

THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

Vol. 4, No. 2

SPRING 1990



Loren Corey Eiseley
September 3, 1907 - July 9, 1977

"We have joined the caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."

SPRING MEETING

Saturday, April 28th, 2-4 p.m.

Charles Gere Library, 56th & Normal, Lincoln

Program: Teaching Eiseley's "Flow to the River" to 4th, 5th, and 6th grade children at the Nebraska Groundwater Festival.

Join us afterwards for cookies and punch.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The March 9th Nebraska Groundwater Festival in Grand Island that attracted over 2,000 4th, 5th, and 6th grade children was a tremendous success. The session, "An Imaginary Float Trip Down the Platte", based on Eiseley's essay, The Flow of the River, was requested by every school attending. Our Spring Meeting will feature a report on teaching Eiseley to children this age. We are indebted to the five people who made the event so meaningful, and who we have made honorary members of the Friends. They are:

Susan Seacrest - President, Nebraska Groundwater Festival

Amy Quandt - Festival Director

Carol Crosby - Chet Ager Nature Center, Lincoln City Park Dept., teacher

Mary Liz Jamison - Nebraska State Museum, Morrill Hall, teacher

Vicki Wood - Coordinator, Young Peoples' Division, Bennett Martin Library, teacher

Participants in the Regional Doll Festival to be held in Lincoln this month will be visiting the Eiseley Dollhouse in the Heritage Room at Bennett Martin Library. If you have not seen it you might like to combine a trip to the Heritage Room with the Spring Meeting.

Early in February, Dr. Gilbert Lueninghoener, cousin of Loren Eiseley and long time member of the Friends, died in Fremont. Throughout his life he was active in teaching and working at Midland College where he was a major influence in building the Science Department. We extend sympathy to his family.

Naomi Brill
Acting President

THE LOST TAPE

At the 1987 Spring Meeting held at the home of Bertrand and Marian Schultz, Dr. Bill Gaffney, formerly of the English Department at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, and longtime personal friend of Eiseley, talked about this friendship and read from his writings. A tape was made of this talk but cannot be located, and both Dr. Gaffney and his wife, Libbey, are no longer living. If you have knowledge of its whereabouts, please let us know. We would like to place a copy in the Eiseley collection at the Heritage Room.

EISELEY MEMORIAL AWARD

In 1986, with the help of the Friends, Clarkson Hospital School of Nursing and the Clarkson Corporation of Omaha, Nebraska developed criteria for selection of a recipient of an annual Loren Eiseley Memorial Award. This is designed for a person who "through teaching and/or writing demonstrates the blending of science and humanity that characterizes Eiseley's work."

On April 20th of this year, the fifth such award will be made at a conference in Omaha on "The Caring Professional; Multi-disciplinary Perspectives." Our representative there will be Jean Anderson, President of the Friends when the award was originated. If possible, we hope that the current recipient will be able to join us at the Spring Meeting.

REPOSITORY FOR EISELEY MATERIAL

The Heritage Room at Bennett Martin Library in Lincoln, Nebraska contains one of the finest collections of Nebraska literature and culture. In May of this year, Librarian Bob Boyce, Vice-President of the Friends, will be cataloging the Eiseley holdings there. This is a good time to think about whether you have anything about him for which you would like to find a permanent place. The library is interested in books, pictures, manuscripts, letters and articles. Address inquiries to Carol Connor, Director, Lincoln City Libraries, Bennett Martin Library, 14th & N Streets, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508.

THE NEBRASKA LITERARY PROJECT

The Nebraska Literature Project is seeking elementary and secondary school teachers to study Nebraska writers at a workshop to be held at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, June 11th through 13th. Eiseley is among the writers to be considered and classes will be directed toward both familiarizing teachers with such material and developing methods to teaching it. For information contact Gerry Brookes, (402) 472-1816 or Joy Ritchie (402) 472-3191.

CURRENT SCHOLARLY WORK ON EISELEY

Too late for mentioning in our Fall issue are papers presented at the Western Literature Conference in Idaho. "Nature writing" was much emphasized in this conference. The following were presented:

Peter Heidtmann of Ohio University wrote of Eiseley, Thoreau and Natural Revelation.

Gale Christianson of Indiana State University (author of the new Eiseley biography) wrote of Eiseley and Morris--a Literary Friendship.

Lawrence Berkove of the University of Michigan wrote In the Valley of Dry Bones: Loren Eiseley's Confrontation with Death.

Paul Bryant of Radford University wrote of The Uses of Time in Nature Writing, using the essays of Eiseley (among others) to illustrate his conclusions.

Sanford Olson of Kent State University wrote of Sigurd Olson: Conservation with a Fly Rod, wherein Olson "acknowledges his philosophical and literary debt to Eiseley."

Gale Carrithers of Louisiana State University writes to tell us of his book, Mumford, Tate and Eiseley: Watchers in the Night, scheduled for publication in Spring 1991 by the LSU Press. It deals with the prophetic judgment of Twentieth Century American Culture which these three writers "partially loved and partially scorned."

