



Speaking of Kansas

WASHBURN CENTER FOR KANSAS STUDIES FALL 2000

Speaking of Kansas series scheduled

The Washburn University Center for Kansas Studies announces its fall Speaking of Kansas series, entitled "Celebrating and Promoting Kansas". It will feature seven notable persons involved with the state's promotion. The talks are on successive Thursday afternoons at 4 PM in the Washburn University Memorial Student Union and are free and open to the public.

- September 28 Kansas Room 4 p.m.
Claudia Larkin, Director of Travel and Tourism Development for Kansas will discuss the state's tourism marketing plan. Her talk is in the Kansas Room of the Union.
- October 5 Thomas Room 4 p.m.
Jennie Chinn, Director of Education at the Kansas State Historical Society and co-chairperson of the history curriculum standards writing committee for the State Department of Education, will discuss the new curriculum for teaching Kansas history in the schools. Her talk will be in the Thomas Room of the Union.
- October 12 Kansas Room 4 p.m.
Brad Woellhof, the Mine Creek Civil War Battle State Historical Site curator will talk about the mission and programs of the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance, a consortium of local historical societies and tourism agencies in eastern Kansas, devoted to promoting the celebration of territorial Kansas's history. The group is interested in documenting sites on the Underground Railroad in the

Kansas Territory and the activities of John Brown during the "Bleeding Kansas" era. Woellhof will talk in the Kansas Room of the Union.

- October 26 Thomas Room 4 p.m.
Rex Buchanan, Associate Director for Public Outreach with the Kansas Geological Survey, will talk on "Kansas: The Land and its People." Buchanan has published extensively on the geology and culture of Kansas. His talk will be in Thomas Room of the Union.
- November 2 Thomas Room 4 p.m.
Marci Penner, oversees the Kansas Sampler Festival and coordinates the Kansas Explorers Club. She will present the GO KANSAS! game show, designed to educate the audience about Kansas places and events. Its format is similar to jeopardy. The show will be held in the Thomas Room of the Union.
- November 9 Kansas Room 4 p.m.
Martha Slater, CEO of First Generation Video in Hutchinson, Kansas and producer of several widely acclaimed video shows on Kansas towns, festivals, and events, will talk about promoting Kansas communities in the information age. Her talk will be in the Kansas Room.
- November 16 Kansas Room 4 p.m.
Ernst Hintz, director of the "Home on the Range" conference at Fort Hays State University, will talk about celebrating Kansas history and folklore. His talk will be in the Kansas Room of the Union.

Washburn Spring 2001 Kansas Studies courses

- AN 225EA Kansas Archeology
Tuesday 5:30-8 (Will Banks)
- BI 180EA Birds of Kansas
Thursday 4:00-6:30 p.m. (Joanne Ramberg)
- EN 138/399A Kansas Literature
Tuesday/Thursday 11-12:15 (Tom Averill)
- MM 402 Kansas and the Media
Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:45 (Barbara Burgess)
- PO 107 American State & Local Government
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10-10:50 (Loran Smith)

New book about Kansas

T-Town on the Plains

by R. Alton Lee

T-Town on the Plains is the story of White City, an "elevator town" in the Flint hills area of east-central Kansas ~ its growth and its demise as the culture unfolded throughout the 20th century.

White City, Kansas is a microcosm of Great Plains development during the last 100 years, as the village evolved from a frontier settlement through economic depression, world wars, the Cold War, and agrarian and electronic revolutions. White City has been part of the alternating image of Kansas as both a desert and a garden.

This unique study tells how a rural community acquired many of the amenities of an urban area, and how these affected the lives of its people. In one century, the town has come full circle, from a small village, with hopes and aspirations, to decline and decay.

This is the story of small-town America ~ its continuity and its change.

(To order, send \$22.95 plus \$3 shipping and handling to Alton Lee, 808 DeHoff, Manhattan, KS 66501 or call (785) 587-9475.

