

THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

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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."

-- The Immense Journey

SAVE THIS DATE

Wednesday, November 28th --- 7:30 p.m.
Heritage Room

Bennett Martin Public Library
14th & N Street, Lincoln

Dr. Harvey Potthoff, Mattingly Distinguished Visiting Professor of Religion from Nebraska Wesleyan University will hold a discussion entitled "Loren Eiseley's Religious Journey". Prior to his Wesleyan appointment, Dr. Potthoff was professor of Theology and head of the Department of Theology of Iliff School of Theology in Denver. Author of several books including "The Whole Person" and "God and the Celebration of Life" he will be discussing religion in the writings of Loren Eiseley.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The visit of Gale Christianson, Loren Eiseley's biographer, to Nebraska in September sponsored by the Friends, was a major event. At appearances both in Omaha and Lincoln he talked about the role of a biographer, about his interpretation of the events of Eiseley's life in his book, "Fox at the Wood's Edge", and about his interviews with the various people significant in Eiseley's life, particularly his wife. Christianson stressed that this book is his work and that other books will be coming that may look at these events in a different manner, draw different conclusions, and spend more time considering the nature of Eiseley's writing and his place in literature.

One of these, Peter Heidtmann's "Loren Eiseley: a Modern Ishmael" will be coming out in December of this year published by the Shoestring Press in Connecticut. The notice from their catalogue promises an interesting and different approach to Eiseley and his work.

The events of Eiseley's life as presented by Gale Christianson have disturbed devoted Eiseley readers who, because of the inspiration they find in his work, have placed him on a pedestal. The Reverend Charles Stephen of the Unitarian Church in Lincoln spoke to this in his sermon, "The Search for Loren Eiseley" on September 23, 1990, in which he says "we don't really need or want biographers who try to create sainthood for their subjects. The biographer's role is an intimate one, adversarial

sometimes, oftentimes affectionate."

This sermon can be read in the Heritage Room in Bennett Martin Public Library in Lincoln, or can be secured by writing the Unitarian Church, 6300 A Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68506. Send 50 cents to cover cost.

Our feature article in this issue by Sherrill Daniels, Friends Board Member, is on Dorothy Thomas Buickerood, a friend of the Eiseleys. Sherrill is both a personal friend and involved in preparation of her biography.

On November 5 I spoke at The Gathering Place in Lincoln about Eiseley and my hope that there will be Nebraska scholars forthcoming who will together examine his work and its importance as an influence on the current generation of writers.

Charlotte Holm of Lincoln, Jean Smith and Kira Gale of Omaha have accepted appointment to the Board of the Friends of Loren Eiseley. One major thrust for 1991 will be reorganization and revitalization of the Board. If you would like to help, let us know.

The manager of Restoration and Promotion of the State Buildings, Robert Ripley, assured us that the bust of Loren Eiseley will be mounted and on display in the Hall of Fame of the State Capitol by December 1st. The delay has been occasioned by the special demands of mounting it on the monolith from the Schultz home.

It's been a good year and 1991 has great promise. The first Nebraska Literature Festival will be held in September 1991 and will be a major event for the Friends. (See story elsewhere). Let us know if you are particularly interested in this event---your help will be needed.

Happy Holidays to you all!

Naomi Brill
Acting President

LOREN EISELEY A MODERN ISHMAEL

by Peter Heidtmann

"Loren Eiseley is considerably more than just a cult figure, a nature writer, or a prose-poet, though he is all three. According to writer Annie Dillard, Eiseley "restored the essay's place in imaginative literature" for this century. In this book, Peter Heidtmann concentrates on Eiseley's use of and accomplishments in that eclectic genre, from 1947 to his death in 1977, and suggests how Eiseley may best be read.

As Eiseley himself recognized, the primary source of interest in the essay is "the self and its minute adventures." Heidtmann concentrates on how Eiseley presented himself, and shows how he was impelled primarily by the autobiographical impulse which, in turn, led to his emergence as the protagonist of his own mythic story.

Heidtmann emphasizes the importance of storytelling, both traditionally and in its modern, autobiographical forms. He shows that Eiseley belongs to a line of American self-mythologizers which includes Henry David Thoreau and Henry Adams. He also discusses the relationship between memory and myth, especially as revealed in Eiseley's handling of childhood and youth. Stressed throughout are Eiseley's romantic literary affiliations, as well as his own romantic sensibility, which is seen in both his transcendental concerns and in his art.

Peter Heidtmann is Professor of English at Ohio University."

DOROTHY THOMAS BUICKEROOD

by Sherrill Daniels



Dorothy Thomas Buickerood 3/85

On September 22, 1990, Dorothy Thomas Buickerood, a close friend of Loren and Mabel Eiseley, died in San Angelo, Texas, after a short illness. Dorothy was 92.

Many Friends will remember Dorothy's appearance at the 1984 Celebration held at the Museum in Elephant Hall and the stories she told about the Eiseleys and the friendship that began in Lincoln in the late 1920's and continued until the death of Mabel, nearly sixty years later.