Dimitri Breschinsky of the Foreign Languages and Literature Department at Purdue University has just been awarded a grant for translation of Eiseley's essays into Russian. Born in China and educated in the United States, Professor Breschinsky has published in both Russian and American journals. He started working on Eiseley in 1986 and has translated The Flow of the River, The Pianist, The Brown Wasps, and The Golden Wheel for Russian periodicals. His book will be titled Wingbeat: A Collection of Essays and Stories by Loren Eiseley--in Russian Vzmakh Kyria.

(Editor's note: Where are the Nebraska Scholars working on Eiseley, a Nebraska author?)

LIGHT THE FIRE OF LEARNING IN OUR CHILDREN

THE AMATEUR NATURALIST

By Naomi Brill

In 30 odd years of crane watching on the banks of the Platte River, each spring has been unique but this year was special. It coincided with the Nebraska Groundwater Foundation's annual Spring Festival for Nebraska school children.

It was impossible to dismiss the similarity between the sound of thousands of sandhill cranes coming off the river at daybreak and the excited voices of more than 2,000 fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders from all over the state who came and went in buses all day long to learn about water and its importance to life.

The idea for one of the many different sessions offered--an imaginary float trip down the Platte--originated with a writer, who was once just such a Nebraska schoolchild. In 1920, when he was in high school, he said he wanted to be a nature writer. He went on to win national and international awards for distinguished nature writing including the prestigious John Burroughs Medal. His work has been translated into German, French, Hindi, Persian, Spanish, Swedish, Greek, Korean and Arabic and presently, into Russian. Recently a reviewer wrote "(his) voice remains unique among the distinguished present day nature writers."

Loren Eiseley spent the first 26 years of his life in Lincoln. From his mother, "an untaught prairie artist," he wrote that he received "an eye for beauty." From his father, a reader of Shakespeare, he received his sensitivity to and awareness of the nuances of language. The direction of his life was strongly influenced by the physical and educational resources of Lincoln, at that time a growing prairie town.

He was a lonely child from a poor family. The availability of schools, of a natural history museum, of a Carnegie library, and of easily accessible, untrammelled landscape on the edge of town where he could wander, shaped his course.

By the time he was 5, Eiseley had "mastered the alphabet and read little primers." Then his brother, Leo, came home for a visit, bringing a copy of "Robinson Crusoe" from which he read. Unfortunately, Leo had to leave before he finished so "I took Defoe's book and some little, inadequate dictionary . . . and proceeded to worry and chew my way like a puppy through the remaining pages." As a reward, he was given "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea" and from then on "read everything I could get my hands on."

This led to the Carnegie Library (now Bennett Martin) to which he "pedaled a coaster wagon" and filled it with books, and to a particular book on home aquariums. "The countryside was open in those days" so, although this was winter, he went "carrying lard buckets and an improvised net" to a pond, presently the lake at Lincoln Country Club. There he chopped a hole in the ice and "dredged up water boatmen, whirligig beetles and dragonfly larvae."

When he was 12 his uncle took him to visit the fossil collection at the University Museum, now Morrill Hall. He returned again and again. "When Grandma was alone in the kitchen we used to bake heads (made of clay) together in the kitchen stove . . . and shaped as I thought they should be shaped from the drawings from the red brick museum." Grandma remonstrated about their "Darwin look" but went along anyway.

From Lincoln High, to University High, to the University of Nebraska, Eiseley's progress was hampered by illness and poverty and by his dropping out of school for a year to ride the rails through the West with thousands of other young people during those Depression years. At the University he wrote for the newly formed Prairie Schooner and dug for fossils with field parties from the museum. He received his degree with majors in English and anthropology and went on to the University of Pennsylvania for graduate work and thence to his distinguished career.

In correspondence with a young friend, Eiseley wrote, "My wife and I feed a pair of cardinals here at our window every year. The individuals come and go and disaster often overtakes them." He likened those disasters to concern about the future of human life and added, "it is youths like yourself who will have to try . . . to help the living chain of life."

Eiseley's vision of the Platte as described in his essay, "The Flow of the River," combined with the commitment of the organizers and the skill of the teachers, helped to light a candle in the eyes of the children at the Groundwater Festival. In its glow lies our future. We do not give them an easy tasks and it is our responsibility to provide such opportunities to learn and such stimulus for creative thinking. Among them are probably other Eiseleys.

(Lincoln Star, March 22, 1990)



We welcome comments, criticisms, material for inclusion in The Caravan, new members. Our January dues appeal was a success--if you didn't get yours in, send it along. \$5.00 will keep you on the mailing list for a year and include a subscription to the Newsletter.

You can become a Contributing Member for \$25.00, a Supporting Member for \$50.00, and a Patron for \$100. Dues paid after September 1, 1989 will also cover all of 1990.

Friends of Loren Eiseley
P.O. Box 80934
Lincoln, NE 68501-0934