Wes Jackson to speak Kansas Day

The Center is pleased to announce that its 2001 Kansas Day speaker will be Wes Jackson of The Land Institute in Salina. Jackson is internationally noted for promoting sustainable agricultural practices and is widely recognized as one of the state's seminal thinkers.

He will address the challenges to the Kansas environment as the state enters the 21st century. His talk begins at 4 p.m., January 29, 2001 in the Kansas Room of the Union.

Geography field trip

The Center for Kansas Studies once again sponsors a field trip under the direction of Tom Schmiedeler. Field trip participation is open to the Washburn community.

The trip this fall explores the Kaw River Valley, Topeka to Lecompton to Lawrence. It begins at 8 AM on October 7 and ends about 3:30 PM. The topics covered are the environmental geography of the Kansas River Valley, the historical geography of Lecompton, and a tour of Old West Lawrence.

Van transportation is provided by the Center and space will be reserved on a first come, first served basis. Reservations are to be made with Professor Schmiedeler at <zzschmie@washburn.edu> or 785-231-1010 x1559

Observations

by Bill Wagnon

director of the Washburn Center for Kansas Studies.

During the past academic year, the Center and its fellows offered a variety of courses with a focus on the state's history and culture. Fellows' scholarly activities included: Barbara Burgess drew on her previous sabbatical to create a new mass media course, *Kansas and the Media*. Robert Hull created a special course, "Investing Locally and Globally," which featured Kansas businesses. The Art Department sponsored a workshop devoted to two Kansas artists: Gail Gregg and Philip Hershberger. Reinhild Janzen organized a field trip to Wichita to visit the Ulrich Museum and tour the Allen-Lambe House. Tom Averill's short story, "During the Twelfth Summer of Elmer D. Peterson" was reprinted in Tamil by the US State Department for distribution in SE Asia. Thomas Schmeideler organized the third geography field trip to NE Kansas. Virgil Dean, Sara Tucker and Tom Averill produced a summer teacher institute to implement the new curriculum standards for teaching Kansas history in the schools.

The Center's annual Speaking of Kansas Series was organized and produced by Michele Reid of Mabee Library. The theme for the year was "Rural

Filmmaker to be on campus

by Tom Averill (785 231-1010 x 1448).

Writer/filmmaker Kevin Willmott will visit Washburn again in the Fall of 2000 as a guest in Tom Averill's Kansas in the Movies Class. Willmott screened his movie "Ninth Street." Washburn University on Tuesday, February 22, 2000.

Praised by The Lawrence Journal-World, The Kansas City Star, and The Pitch Weekly, "Ninth Street" stars Martin Sheen and Isaac Hayes in an ensemble cast. The film is a poignant, humorous, irreverent look at the wild lifestyle of the "Harlem of Kansas,"

Life and the 21st Century: Growth, Conflict and Diversity." On December 9, Phillip Thomas spoke on "Follow the Yellow Brick Road: Kansas at the Millennium." On February 3, Steven Lickteig gave a presentation on Lebanon, Kansas, struggles with survival as a place. On March 2, Don Stull gave a talk, "Old Places, New Faces: Rural Communities in the 21st Century" which examined rural economic development in the state. On April 6, David Procter discussed community conflict in Manhattan. On April 6, Julene Bair read from her new collection, *One Degree West*.

The annual Kansas Day Celebration featured David Serfas, as Zerf, in a program of songs about Kansas, cowboys and pioneers on January 26. Kansas writer and film maker Kevin Willmott screened his movie "Ninth Street" on campus, Feb. 22. The film is a poignant, humorous, irreverent look at the "Harlem of Kansas" in Junction City during the Vietnam War era. The film examined the human struggles of black business owners eking out a living and others who fell victim to alcohol, drugs and prostitution.

Several Washburn faculty availed their classes of support from the Center to invite guest lecturers with expertise on Kansas. The fall 1999 newsletter was distributed across the state.

