned to overlook the dated nature of his World War I vintage bathing suit, complete with brief arms, legs, and skirt, we, together with whatever young women might be nearby to impress, could only marvel at the skill of his dives, the strength of his strokes, the speed with which he moved through the water. Although he reluctantly came ashore to stay at my grandmother's insistence when they were married, he often refused to come out of the water, even when lifeguard, Coast Guard, or grandmother insisted. In the water Grandfather Foster was in his element.

He was equally at home on the surface of the water, in any craft that would float, whether row-boat -- he loved to row --, power boat -- he founded the Lorain Power Boat Squadron in 1910 and flew its pennant proudly -- or sail boat. Under sail, powered by the wind that was harnessed by canvas, lines, muscle, and skill, he insisted a man or woman -- he was never sexist on the water -- was a free and in control as it was possible to be on this planet. The lake, to him, was a precision instrument on which one completely attuned to it in all its elements and moods, could demonstrate his skill. I still have his brassbound telescope and his compass. He taught me to box it in quarter-points, a rare skill I still display on occasion in spite of its uselessness, but I



prize both instruments as working tools as well as relics. And he taught me to identify shipping lanes and owners by the color of the boat's stacks. To later generations he was known as "Cap," a diminutive of "Captain," a title he doted upon to his death.

When he wasn't in the lake or on the lake, Gramp talked about it or chanted about it or sang about it. An accomplished musician -- on strings and percussion -- he often sang chanteys and ditties he remembered from his youth, and, interspersed between them, he told stories that gave my Lake Erie a mythical dimension I feel even yet when I look at it, as I do on every occasion I can. (Some of those songs and sayings and stories are appended to this essay.) As a result of my maternal grandfather, my family and I have always been steeped in the lore of the lake.

My Grandfather Anderson loved the lake as devotedly as did Grandfather Foster, but as a latecomer to the lake -- he moved from Pennsylvania to Lorain in his mid-thirties -- he was neither a sailor nor a swimmer. Instead he was a skipper of stones, a master at a skill he passed on to me and at which I still excel, a fisherman who refused to use bait lest he catch something -- and I still enjoy the act but despise the sport -- and a connoisseur of sunsets -- and I still believe with him that Lake Erie sunsets are the most magnificent and the most varied in the world.

Each of my grandfathers contributed happy, funny memories that grow richer with time, and that you should hear. First one about my Grandfather Foster, when I was perhaps ten. He had only one eye -- the other had been lost in some youthful indiscretion -- but that one eye was often devoted to the ladies, to whom, as I commented, he enjoyed demonstrating his diving skill. On this one occasion he was performing off the East Pier of the harbor for an audience of my brother and me, two or three attractive -- but alas, bikini-less -- young ladies (two-piece bathing suits were banned in Lorain until after World War II, and occasionally in the late thirties and early forties a daring young lady would expose herself -- to arrest, that is -- to our later teen-aged delight) and their somewhat surly, non-diving male companions. Diving off the pier into a surf is quite a trick -- there's no spring in the concrete and stone, so muscle and skill must replace it. He did a swan dive, and a

variety of jack knives and twists and turns, and in each case he surfaced with a roar to the gasps of the young ladies. Finally he announced a bullfrog dive that I'm sure was his own inspiration of the moment. Down the pier he sprang, hopping on all fours, and then leaped into the air, straightened out, and hit the water. When he surfaced we knew something was wrong, but he refused help, climbed up on the pier, and announced that he had hit something in the water. As a lump began to form on his head, he took my brother and me home in his 1932 Chevy.

After a moment of terror that began to subdue as Grandfather drove confidently down Oberlin Avenue, we were again terrorized when he announced that there were two streetcars ahead of us where we saw only one, and he would go between them. How he saw two with one eye, I'll never know, but miraculously, there was no collision, and when we arrived at my grandmother's, she took one look and called the doctor. Grandfather had a concussion; he didn't dive again until late in the summer. He was in his mid-sixties at the time, but seemed impossibly old and incredibly young.

