

# THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

Vol. 8, No. 2

Fall 1994

---



**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*

## SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

You will want to be with the Friends of Loren Eiseley for their customary late October gathering in Elephant Hall of the University State Museum. Our event this year marks the completion of the project Chris Lesiak and the Nebraska Public Television Network have undertaken to produce their television documentary on Loren Eiseley and that evening we will witness the premiere showing of this hour long film, Reflections of a Bonehunter. Chris told us something of the work she has done in her article in the last issue of the Caravan. This will be a landmark event for the Friends and we will be looking forward to one of our most exciting experiences together.

Another important part of our activities during the evening will be the awarding of the Loren Eiseley Medal.

A tour of Eiseley's Lincoln will again be led by Darrel Berg during the afternoon. Then after the tour we will gather in Elephant Hall for the dinner to be followed by the presentation of the film.

Mark October 23 on your calendar and watch your mail for your invitation to join us on this big day.

## BILL WISNER REMEMBERS LOREN EISELEY

We first encountered Bill Wisner through his wonderful article "A Boy, a Bird and a Book: A Remembrance of Loren Eiseley" which appeared in the May 1989 issue of the Audubon Magazine. We are very pleased to have received the following article from him with his permission to allow us to print it in the Caravan. Bill is a Reference Librarian at Laredo Junior College in Texas and we have enjoyed reading his reviews in the Kansas City Star. He has written extensively on Texas artists and is himself an artist.

### Strengthening Autumn A Remembrance of Loren Eiseley

By William H. Wisner

I held his letter in my hands like a vindication, feeling my adolescence begin to ramify with possibilities -- some nameless, incipient belief that I could be like him, that my own prose and life could somehow shadow his for immensity and virtue and artistry. Did his sadness not match my own? Were his beginnings not humble too? And didn't he too magnify every grief he ever felt and project it in words onto the screen of other hearts, as I ached to do? I did not imagine then that art is a surrender, not a victory and old age's wisdom comes in loss, not discovery. Nor did I have any certain idea how his books were made, just how the miraculous, bound transfiguring leaves which appeared every other year came to exist in my teenage hands. I merely memorized Loren Eiseley's words, the numbers of his prose unrolling in my heart and mind as I quoted him unerringly to my bewildered high school classmates -- or as I made drawings of sunflower forests for him and sent them from Hays, Kansas to his book-lined offices at Penn.

Loren Eiseley died in July 1977, at age sixty-nine. He was born in 1907 in the provincial town of Lincoln, Nebraska. The moments of his later prose could be thrilling, as in the closing of "The Ghost Continent": "I have listened belatedly to the warning of the great enchantress. I have cast, while there was yet

time, my own oracles on the sun-washed deck. My attempt to read the results contains elements of autobiography. I set it down just as the surge begins to lift, towering and relentless, against the reefs of age." Or his reply to the Star Thrower: "I do not collect. I gave it up a long time ago. Death is the only successful collector." Or his defiant cry, "I am every man and no man, and will be so to the end. That is why I must tell the story as I may."

Even then, at fourteen, I took Loren Eiseley to be an anomaly in the domain of anthropology, a maverick scientist whose first book, The Immense Journey, (published when Eiseley was fifty-two, in 1959) had become a classic for its rich infusion of natural history with autobiographical reminiscence, carving a place in the grand tradition of T. H. Huxley, Henry David Thoreau and (one of his own favorites, I learned later, from his wife Mabel) the quixotic W. H. Hudson.

Our correspondence spanned seven of the most profound years of my development, from age fourteen to twenty one. Though they were never copious, the letters we exchanged reveal the uniqueness of my literary bond to him. I had written to Loren initially with a child's burning question: some boys in our neighborhood had cruelly killed a bird -- a Downy Woodpecker -- which our family had been feeding for some months at our window. I would watch the Downy each morning at the suet before going off to junior high. I was strangely devastated by this act of violence. My father had read The Immense Journey out loud to my mother and me, and I thought suddenly -- remembering the essay entitled "The Judgement of the Birds" -- that Loren Eiseley could tell me why the bird had died, what it meant. "Can man survive?", I wanted to know, making some strange galvanic leap from the particular to the universal as only a child will. I learned from the "About the Author" paragraph at the back of the book that Eiseley was the Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and the History of Science, Director of the University Museum, at the University of Pennsylvania. But of course I understood only one thing: he must be wise.