Junction City, during the Vietnam War in 1968. Willmott's film examines the human struggle of black business owners eking out a living and others who fell victim to alcohol, drugs and prostitution.

Willmott grew up in Junction City, Kansas. He currently is co-writing the NBC mini-series "The 70s" with his frequent writing partner, Mitch Brian. He also co-wrote a script for director Oliver Stone called "Little Brown Brothers." He just finished work on the NBC mini-series, "House of Getty" and will shoot his second film, "Confederate States of America," this fall.

On performing historical characters

by J. Karen Ray

Historical performance, well done, provides both a micro and a macro view of a specific historical era—micro in the accurate and detailed portrait of a particular historical figure and macro in an accurate description of the major issues and events of that person's time.

Historical performances are appealing to audiences because they personalize history; they put a human face and human emotions onto dates, social movements, and documented events. They reify the notion that history is more than great men embroiled in great events. They demonstrate that history is also made in the quiet moments, in the creases of time, by not-so-great men, and by women, both great and not-so-great. They bring history out of the pages of books, out of the archives, and into the lives of real men and women not so different from ourselves.

The research on which historical performances are based accomplishes much the same metamorphosis in the scholar. The historical research/performer, whether in the archives or on the stage, is "doing history" in the most palpable form. To delve into the inner recesses of an historical figure (through letters, journals, court records, etc.) and then to make those documents come to life in the portrayal of the figure is at once a highly creative act and a display of disciplined scholarship.

How does one begin the daunting task of

learning enough about a character and her times in order to create a credible performance? My own approach is to begin from the inside and work my way out; that is, I begin by reading everything I can find written by the person herself. This would include autobiography, diaries, letters, journals, editorials, articles, etc. For the more obscure of the sources, the archives of the Kansas State Historical Society provide a treasure trove of materials, including, for example, a recently acquired, unpublished journal Carry Nation kept during her years in Texas after her marriage to David Nation. I then proceed to read what has been written about a character, again biographies, articles, newspaper articles, etc. Finally, I move to the historical records of the time—books, journal articles, legal documents, historical, sociological, political, economic accounts of the times in which the character lived.

Of course, the opposite approach works as well; one could begin with a history of the times,

then move to what others have said about the figure, and conclude with the character's own words. The key in both approaches is to keep one's self focused and in control of the material. The biggest problem students have with this phase of the work is

becoming overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task. For students, it is best to help them concentrate on a single period of the character's life or on a single issue or idea. The amount of time available to a student is insufficient for the thorough approach outlined above, especially if the character is a major figure.

One of our students had the good fortune to acquire letters covering forty-years of the life of a Topeka missionary to China. While this acquisition was a treasure, the student was simply overwhelmed by the social, political, historical changes reflected in the letters. She was unable

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to focus on a single theme or event, and consequently, the project was less successful than it might have been.

Once the research is finished, the scholar must also focus the script. I try to get the students to imagine a specific audience and then ask, what does the audience know about this character and her times; what do they need to know in order to understand the things you wish to convey about the character. This exercise should help the student select what material will actually be conveyed in the performance.

It is also important to establish a through line or to utilize a unifying device to focus the material. The unifying device could be a material prop such as a series of letters or a journal from which the character is reading or it could be a situation such as an interview or a speech to a particular audience in a particular context. A through line could consist of a single idea developed through time or a particular problem attacked by the character.

Examples I have used include the development of Carry Nation's commitment to prohibition and the growth of her determination to wipe out the scourge of alcohol. The Laura Ingalls Wilder character is unified by the delineation of her ideals of courage, independence, self-reliance, and integrity, which permeate both her books and her life. Katherine

Richards O'Hare is delineated by the depth of her commitment to those less fortunate than herself, and Osa Johnson by her unswerving love and support for her husband. One of our students created the simple but effective device of dictating three letters on the night of his death—one to his wife, one to his political enemy, and one to a friend and confidant.