The story about Grandfather Anderson is just as typical of his relationship with the lake. One Sunday afternoon he appeared and announced that he would teach us to fish with a throwline, which he had concocted from butcher twine -- he ran a grocery store until it died in the Depression -- and, if not a bent pin, something close to it. The sinker was a couple of stove bolts. We knew Gramp had no interest in fishing, but simply wanted to go down to the lake, and naturally we took no bait. One the end of the pier my brother and I took turns casting and pulling in the line, developing, under Grandfather's tutelage, a skill that we both knew would be wasted energy, so each of us strove for distance.

Then, suddenly, as my brother was pulling in the line, something happened. He had caught a fish, and the three of us simultaneously excited and terrified as it broke the surface. But none of us knew what to do with it, and my brother announced that he would take it home and put it in the bathtub. He took off at a run; Gramp and I followed.

As we were going up the hill, a burly man stopped us, displaying a badge and demanding my grandfather's



fishing license. My grandfather exploded. The nerve of the man! The nerve of the State of Ohio! A man and his grandsons could not engage in harmless exercise without attempts of the police power to intimidate them. Besides, where was the evidence? My brother, the fish, and the string were out of sight. The man grinned sheepishly, held out his hand to shake, and then went away. "He's only an honorary deputy," my grandfather grinned. "Always learn to tell the difference between a phony and the real thing." Grandfather Anderson always had a sure instinct for the real thing, and he taught us to see it as clearly, beginning with his perception of the lake.

And the fish? It swam freely in the bathtub for a few hours -- long enough to be named "Stoney" -- it was a stoneroller and to receive a formal funeral in the backyard when it did.

Memories of the lake are equally tied in with memories of my parents, both of whom inherited their love of the lake. Sunday afternoons in the summer -- and long summer evenings -- were often spent on the beach, sometimes at Lake View or the Hole-in-the-Wall but most of the time at the Coast Guard station, where the beach was small and secluded, where my father taught us to swim, where my mother combined maternal caution with her father's devil-may-care aquatic high jinks. My father always told us to respect the water, to approach it with respect as well as confidence -- and then one afternoon my brother and I arrived at the Erie Avenue bridge over the Black River to ride it illegally as it swung open for ore boats -- and we found my father and his old boyhood and Army buddy -- both of whom were probably in their mid-thirties -- diving the thirty feet into the river -- something they made us promise never to do at least until we were older. I think I was fifteen when I first tried it, enjoying, for that long second, the illusion of flight.

As the early thirties became the mid-thirties and then a new decade approached, the lake became less family-oriented and increasingly social and competitive, or a combination of both. By fourteen I had joined the annual competition -- surreptitiously, of course -- to be the first of the year to go in swimming. My earliest was March 15 one year, and although there was no ice in sight, I'm sure there would have been if I'd looked more carefully.

By that time in my life, every afternoon from mid-May to mid-September was spent on the beach -- usually at Lake View because that's where those delectable creatures congregated who had somehow escaped my earlier attention. I discovered I had inherited my grandfather's eye if not his diving skill, although I tried desperately to emulate him on "the raft" as it was euphemistically called, actually a huge block of sandstone about 100 yards off shore in some fifteen feet of water, a remnant of pier construction somehow -- I suspect deliberately -- misplaced. Lake View was a romantic place, although often it was a place for painful romance in those summers of the late thirties and early forties. I can even remember names, especially that of one lovely creature -- now, alas, I'm afraid, a grandmother -- older than I, to be admired from a distance, whose deep tan was always strikingly offset by her white bathing suit. She dove beautifully, too.

But in spite of glandular changes and the painful pleasures of adolescence, there was plenty of opportunity for adventure. Our gang, the Ivory Patrol, named after a comic strip, fought furious turf and beach battles with rivals, usually from Elyria, and usually with success. And we spent one winter constructing a boat -- actually a barge -- with which to explore the upper Black River, only to see it swamped by an ore boat shortly after we launched it behind the Coast Guard station -- illegally and unwisely and nearly tragically, of course, but those were the elements that made it fun.

Lorain was at that time home to some thirty commercial fishing tugs based at the foot of Ninth Street at the river, across from the shipyards. The fishermen were unlike other adults; they would never tell on a kid who should have been in school, and often they'd take us along, out beyond the horizon, well out of reach of teachers and schools and truant officers and even parents, where we'd tug happily at tar-covered lines, setting or hauling in nets. I remember one April day, perhaps in 1938, when half my eighth-grade classroom -- the male half -- returned from adventures afloat to irate parents and punishment that a later world would probably declare abusive. Someone -- but we knew it wasn't one of the fishermen -- had blown the whistle.