Three periods of friendship will interest the Friends particularly. First is the period of the late 1920's when all three, Dorothy, Loren, and Mabel, were in Lincoln. Dorothy had started teaching school in the fall of 1919, after completing her junior year of high school. She taught grade school nine years, the last three at Elliott School in Lincoln, under the principalship of Sadie Baird, and had participated in the literary scene in Lincoln,

along with Loren and Mabel, Mari Sandoz, Dwight Kirsch, and others. Dorothy had attended the University only during summers, taking courses in English and Art for fun, and Teachers College courses because she had to have them to get a better certificate. It wasn't until the fall of 1928 that family finances, to which she had been a major contributor for nine years, permitted her to go to school full time. In the fall of that year, she published a short story in the Prairie Schooner; Loren had a contribution to that issue also. In the winter issue, Dorothy and Mabel Langdon had poems. In March of that year, Scribner's Magazine accepted Dorothy's short story, "Three Blue Doves." On the strength of that sale, she returned her teacher's contract unsigned and set out to make her living as a professional writer.

During this period, Dorothy's writing career took off. In addition to numerous short stories published in the best literary magazines of the day, New Yorker and Harper's included, Dorothy published her first novel, Ma Jeeter's Girls in 1933. Under Alfred Knopf's direction, she had reshaped the short stories about Ma that had so intrigued H.L. Mencken, who had purchased them for his American Mercury. In December of 1932 Dorothy was sufficiently sought-after to charge \$5.00 plus expenses for readings given to ladies' clubs.

On the strength of her novel and short story sales, Dorothy moved to Sante Fe, New Mexico, after seeing a film about the country. It was her home until 1939. Loren and Mabel drove there in 1934 to visit when she was living in the home of Mary Austin, the well-known southwestern writer. They arrived in time for Mary Austin's funeral. Gale Christianson, in his recent biography of Eiseley, tells how Loren wrote a poem that was used in her service. Dorothy was still in Sante Fe in 1938 when she "stood up" for Mabel when Mabel married Loren on August 29 of that year. Another collection of her short stories was published by Knopf as a novel, The Home Place, during this time.

Dorothy and the Eiseleys crossed paths again in New York in 1940, when Loren had a

fellowship at Columbia University. At this time, before the Second World War, Dorothy was a very successful and well-known writer. She moved to New York from Sante Fe only the year before. Through the Eiseleys, Dorothy rented the apartment below theirs for most of the Eiseleys' stay in New York. As Christianson points out, the most fruitful part of their renewed friendship in New York was the chance for conversation, or at least for Loren to talk to two warm, lovely women who liked and encouraged him.

On the surface there seems to be little that Loren and Dorothy held in common. His professional misanthropy and her rosy view of the world appear incompatible. Yet the common Nebraska background, the synchronicity of Lincoln, Sante Fe, and New York and Dorothy's ability to listen with the ear of a prose writer whose specialty was turning personal experience and observation into fiction obviously gave Eiseley something he found useful. Their friendship continued during the years after the war, when his literary star rose and hers fell. It ended only by the deaths of Loren and Mabel. Fortunately the importance of its friendship is preserved both in Christianson's biography and in the letters from Mabel which Dorothy so carefully preserved.

NEBRASKA LITERATURE FESTIVAL

by Kira Gale

The first Nebraska Literature Festival, co-sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, will be held September 27-29, 1991. The festival, at the Milo Bail Student Center on the UNO campus, will be a combination of a fair and performance events, celebrating Nebraska's literary heritage and contemporary writers. In 1992, the festival will be held at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Plans are to make the festival an annual event, rotating between the two campuses to encourage statewide attendance.

The theme "Nebraska: The Authors State"

will be used to publicize Nebraska's richness in literary talent. Six organizations honoring individual authors will participate in the festival. The authors, and the places associated with them, are Bess Streeter Aldrich, Elmwood; Willa Cather, Red Cloud; Loren Eiseley, Lincoln; Wright Morris, Central City; John G. Neihardt, Bancroft; and Mari Sandoz, Chadron. Festival organizers plan to establish an annual Nebraska Literature Resource Guide, and the six authors will be the subject of the first publication.

Hilda Neihardt, daughter of Nebraska's Poet Laureate John G. Neihardt, and Betty Jean Steinshouer, who portrays Willa Cather, will be featured performers at the festival. The festival will be free of charge, and will include a variety of programs: poetry and prose readings, dramatic productions, storytelling, workshops, panel discussions, slide talks and video. The fair will have organizational booths, souvenir and book sales, an auction, and book art demonstrations.

Two competitions will be held in connection with the festival. The Center for the Book and the National Conference of Christians and Jews are co-sponsoring a Minority Playwrights Competition with a first prize of \$500.00. The winning play will be performed at the festival. A Student Essay and Creative Writing Competition for grades 7-12 also is planned, with corporate underwriting being sought. For further information, contact the Nebraska Center for the Book, c/o Lincoln City Libraries, 136 S. 14th., Lincoln, NE 68508.

We welcome comments, criticisms, material for inclusion in The Caravan, new members. If you have not yet paid your dues, send them along. \$5.00 will keep you on the mailing list and include a subscription to the Newsletter. Those paid now will cover the year 1991. You can become a contributing member for \$25.00, a Supporting Member for \$50.00 and a Patron for \$100.00. Send checks to: Friends of Loren Eiseley, P.O. Box 80934, Lincoln, NE 68501-0934.