He had written a book. He must know about the bloody disheveled clump of feathers I had buried in my backyard, with sudden hot tears of grief even I could not account for. Within a week I held his answer in my hand. My urgency had leapt across the 1500 miles that lay between us. He had recognized his younger self. "You are young" he wrote, after bemoaning the increasing destruction of the planet, "and it is youths like yourself who must carry these burdens and try as best you can to help both man and the living chain of life after my generation is gone."

At the time of my first letter from him, dated February 9, 1971, his seventh book, The Invisible Pyramid, had just appeared. On the strength of our new-found correspondence I hastened to read it. And the Unexpected Universe. And the Firmament of Time. And the Mind as Nature. And Francis Bacon and the Modern Dilemma. There is a kind of glib adult dismissal of the intense youthful passion which can seize the gifted in adolescence. I believe such heat is not merely a transition -- as we usually think -- but a vivid end in itself. Never have I read so deeply or believed so innocently in the truth of words. Never have I believed so adamantly in another's undoubted virtue, saddling Loren (wrongly) with a benevolence that was only partly real, or a belief in the uniformity of his genius that was only partly true. Of all genres autobiography is the most dangerous, a treacherous reef in which the writer must somehow make his version of literal truth accord with the inherent, destabilizing tendency words have for seeking the autonomy of art. Worse, few writers can sustain the admiration readers will project onto a richly-described existence whose pain, celebrity or meaning they identify with.

My initial letters to him begin in humility, with the question of the bird, but Loren's attention quickly became the pride of my life. The atavistic drama of his story found in me a kind of youthful zealot, and I searched the small town of Hays for the means to express it. The Invisible Pyramid, Loren's "ecology book," stimulated me to seek out the elderly editor of the Hays Daily News (the only paper in a town of 25,000) and fantastically persuade him to let

me write a guest editorial on the then controversial trans-Alaskan oil pipeline -- ostensibly to allow a "young person's" point of view. I wrote the piece and it was accepted. I said in it, "the danger of oil leakage is impossible to overcome," and added (with prescient accuracy), "Alaska is going to be in for some spectacular oil spills." The real motive for the review came at the conclusion, however, and gave a headline to the piece. Calling Loren Eiseley "a noted naturalist and philosopher" I quoted from The Immense Journey, "the need is now for a gentler, a more tolerant people than those who won for us against the ice, the tiger and the bear. The hand that hefted the axe . . . now fondles the machine gun as lovingly. It is a habit man will have to break to survive, but roots go very deep." I was, in effect, reinvesting Loren's words back into the sanctity of print -- print I had made, with words I had assembled. There is also, in the editorial, our shared passion for finalities: what was to become for me, in endless restatement, the "farewell to life," Aeneas's "tears for things," the tension between our existence and our heartbroken memory of another after their loss. Eiseley meshed perfectly with my already established predilection towards negative emotion, which was a feature of my adolescence then as it is now. Too young to tender the implications, I was taking my first steps toward an adult conception of death.

Always, it seemed, I was waiting -- waiting for another long, buff envelope which said at the top "The Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania." I waited while other boys and girls in my junior year were accomplishing the difficult, necessary task of going to their first dance; which I found impossible to do, escaping instead into words -- into the immense private realm of inner experience which literature promised -- as many teenagers who do not or cannot fit into high school do to this day. It was not that I was unpopular. I simply refused to acknowledge my social capacity. The clear identification with a mentor -- who was for me a living representative of what I saw as the noble necessity of art -- swamped my imaginative life.

My English teacher (this would have been in 1972) permitted me to read selections from Loren's first volume of poetry, Notes of an Alchemist, to the class. My crib, kept to this day in my copy of the book, indicates the poems I chose, with instructions: "Read in order: 'The Striders', 'Notes of an Alchemist', 'The Lost Plateau', 'Not Time Calendrical'." I entertained no personal attempt at critical assessment. Loren's words were sacred ground, the temenos of art. I could not have brooked the truth: that Loren's poetry, as Auden intuited, was the weakest form he wrote and that his brilliant skills as an essayist -- and despite the thrillingly poetic prose he fashioned -- simply did not translate into the strict metric virtuosity true poetry demands. I retain no memory of my classmate's reaction to my readings. In itself this symbolizes the distance I was consciously placing between us, transfiguring my inability to reach out to them in the name of a higher ideal.