One other such adventure remains vivid even yet. I had discovered a reasonable facsimile -- a phrase popularized by box top people -- for flying -- partially to capture the eye and perhaps admiration of that



white-clad vision. I would pose dramatically on my bicycle on top of the hill overlooking the beach at Lake View. And then, peddling furiously, I went down the hill, out the length of the pier, and for a moment I was airborne. And then came diving for the bike, tying a rope to it, pulling it up, and repeating the glorious procedure. I was acquiring a reputation -- but then one day, without my knowledge, my parents had decided to stroll down to the lake and out on the pier. Oh, well, that, too, was fun while it lasted.

Gradually, however, the larger world began to make itself felt along with my Lake Erie. Our fathers were World War I veterans, and we were aware of, fascinated by, their glorious adventures, and as Hitler marched into the Rhineland and then Austria and Czechoslovakia vanished and the Japanese bombed the Panay and Franco's forces advanced on Madrid, we knew that some day we would have ours. On September 1, 1939, we were camped upstream along the Vermilion River, and we listened to a portable radio as the world tottered on the brink, and we practiced close-order drill with rakes and bats and shovels, and we knew where we were going. Soon after, the shipyard began producing minesweepers as well as ore boats. Finally, on a Sunday in December, 1941, we came off the basketball court to learn that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. My brother, who was eighteen, and a lot of others, enlisted in the Navy within days, and I, almost defiantly, consented to wait six months until I graduated and was old enough.

On June 6, 1942, I graduated, on the 7th I enlisted, on the 8th I turned eighteen, and on the 9th I left my Lake Erie behind. But that last weekend remained -- a vivid, daring, but in retrospect impossibly innocent memory. A carnival was in town. A feature was a huge show that was locally known as a hootchy-kootch; the girls, some twenty of them, all in memory as then in fact were exotic and beautiful. They discovered the beach and spent their mornings there, acquiring tans. We discovered them and they, condescendingly but kindly, discovered us. And in the evenings we went to the shows, enjoying our momentary intimacy with those who brought a vision of romance and far places and rare forbidden pleasures, to a town that, at the end of a depression and the beginning of a war, desperately needed both. And then, on June 9, 1942, at seven a.m., I reported at the recruiting station in the post office, and my Lake Erie, as large and exciting as ever in my memory, became, almost instantly, part of the past.

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## SONGS AND SAYINGS OF THE LAKES

**O**CCASIONALLY TODAY in the old port towns and cities along the Great Lakes one hears a child chanting a bit of singsong doggerel as he hops along the sidewalk or runs a stick along a fence:

*A steamer went to Erie,  
The steamer had no bell.  
The steamer's boiler busted,  
And all the people went to —  
Oh, maybe you don't believe me,  
Maybe you think I lie,  
But if you go down to Erie,  
You'll see the same as I.*

Or, on occasion, such bits of wisdom as

*Red sun at night, sailors' delight;  
Red sun in the morning, sailors take warning.*



*Midwest Folklore XII:1*

Or, even less frequently, snatches of philosophic resignation:

*Six days thou shalt work  
And do all that thou are able,  
And on the seventh thou shalt holystone the deck  
And scrub the bladdy cable.*

When the child is asked where they came from or what they mean, the usual reply is a shrug and a self-conscious smile or, more directly, "I don't know." Once in a great while the answer is that "Grandpa sings it," or "Grandpa told me."

Actually, the child himself is one of the last remaining reservoirs of what once was a strong oral storytelling and singing tradition, one that had its origins in the great days of sail on the Great Lakes during the nineteenth century when thousands of sailing ships, primarily schooners, sailed those inland seas. Navigational aids were almost non-existent, power was provided by wind and by muscle, with only an occasional steam tug, and entertainment on voyages that lasted as long as a month was provided by the sailors themselves. As a result a strong oral seafaring tradition grew up on fresh water.