Finally, the script needs to have a sense of development, a progression of emotions, or ideas, or events through time. To make the character live, we need to see depth, complexity, and change over time. Static characters are inherently uninteresting, and simple characters rarely pique our curiosity or stretch our understanding of ourselves and others. In short, a performance script must be whole, complete, and composed by a beginning, which establishes the context, a middle which develops the character's main ideas, and a conclusion which brings the performance to a satisfying end.

All these steps accomplished, the scholar will have produced a well-documented, accurate, and revealing script, which in performance brings an historical figure to life in vivid and credible terms. This exercise is fulfilling and educational to both scholar and audience.

Center co-sponsors Charles M. Sheldon Week

by Bill Wagon

March 12, 2000, began a week's centennial commemoration of Charles M. Sheldon's editing the Topeka Daily Capital, which allowed him to experiment with implementing his ideas introduced in his internationally renowned publication, *In His Steps*. The Center co-sponsored the events, including a seminar for the public at the Kansas History Center.

Center Director Bill Wagon was one of the presenters. He described Sheldon's efforts to perfect the social gospel response to industrialization in America. Other panelists included Timothy Miller, biographer of Sheldon, and Andrew McHenry, pastor of the Mill Creek Community Congregational Church. Phil Anderson, staff religion writer for the Topeka Capital-Journal, moderated.

The daily newspaper ran extensive features devoted to Sheldon's life, particularly his serving as editor of the Daily Capital in 1900, which boosted circulation from about 15,000 to over half-a-million.

Book Review

ONE DEGREE WEST: Reflections of a Plainsdaughter

by Julene Bair

Winner of the 1998 Mid-List Press First Series Award for Creative Nonfiction

Review by Sara Tucker

Reviews of this slim volume of closely-linked essays call it “bittersweet,” “powerful,” “flinty and tender,” “lyrical, evocative,” “a luminous account of life on the western plains” and “an eloquent tribute to a passing way of life.” It is all of these things.

Julene Bair, born 1949 in Goodland, Kansas, wrote the volume’s eleven essays separately over the span of the 1990s. In all of them she ponders her Kansas childhood and family, her place in it, and what it means that so much of that life is now changed or gone. Hers is specifically the story of mid-20th century family farm life in a place one degree, forty-two minutes west of the hundredth meridian line that divides low-rainfall high plains western Kansas from the greener lands to the east.

Writing in a simple, very readable style, Bair offers many glimpses of little, ordinary details that most effectively bring alive that time and place. Thus she describes a Thanksgiving 1954 with all of the family gathered at her parents’ farm, with brothers and boy cousins having a dirt clod tossing contest at the barn’s corrugated tin door, and the girl cousins dropping rocks down the storm shelter vent pipe. Other essays describe the rare spontaneity of her tenth birthday party, planned suddenly

when the farm lagoon unexpectedly fills up after a rare big rain; her brother Clark using Coca-Cola to remove grasshoppers from the chrome bumper of the family car; and the many wonderful sunsets seen over the High Plains wide sky.

But there is much more to Bair’s memories. Her sense of the past is a complex one, simplified neither by sugar coating or villainy. Again and again Bair gives us amazingly frank insights into her own Kansas memories and continuing family relationships. Perhaps most often she writes about her own struggles with the limits and lesser value that she feels traditional, farming Kansas culture put on women.

In this volume’s essays she writes repeatedly about feeling excluded, as a female, from the most-valued world of men’s heavy, physical farm work. Thus she says “Kansas values are male. Part of me simply can’t have existence here,” (p 129) in a world where “everyone tacitly understood that through the men’s largess, we females were allowed the luxuries of the house and yard, but these comforts entailed a compromise in status.” (p 54)

Yet overall Bair’s portrait of her family is a powerfully loving one, filled with admiration for the ways both her mother and her father lived their lives, did their work and nurtured their children. She writes movingly of the rides she took as a young child, when her parents loaded all three children into the family car for trips to monthly adult card-games. She traveled in the front seat, sheltered between the bodies of her two parents, brought along because she, like all the participating families’ children, was fully included in the community’s life. (This she compares to her own later struggles when, after leaving her abusive second husband, she began raising her son alone, finding little tolerance for children in modern-day urban adult society.)