My adulation for Loren in those years found visual expression as well. Fueled by a consuming passion for art, I would take long walks into the prairie with my sketchbook, faithfully drawing its wealth of plants and small animals. I made one drawing expressly for Loren, of a sunflower forest such as he had described in The Invisible Pyramid. I sent the completed picture to him at Penn, where it was spotted by an interviewer from The National Observer. "You will be interested to know," Loren wrote me in February 1973, "that the attractive sunflower picture which you sent me some time ago was in my office when I was interviewed by Michelle Murphy of 'The National Observer.' In it she makes reference to your sunflower picture which apparently caught her eye during the course of the interview." Sure enough. She had. A wealthy local woman sent me a copy of the piece which she had seen. "A young friend in Kansas gave me that," Eiseley recalled to Miss Murphy. I needed proofs, and here was a persuasive one. In my most outrageous Eiseley adventure, I floated with my bemused parents down the Platte River two hundred miles north of Hays, in imitation of the floating episode on the Platte Loren describes in The Immense Journey. Only a youth could believe that

imitation of adult action could magically transfer its benefits to him, usurping and eliding the twin domains of time and personal history.

Life became memory on a day in July 1977, when the prayer wheel of time turned and turned and stopped. My twenty-first birthday was upon me. My eldest brother called from Montana: "I read it in the Billings paper," Byron said. "I'm very sorry for you." "Read what?" I cried, my heart icing. I had heard nothing of Loren's death. That night my good mother came softly into my room. "He's gone," I said again, without apparent emotion, and turned over in bed. His autobiography All the Strange Hours lay beside me -- inscribed by him for my birthday -- that brilliant catalog of earthly sadness in which he said on its opening page, "Nothing is lost, but it can never be again as it was. You will only find the bits and cry out because they were yourself."

In the years following Loren's death I maintained close ties with his wife Mabel, who would call on New Years Eve every year. After Loren's death she had suffered a breakdown, and was unable to speak during three months of intense grief. Time passes, and I think now that if Loren would truly have thanked me for anything it would have been that I remained a loyal friend to his beloved wife during the years following the mortal division that undid her.

My parents and I visited Mabel one time, at their apartment in Wynnewood, a suburb of Philadelphia, where they lived for many years. There was no grief between us for once and she kindly gave me a small, privately printed edition of Loren's essay "The Brown Wasps" -- a magnificent, hand made volume designed for their friends by Walter Hamady's Perishable Press, Ltd. in Madison. The grave I visited with my mother and father later that afternoon stood under an immense spreading chestnut tree. I left there a sheaf of prairie grasses I had brought, and collected a number of the chestnut shells lying scattered around the huge, rough-hewn stone which read. "We Loved the World But Could Not Stay." I have kept these shells as treasures ever since.

# UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA 19104

LOREN EISELEY  
Benjamin Franklin Professor  
Anthropology and the History of Science

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY MUSEUM  
33rd and Spruce Streets

February 9, 1971

Mr. Bill Wisner  
701 Walnut Street  
Hays, Kansas 67601

Dear Mr. Wisner:

I was touched and distressed by your letter and most appreciative of your kindly remarks about my book The Immense Journey.

Man is indeed a terrible destroyer of life and in a more recent book of mine I have ventured to call him a "world-eater." The question you have asked me is far too difficult a one to answer easily. Certainly man's multiplying numbers and his pollution of the environment suggest that he possesses the power to destroy himself by insidious degrees even if he does not resort to outright warfare with his appalling new weapons. On the other hand, there are some indications that the intelligent among his kind have become concerned and are attempting to redirect some of his activities along more rational lines. Certainly no great civilization has ever known so much before about the death of other civilizations in the past. This in itself should make us more self-conscious about planetary dangers and our own limitations. The question remains, however, whether a technologically oriented society like our own, with a correspondingly complex economic structure is really capable of being consciously turned around and redirected upon another course. It may be possible but, human nature being what it is, the question may lie in whether we can achieve this reorientation in time to avert the fall of western civilization. It is one thing to produce inventions, or place a man on the moon; it is quite another to get the average voter to change his whole way of life before disaster is practically upon him. Therefore we get down to less a question of can man survive than whether he is willing to discipline himself for survival. It will take more than the foresight of a few unusual people to change the course of human society.

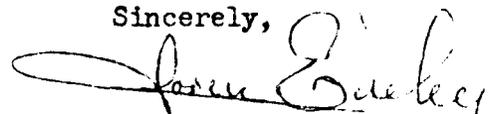
My wife and I feed a pair of cardinals here at our window every year. The individuals come and go, of course, and disaster often overtakes them. We have loved them all and tried to help them just as your family has done.