That tradition on the Lakes has all but disappeared as the schooners made way for the bulk freighters that ply carefully-marked waterways, employ radar, radio, and direction finders, and measure the length of voyages in days, while the crews listen to the radio or watch television in their quarters during off-duty hours. The machine has supplanted the need that brought the old songs and sayings into existence, and now they are found largely in dusty files of old newspapers and diaries, in the memories of the few remaining old schooner-men in the lake ports, and as fragments in the minds of their grandchildren.

Like their brothers on the ocean, Great Lakes sailors recited and sang both because they had to and because they wanted to. The tradition is as old as seafaring, and sailors on the Lakes, although far from the main stream of ocean sailing, both borrowed and adapted from their salt water brothers and evolved a substantial original contribution to that long tradition.

Much of the doggerel that survives along the shores of the Lakes today has its origin in the songs and sayings that were original to or adapted to the peculiar conditions of the Lakes. The sayings are primarily functional in nature, and because of the peculiar situation on the Lakes, where the threats of fog or heavy weather were much

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more dangerous in those enclosed and crowded waterways than they were at sea, most of them are concerned with interpreting that old seafaring questionmark, the weather. Some, like that quoted above, attempt to read the sun and the sky:

*Evening red and morning gray  
Will send the sailor on his way,  
But evening gray and morning red  
Will bring rain down upon his head.*

Or,

*A sundog in the morning  
Will bark before night,  
But a sundog in the evening  
Is the sailors' delight.*

Others have pertinent advice for those days of sail:

*If the clouds are scratched by a hen.  
It's time to take your topsails in:  
Rain before wind, take your topsails in,  
Wind before rain, hoist em again.  
When the wind shifts against the sun,  
Watch her boys, for back she'll come.*

These sayings, like others, are still heard along the Lakes, but more rarely as the old sailors who once squinted against the sun and wind go to the legendary caverns under Lake Superior. Their origins are, of course, lost, and as the chanting along the lakeshore grows fainter as the days of sail pass beyond the memory of man, the tradition itself has little chance of enduring.

Among the songs that evolved along the Lakes two major varieties still manage to survive. The first of these is that old functional and yet stirring type of song, the chantey, that provided rhythm as well as spirit while the sailor bent his back to the lines, windlasses, capstans, and halyards that were muscle-operated on the schooners. Many of the chanteys were borrowed from salt water or adapted to the Lakes; others have a peculiar freshwater flavor of their own.

For the long marching rhythms necessary to walking the anchor up with the capstan a certain type of chantey evolved, with the chanteyman singing the verses and the rest of the men singing the alternating chorus. One such that bears a good deal of similarity to saltwater chanteys tells the story of a long haul uplake from Buffalo to Chicago:

*When the mate calls up all hands  
To man the capstan, walk er round.  
We'll heave er up, lads, with a will.*



*Midwest Folklore XII:1*

*For we are homeward bound,  
Rolling home, rolling home,  
Rolling home across the sea,  
Rolling home to old Chicago,  
Rolling home, old town, to thee!*

The schooner clears Buffalo harbor and beats its way up Lake Erie against the wind. Then, entering the Detroit River, a difficult run uplake for a schooner, a tug takes over:

*Up the river on a tow,  
Past the city of Detroit,  
The cinders fall upon the deck,  
All day long and half the night.*

Then, after a rousing chorus, the schooner is under sail again:

*Then up the length of old St. Clair,  
And at Port Huron we let go,  
We hoist the canvas on the forestick,  
On the main and mizzen, too.*

The chorus, the Straits, and the long haul the length of Lake Michigan take them within sight of home:

*Soon, my boys, the trip is done,  
And there is no more to say,  
We'll go down to old Black Pete's,  
And spend our whole damned pay.*

And the chorus brings them into port.

The chanteyman occupied a key role; not only did his repertoire include chanteys that were more or less formalized, such as these, but often he was capable of improvising on almost any subject from the ship or the chow to the virtue or lack of it of young ladies in the various ports. The chanteyman was a valuable member of the crew.