In another particularly powerful memory, Bair recounts her father’s reaction to a sudden hail storm which wiped out an expected wheat crop on the eve of harvest. She describes him breathing deeply “as if to exert control over this much of nature, himself” and “figuring already, ten minutes

after the storm, what it will take" to plant a replacement crop. Likewise she describes a mother serenely, powerfully in charge of the young children, the house, and many of the farm tasks immediately surrounding it.

In writing about changing farm life since her childhood days, Bair looks deeply and amazingly openly into her own very personal, conflicting feelings about recently changes in Kansas farm country. She regretfully describes aging farm parents' struggles with the widespread problem of children - including herself, she points out - who choose not to take over the family farms, but instead use expected farm inheritance to help finance lower paying, more artistic occupations. She also talks about the - in many ways - deeper problem of a whole way of life and identity disappearing even for those who manage still to run the farms.

She writes that "When my family moved into town, into a suburban-style house, we evicted ourselves from the place that birthed our stories." (p 116) This left her father to commute out to the land like a factory worker clocking-in on a job, and her mother to fuss that he had forgotten to

close the town garage door after him when he left. "We had this great open continent, this airy gift that filled so much more than our pragmatic needs, but we gave no credence to the nonmaterial things that derive from land and apace, the things you can't really own." (p 117) Yet, Bair repeats, she could not choose to try to stay and live on the land in the old way, even were it possible, with its many costs including women's diminished status and disregard for the environment.

Julene Bair offers us no comfortable, romantic view of Kansas's recent farm past. Equally, she offers us no comfortable reassurance that nothing important has been lost in all our recent change. What she does offer us is the gift of her own honest memories, which bring alive much of what was most distinctive about Kansas in the past century. There is much to savor in her loving memories of High Plains farm life; there is also much to think about in the questions she raises about relations within families, between men and women, and between humankind and the earth.

Washburn offers minor in Kansas Studies

Washburn University offers students a unique opportunity to study about Kansas. Students can learn about the archaeology, ecology, folklore, government, history, literature, movies, media and museums of the state while earning the minor in Kansas Studies at Washburn University.

To earn the minor in Kansas Studies, a student must complete at least 15 hours from Kansas courses listed, with at least 6 of the hours at the upper division level. Barbara Burgess will advise students and certify that a student has successfully met the requirements for this minor. She can be contacted at (785 231 1010 x 1801)

AN 225 Kansas Archaeology
BI 170 Kansas Ecology
BI 180 Birds of Kansas or Reptiles of Kansas
EN 138 Kansas Literature
EN 190 Kansas and the Movies
GG 304 Geography of Kansas
HI 322 Kansas History
HI 317 Topeka and the Urban Experience
PO 107 American State and Local Government
PO 307 Internship in State/Local Government
HI 397 Internship in Historical Agencies
MM 402 Kansas and the Media (special topic)

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1700 College
Topeka, Ks. 66621
(785) 231-1010 Ex.1989
Director: Bill Wagnon
HOME PAGE:
www.washburn.edu/cks

1998-1999 Fellows

Tom Averill, English
Roy Bird, English
Barbara Burgess, Mass Media
Jenny Chinn, KSHS
Virgil Dean, KSHS
Amy Fleury, English
Rachel Goossen, History
Robert Hull, Business
Reinhild Janzen, Art
Bruce Mactavish, History
J. Karen Ray, Dean CAS
Tom Schmiedeler, Geography
Bradley Siebert, English
Loran Smith, Political Science
Glenda Taylor, Art
Sara Tucker, History
Bill Wagnon, History
Tom Wolf, Biology

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Tuesday 5:30-8 (Will Banks)
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