What hurts me most is not the thought of human extinction. This I believe I could bear with readiness now. What appalls me more is the fact that we may ruin the planet for other forms of life before we go. You are young and it is youths like yourself who will have to carry these burdens and try as you can to help both man and the living chain of life after my generation is gone.

You must know that great though my doubts have been, it is the letters of young people like yourself that make me feel that there is still hope for the gentle and the tolerant among mankind. I know that you grieve for your bird as I have grieved for many small creatures that I remember still from out of the past. It is a hard thing to bear, as cruelty always is. All one can try to do is never to tolerate it in one's own life and to try and guard to the end those fellow creatures for whom we can frequently do little, just as so frequently we can do little for ourselves. Some of what I am trying to say to you I have expressed in two more recent books with which I am not sure you are acquainted, The Unexpected Universe (Harcourt Brace, 1969) and The Invisible Pyramid (Scribner's, 1970). It may be that you can find them in your local library. I hope you can because they will tell you a little more than I can do in this letter.

In any case, I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. Perhaps it will help a little if we can share the pain together.

Sincerely,



Loren Eiseley

LE:cw

**THE 4th ANNUAL Nebraska Literature Festival ■ Saturday, September 24, 1994 ■ Peter Kiewit Conference Center ■ 14th & Farnam, Omaha, NE**

WRITING	READING	TALKING	AND MORE	READING	TELLING	LISTENING	TEACHING	AND MORE
Festival Preregistration required to guarantee space in the free workshops listed below. PKCC 112 Elizabeth Wells	The Omaha of Josie Washburn, Margaret P. Killian, Bess Streeter Aldrich Harl Dalstrom, Orville Menard PKCC 123	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Neihardt's <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> PKCC 102B	Wright Morris's Photographic Strategies Joseph Wydeven, Nancy Johnson PKCC 104		Teaching Native American Autobiography Craig Womack PKCC 102A		Teaching Cather's <i>Of Pioneers</i> Steve Shively, Manya Lucca-Tinyborg PKCC 216	8:30 - 9:20 a.m. The Business of Writing Bob Doyen PKCC 125
Writing For Children — Essential Ingredients 9:30-11:00a.m. PKCC 112 Elizabeth Wells	Forming a Successful Book Group — Everything You Need to Know Sara C. Radil, Judy Gacek PKCC 102A	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Morris's <i>The Home Place</i> PKCC 102B	Nebraska Women Poets Hilda Raz PKCC 104	Censored Mary Heise Karen Weber PKCC 125	<i>The Cattlemen</i> Sandoz Panel A — Sandhills Ranching Suzanne George, Donald Green, John Wunder and others PKCC 216	Nebraska Writers Reading PKCC 105 9:30 a.m. — 3:30 p.m. Richard Duggin George O'Connell James Reed Jean Delehant Fidel Fajardo-Gosta Karen Mockler Eric Jolly Duane Hutchinson Craig Womack Karen Foster Doug Marr Sheila Rocha Cruz Terri Brown-Davidson Season Harper Dowell Annette Murrell Barbara Emry Robert McEwen Mark Sanders Jonis Agee Carol Light Arthur Homer	Bess Streeter Aldrich — Pioneer Author Paula Damke PKCC 121	9:30 - 11:00 a.m. First Encounters — Indians in the Omaha Area Enter the Written Record Kira Gale PKCC 123
Figurative Language — Poetry 10:00 — 11:30 a.m. PKCC 114 Ted Kooser	Eiseley for Young People — Universal Values Jane Stillwell Smith Naomi Brill PKCC 121	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Sandoz's <i>Old Jules</i> PKCC 102B	Beth Streeter Aldrich "In Person" Maxine E. Cline PKCC 125	Dramatization of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" PKCC 102A	Writing History: The Upstream People Michael Tate PKCC 104	Teaching Malcolm X in Primary and Secondary Schools Dr. George Garrison PKCC 125	11:00 - 11:50 a.m. Ron Hansen interviewed by Jim Delemont PKCC 216	
Journals: Writing for Self-Discovery 11:30 a.m. — 1:00 p.m. PKCC 112 David Martin	Myth and Archetype in the Work of John G. Neihardt Pam Saalfeld Gretchen Ronnow PKCC 102A	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Cather's <i>Of Pioneers</i> PKCC 102B		<b>LUNCHEON WITH TILLIE OLSEN</b> reading from and discussing <i>Yonondio</i> <b>Room 100</b> Reservations Required		Open Mike PKCC 107 10:00 a.m. — 2:00 p.m. Sign Up At Registration Desk	Wright Morris's West Barbara Allen-Langdon, Jerrine McCaffrey, John McKenna, Joseph Wydeven PKCC 125	noon - 1:00 p.m. Czech Elements in Nebraska Literature Mila Saskova-Pierce PKCC 123
Plotting mysteries Noon — 1:30 p.m. PKCC 114 Diane Kirkle	A Shaman for our Time — Loren Eiseley Dr. Bing Chen PKCC 104	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Welsch's <i>Shingling the Fog and Other Plains Lies</i> PKCC 102B	Writing Plays in Omaha Doug Marr PKCC 102A				From Life to Stage: Rachel Snowden Mimi Loring, Stu Lynn, Helen Sundell PKCC 125	1:00 - 1:50 p.m. <b>ALL DAY</b> Book Fair Author Signings Storytelling for adults and children
From Literature to Music (Songwriting) 1:00 — 2:30 p.m. PKCC 121 John Kunz	"Nebraska" Private Eye — The Novels of William Reynolds Patricia Will Evelyn Whitehill PKCC 104	Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund — Let's Talk About It Discussions Aldrich's <i>A White Bird Flying</i> PKCC 102B	Culture as Theatre Laura Partridge Nedds Gerarda Emma Lara PKCC 102A	Jonis Agee <i>Strange Angels</i> PKCC 216	John G. Neihardt: Literary Critic Hilda Neihardt, Lori Utech PKCC 125	Responding to Place in Photographs and Words Phil Smith 2:00 - 3:15 p.m. PKCC 123	CD'S — Teacher's Tool Kit — Interactive and Portable John Gaudreault PKCC 104	2:00 - 2:50 p.m. Photo Display: Old Jules Country W. Dale Clark Library Bonfires of Liberty Exhibit
Romance Basics: Writing Romantic Fiction that Sells 1:30 — 3:00 p.m. PKCC 112 Cheryl Ludwig St. John Elizabeth Parker	Omaha's Satirical Tory — Novelist Carl Jones Dr. Thomas Kuhlman PKCC 121	Dramatization of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" PKCC 123	The Friendship of Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield Fisher Mark Madigan PKCC 102B	<i>The Cattlemen</i> Sandoz Panel B — Sandhills History Jamie Bell, David Murrrah, Helen Stauffer and others PKCC 216		Pioneer Nebraska Women Writers Suzanne George PKCC 102A	Prairie Connections: Land, Family and Culture in Children's Literature Susan N. Maher, Bill Finlaw, Ellen Scott PKCC 125	3:00 - 3:50 p.m. Authors drawings by Dave Routon
How to Market Fiction 2:00 — 3:30 p.m. PKCC 114 B.J. Doyen	<b>WILLA! ■ Slides and songs composed and performed by John Kunz ■ Auditorium 102</b>							4:00 - 5:00 p.m. 