Before the windlass gave way to the donkey engine, another was sung:

*Come gather round boys, up all hands,  
Heave er up, boys, heave er high,  
Strain and heave er, all who can,  
Heave er up and bust er!  
Oh, we'll say goodbye to this old town,  
Heave er up, boys, heave er high,  
We'll ship once more, we're homeward bound,  
Heave er up and bust er!  
When we get out and let er go,  
Heave er up, boys, heave er high,  
We'll point her nose from Buffalo.*

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*Heave er up and bust er!  
Farewell to Liz and Mary and May,  
Heave er up, lads, heave er high,  
We left em with our last trip's pay,  
Heave er up and bust er!*

This chantey, too, retraces the long haul home, some of the lines recounting amorous or alcoholic adventures behind them and before them until the job is done.

Some of the surviving chanteys reflect their saltwater ancestry in the similarity between them and their seagoing brothers, as does this halyard chantey for hoisting sail:

*In a handy three-master I once took a trip,  
Hurrah, boys, heave er down!  
And I thought I shipped out aboard a good ship,  
Way down, laddies, down!  
But when out at sea to my sorrow I found,  
Hurrah, boys, heave er down!  
That she was a workhouse and that I was bound,  
Way down, laddies, down!*

The chantey goes on to recount the shortcomings in the weather, the captain, the mate, the chow, and the ship itself, concluding:

*And now we're bound down the Lakes, let em roar,  
Hurrah, boys, heave er down!  
And on this old scow we'll never ship more,  
Way down, laddies, down!*

One of the peculiarities of Great Lakes chanteying was the fact that often, especially at night, the chanteying was heard ashore in the narrow waterways between the Lakes as the sailors made or took down sail or as they weighed anchor after lying in the lee of the land during storms. Often, too, at night, one schooner was warned of the approach of another by the sound of the chanteying long before it could be seen by the lookout.

The decline and disappearance of the chantey was rapid in the years between 1880 and 1920. The steam donkey engine and the tug removed the need for many of them as early as the eighties when steam power replaced muscle in heaving; as the long bulk steamers took over more and more of the cargo trade on the Lakes and railroads took over the package trade in the nineties, many of the schooners were converted to barges, to end their days at the end of towlines pulled by steam; and the great storms, especially that of November 8, 1913, took their toll. World War I saw many of the remainder pressed into the Atlantic coastal trade. When the schooner *Our Son*, re-rigged in 1923 after seven years as a barge, went into



the pulpwood trade out of Muskegon, there was a flurry of revival, but when she was wrecked in the fall of 1930, commercial sail, which brought the chanter into being, disappeared completely from the Lakes.

Another type of Great Lakes song has a better chance for survival, both because more of them found their way into print and because occasionally one still hears them sung in the crews' quarters, the galleys, and the waterfront bars from Duluth to Buffalo. This is the Great Lakes ballad, many of which are anonymous re-tellings of some of the many wrecks and mysterious disappearances of both schooners and steamers. However, the ballad, too, although its tradition is an old one, seems threatened on the Lakes both by the mass entertainment media that dominate the crews' quarters and hangouts and by the new breed of lake sailor who is becoming more and more a technician afloat rather than a sailor.

One of the many anonymous ballads describes the wreck of the schooner *Antelope*, probably in 1894, which was bound downlake from Chicago with a load of grain. As is the case in so many Great Lakes shipwrecks, it was late in the season.

*On the eighteenth in the morning,  
And what I say is true,  
The ice upon our riggin froze,  
And the cold winds really blew.  
But no one thought that in two short hours,  
That very afternoon,  
Some would be froze and some be drowned—  
The Antelope was doomed.  
The cold increased, the tempest raged,  
The huge seas loud did roar;  
With our canvas gone, both anchors out,  
We were drifting on the shore.  
We drifted with each pounding sea,  
And then we struck stern on;  
Our mainmast by the deck was broke,  
Our mizzenmast was gone!  
The huge seas raked her fore and aft,  
And then she swung broadside,  
And three men overboard were swept,  
Into that raging tide!  
Our captain tried to swim ashore,  
Our precious lives to save,  
But by his bold endeavor  
He was lost beneath the wave.  
And only one of that gallant crew  
Was in life once more to stand,  
And for miles and miles the Antelope  
Lined the shores of Michigan.*

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Many other lake schooners lost during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were memorialized in ballads: the *City of Green Bay*, which went down off South Haven, Michigan, in the 1880's; the *Gilbert Mollison*, sunk with all hands off North Manitou Island in the fall of 1873; the *Oriole*, wrecked with all hands off the Pictured Rocks, and a good many more. Essentially they follow the same pattern: a description of the season, the weather, and the time; a graphic picture of the moment of crisis or impact; and then a sentimental tribute to those lost and to the fact that another ship will never sail the Lakes again.

Unlike the chantey, the ballad did not diminish or disappear with the advent of steam on the Lakes. On the contrary, the opportunity for creating them was enhanced as many of the steamers went the tragic way of so many schooners. There was, however, one major difference conducive to ballad making. There was almost always a much greater loss of life because of the larger crews and the fact that most of the early steamers were passenger or combination passenger and freight vessels. This was especially true on the immigrant run from Buffalo to Milwaukee or Chicago, the route that saw so many tragic wrecks, including the one commented on in the fragment cited earlier.

One of the early ballads concerned with steamer wrecks is that commemorating the sinking of the Canadian-built *Lady Elgin* in collision with the schooner *Augusta* between Chicago and Milwaukee on the night of September 8, 1860, with a loss of 287 lives. This one is loaded with political overtones: the passenger manifest listed the entire Union Guard, a Milwaukee Democratic political group returning from a rally in Chicago. Stephen A. Douglas, the Little Giant, lost many votes that September night.

Others commemorate the *City of Alpena*, lost off Holland, Michigan, October 17, 1880; the *Erie*, lost with 180 lives in 1841, when her boiler exploded; the *Atlantic*, which took 250 lives with her the night of August 20, 1852. Later the steamer *Chicora* went down off South Haven the night of January 21, 1895, with 26 lives, and the *W.H. Gilcher* took all hands with her off South Manitou Island late in 1892, both of them commemorated in ballads. That recounting the *Gilcher's* loss is typical of the lament for a steamer:

On October twenty-eight,  
Oh, how the wind did scream,  
The last time the *Gilcher*  
And crew was ever seen.  
Of death these jolly lads



*Midwest Folklore XII:1*

*Never once did dream,  
As routed for Milwaukee  
They from Port Huron steamed.  
It was a fearful night,  
The Gülcher should turn to,  
But she held to her course  
Till off the Manitou.  
Says a sailor's hurried note  
That later came to light,  
They were breasting mountainous seas  
At nine o'clock that night.  
Lost in Lake Michigan  
They did not reach the shore.  
That gallant ship and crew  
Will sail the Lakes no more.*

The ballad dedicated to the *Chicora* is even more sentimental in the Victorian tradition so ably satirized by Mark Twain in his portrayal of Emmeline Grangerford:

*Oh, the hearts that watched her going, ever smaller,  
smaller growing  
Out upon the seeming shoreless waste of waters glad and  
free,  
Growing dimmer, dimmer, dimmer in an iridescent  
shimmer,  
Until a speck she faded tween the blue of sky and sea.  
Here's a sigh for the Chicora, for the broken, sad  
Chicora;  
Here's a tear for those who followed her beneath the  
tossing wave.  
Oh, the mystery of the morrow! From its shadows let us  
borrow  
A star of hope to shine above the gloom of every grave.*

Not all the ballads of the Lakes were concerned with shipwreck and death, however. More of them are concerned with the experiences of lake sailors aboard ship and ashore, the cargoes they carried, and the peculiarities of various captains they sailed under. A particularly interesting group tells of racing up and down lake in the course of normal commercial trips. Steamer raced steamer and schooner raced schooner, seemingly at almost every opportunity, often to the dismay and detriment of both passengers and crew, as John Disturnell comments in his *Guide to the Lakes*. Unfortunately most of these ballads survive only in fragments. One such describes the beginning of a steamer race down Lake St. Clair toward Lake Erie:

*On the eighteenth of December,  
The weather it was fair;  
The Darius Cole and Mackinaw*

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*Were crossing Lake St. Clair.  
The Darius Cole had often said  
She could beat the old Mack's time:  
"Now, boys, here comes the Mackinaw,  
We'll leave her far behind."  
Through the Old Channel she took her course,  
An advantage for to find,  
But when she got around the Cut,  
The Mack was just behind.  
The Mackinaw then opened up  
With all the speed she could contrive,  
And came alongside the Darius Cole  
Much to the Cole's surprise.  
Then through the water these craft strained,  
Side by side they flew.  
Great sport it was for all on board,  
Both passengers and crew.  
They met a tow acoming up;  
The Mack outside must take.  
The Darius Cole kept on her course,  
And gains began to make.*