**PARKING AVAILABLE FOR ALL EVENTS**

After Mabel's death in 1988 her sister Dolly Hahn sent me a small package one day. I opened it curiously. Inside was the magnificent gift of Mabel's wedding ring, and on the inside of the band the date August 29, 1938 was still visible. The day of their wedding. The card in Dolly's hand, read, "May this symbol of a beautiful love somehow bring you the same." What is time?, Loren asked unceasingly. I have an ache for both of them now that never diminishes.

I remember another time also, a mid-October in Wisconsin when leaves cried down, when the cool air of strengthening autumn undid my heart again, and the wanton God loosed my fate to all the setting sun. That was the last flush of my youth. I was burying my dead fiancée Barbara Anne Erickson, who had died suddenly in Ashland, Oregon on October 17, 1986. We had known each other for six years. If fortune brag of two she loved and hated, one of them I beheld as the coffin stretched sated over the black earth there in Beloit. The little, mechanical pastor finished speaking as I stared unbelieving before me, and the family and I returned to the waiting car. I had wept only once, briefly, in three days. But as her stricken parents, Virginia and Lester, settled into the idling auto, I suddenly made an exclamation and returned to the grave for my real farewell, the one I had planned. "Goodbye little one," I remember whispering, feeling our immensity surge and pass -- and then added strongly, "I will go far to lie down." I was forever quoting Loren, even then. Then I took from my trouser pocket one of the Eiseley chestnut shells, which I had deliberately carried across half a continent, and placed it in the earth next to her, covering it gently, uniting the two great principles of my life.