What happened? Who was the winner, if there were one? Unless the rest of the fragment turns up someplace, we shall never know. Other fragments of racing ballads exist, some foretelling victory and others tragedy. However, the spirit of the race on the Lakes, whether sail or steam, is best told in the lines:

*Let the old ponds roar  
As they've often done before,  
Hooray for a race on the Lakes!*

Other ballads of varying subject matter still exist, in whole or in part, some of them, like "The Wreck of the *Julie Plante*," existing in several versions, advising the young French Canadian sailor to stay off of Lake St. Clair, Lake "Ontair," or Lake St. Pierre, depending on the version encountered.

One interesting ballad, "The *Nancy B.*," tells of the ease with which a good cook could change jobs in the North Country as the singer tells of moving from lumber camp to schooner:

*It chanced next morning I found myself  
At the docks in Bay City town  
When I heard a voice that I knew quite well,  
And there was Captain Brown,  
Who commanded the schooner Nancy B  
In the northern lumber trade.  
He hit me a crack upon my back  
That near broke my shoulder blade.  
And he yelled at me, "Hello there, Jack!"*



*Midwest Folklore XII:1*

*You're the boy I want to see.  
I want you to go along as cook  
On the good old Nancy B.  
We are sailing up on Georgian Bay  
For a load of two by four,  
And our cook has skeddaddled and left us flat,  
And we can't eat any more."*

Jack changed jobs more easily than he would his shirt in the North, only to find that cooking aboard ship is not like cooking ashore, and his complaint is reminiscent of the story of the runaway slave who stood on the dock at Sandusky, Ohio, watching a steamer sail for Canada. When asked why he didn't take it, his reply was, "No, suh, if I gets blowed up on land, here I is, but if I gets blowed up out there, where is I?" Jack the cook is ready to return to his hot stove in the lumber camp before the trip is over.

Perhaps the ballad that most nearly captures the spirit of the lake trade is "Red Iron Ore," a recognition of the routine, the excitement, and the hard work involved in carrying the cargo that is the mainstay of the fleets of long boats. Sung to the tune of the Irish *Derry Down* ballad, as were many of the Lakes songs, it is a merry complaint:

*Come all ye bold sailors that follow the Lakes,  
On an iron ore vessel your living to make,  
I shipped in Chicago, bid adieu to the shore,  
Bound away to Escanaba for red iron ore.  
Chorus: Derry down, down, down, derry down.  
Next morning we hove up alongside the Exile,  
And the Roberts made fast to an iron ore pile,  
They let down their chutes, and like thunder did roar,  
They poured into us that red iron ore.  
Some sailors took shovels, while others got spades,  
And some took wheelbarrows, each man to his trade,  
We looked like red devils; our fingers got sore,  
We cursed Escanaba and that damned iron ore.  
The tug Escanaba, she towed out the Minch,  
The Roberts, she thought, had been left in a pinch,  
And as they passed by us, they bid us goodbye,  
Saying, "We'll meet you in Cleveland next Fourth of July."  
We sailed out alone, through the passage steered we,  
Past the Foxes, the Beavers, and Skilagalee,  
We soon passed by the Minch for to show her the way,  
And she never hove in sight till we were off Thunder Bay.  
The Roberts rolled on across Saginaw Bay,  
And over her bow splashed the white spray,  
And bound for the rivers the Roberts did go,  
Where the tug Kate Williams took us in tow.  
Down through to Lake Erie, Oh Lord, how it blew,*

David D. Anderson

*And all round the Dummy a large fleet hove to.  
The night dark and stormy, Old Nick it would scare,  
But we hove up next morning and for Cleveland did steer.  
Now the Roberts is in Cleveland, made fast stem and stern,  
And over the bottle we'll spin a good yarn,  
But old Captain Shannon had ought to stand treat  
For getting to Cleveland ahead of the fleet.  
Now we're down from Escanaba, and my two hands are sore  
From pushing a wheelbarrow; I'll do it no more.  
I'm sore-backed from shoveling, so hear my loud roar,  
Now I'm ashore in Cleveland, I'll shake red iron ore.*

Like most of the ballads, this, too, is heard in a number of versions, and because it appears in several folksong anthologies and is in the repertoire of modern folksingers it seems likely to endure. But the lament of the sailor, in this age of mechanized loading and unloading and bulldozers in the cargo hold, has largely passed from the scene, and with it a good deal of the feeling behind the song, to be replaced by other less romantic but no less real complaints, none of which has yet been made the subject of a song.

Other ballads still extant on the Lakes include a rousing patriotic one called "Perry's Victory." Apparently written as a penny broadside shortly after the Battle of Lake Erie, it was resurrected for the Perry Centennial in 1913, an event widely celebrated along the south shore of Lake Erie. Tracing the circumstances of the battle with fair accuracy, it begins:

*Columbian tars are true sons of Mars  
Who rake fore and aft when they fight on the deep;  
On the bed of Lake Erie commanded by Perry  
They caused many Britons to take their last sleep.  
On the tenth of September let us all remember  
As long as the globe on its axis reels round;  
Soon our tars and marines on Lake Erie were seen  
To make the red flag of proud Britain come down.*

After its long, detailed description of the battle, designed to appeal to the red blood of every American, it concludes:

*Then everyone sing till we make the woods ring!  
Let us toast our brave heroes by land and by sea;  
While Britons drink sherry, Columbians drink Perry  
To the land of the brave and the home of the free.*

Another ballad of historical interest records the final journey and death of Dr. Douglas Houghton, to whom Northern Michigan owes so much. In the late fall of 1845 he had set off from Eagle



*Midwest Folklore XII:1*

Harbor with four companions in an open boat. The boat was capsized in a storm; there were two survivors who sought the doctor unsuccessfully:

*They searched and called in the freezing blast  
But gave up hope of the others at last.  
Come away, boy, come away.  
"We have lost our brothers," Bodrie said,  
"Perhaps one of us will not be dead  
Before we reach Eagle River."*

In this ballad, like others, the storm-tossed emptiness of the lake shore is conveyed quite strongly; the Great Lakes balladiers in their anonymity wrote of experiences they knew well, and as in this one the result is often readily apparent.

Like sailors everywhere the lakes sailors were often obscene and even more frequently profane. One often-repeated ditty consisted solely of the words "God damn," repeated until the chanter ran out of energy or interest. Others were and are considerably less printable; because they do not appear in print, many of these gems are gone, and others exist only in half-remembered fragments. They, too, may soon be gone, although the oral tradition is a strong one. If they go, more of the color of the Lakes will go with them. One such fragment remains; the lament of a young lookout, it smacks somewhat of blasphemy as it runs:

*I don't care if it rains or freezes  
As long as I'm in the hands of Jesus.*

Jesus, it appears, was the irreverent nickname of the captain.

The songs and sayings of the Lakes, like those of the sea, the mountains, the West, and the North Country, are part of the main stream of American folklore, and like these others their survival is questionable in the age of a mass society. As in the case of the others, they may be added to anthologies, recorded on tape, or added to the repertoires of professional folklorists. While such projects are worthwhile in preserving a portion of our heritage, nevertheless when they pass from the scene where they were created or are forgotten by those who live on the Lakes the spirit behind them will be irretrievably lost.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Janet Ruth Heller, an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Grand Valley State University, wrote Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and the Reader of Drama, just published by the University of Missouri Press in August, 1990. This book demonstrates that the British romantics' bias against the staging of Shakespearean tragedy is rooted in an established and intellectually justifiable tradition in Western drama criticism. The romantics argue that performances frustrate the audience by making it passive; however, reading the same play activates the imagination. Detailed analyses of selected texts illustrate the romantics' interest in their own reading public and show that Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and other writers anticipate twentieth-century reader-response criticism, educational theory, and film criticism.

Janet Ruth Heller was commissioned to write a poem by the Friends of Poetry in Kalamazoo. Her poem, "Bird-Watching," will be on display in local libraries with poems by other local writers. A videotape of her reading the poem will be broadcast by the Kalamazoo Community Access Center on cable television in early 1991.