I am here to say that literature is a leave-taking which rehearses our other farewells. And that I have learned this truth in the still place where the borders of art and life blur to indistinction. Like Barbara, Loren did not die well. And like her, he died alone -- in one of the great hospitals of the Eastern seaboard. Loren's work invented the language by which I live my life, and because of literature I do not believe that death is the only successful collector. For

many years I have felt that Loren's final wish was for ending and release and that he had come to doubt the meaningfulness of his many books. Alone with Mabel, fending off increasingly curious readers and biographers, and all too aware -- as every dying man is -- of his surrenders, vanities and prevarications, I cannot yet think that Loren's faith in nature's awesome beauty ever receded, or his love for the fox and the turtle and the mouse, whose small lives he dignified in some of the finest essays in American letters. "I wanted to love not man, but life," he said once in conclusion. Fox-like he went free.

## NEWS FROM THE BOARD

We are very pleased to welcome Barbara Sommer to our board and fortunate that she has agreed to help us and to serve as chairman of our Publicity Committee. Her husband is the recently appointed Director of the Nebraska Historical Society.

Darrel Berg retired this past spring as a campus pastor on the University of Omaha campus and is moving to Washington State. He has served us very well while he was in Omaha, particularly as a discussion leader with his partner, Bing Chen. Over the past two seasons they have lead a discussion series on the works of Loren Eiseley. Dale is not leaving the board, but we will miss the regular contact we have had with him and do thank him for his good work and wish him a happy retirement.

Clarkson College has for many years given an Eiseley Medal to a person whose teaching and writing are characterized by that combination of science and humanism exemplified in the works of Loren Eiseley. After discussions with Clarkson College it has been decided that the board of the Friends of Loren Eiseley will take over the selection and administration of this award. This is a very important step for us and there will be more about this in future issues the Caravan.

## APOLOGIES FOR AN ERROR

In our last issue we featured "The Ruse of the Fox" by Chris Lesiak, the producer of the Eiseley documentary being produced by the Nebraska Public Television Network. This article was marred by a misprint occurring in the poem when an extra word was inserted in the next to the last line of the poetic quotation which ended that article. We apologize to Chris and to all of you for this error for it destroys the point made by this quotation. Here is the excerpt of Eiseley's poem, "Let the Red Fox Run" as it should have appeared.

I will not be running with all that runs  
(Its torn breath streaking down the furrow).  
I will take my ease while the hunt pounds by,  
Safe at last in earth's darkest burrow.

But somewhere still in the brain's gray vault  
Where the light grows dim and the owls are  
crying  
I shall run with the fox through the leaf  
strewn wood.  
I shall not be present at my own dying.

## LITERATURE FESTIVAL

The Fourth Nebraska Literature Festival will be held in Omaha on Friday, September 23, At UNO and Saturday, September 24, at the Peter Kewitt Conference Center. This year the Festival will be occurring in conjunction with Omaha's River City Round-up and a very full program has been planned. The Friends of Loren Eiseley will have an active role again this year, providing two sessions as follows: Saturday at 11:30 Jane Smith and Naomi Brill and will present a session, "Loren Eiseley for Young People -- Universal Values" and at 1:00 Dr. Bing Chen will speak on "A Shaman for Our Time -- Loren Eiseley." We will also have a table at the Saturday portion of the program.

The Friday program will again be directed toward high school students and the Saturday program is directed to the general public.

The full Festival program is shown elsewhere in this issue and features presentations by

Nebraska writers Tillie Olsen and Ron Hansen. Other events include a gathering Thursday evening to kick off the Festival when there will be a reading by Ron Hansen at the UNO Alumni House at 7:00. Then on Friday evening in the UNO Strauss Performing Arts Center at 6:30 a Festival Benefit Reception and Musical Performance will feature the presentation of the Nebraska Humanities Council's Sower Awards.

## EDITORIAL EXCAVATIONS

We were pleased to receive a copy of Gale Carrither's essay, "Eiseley and the Self as Search," which appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of the Arizona Quarterly. In stating his purpose, the author states that he will attempt to "illuminate major Eiseleyan questions about identity and his responses to them" and he then presents a fine development of these themes. This was a special issue of the quarterly dedicated to the memory of Joseph Riddel. Gale's book, Mumford, Tate, Eiseley, Watchers in the Night was published by the University of Louisiana Press in 1991.

On July 23rd Naomi Brill spoke to 5th and 6th grade youngsters at the SOAR program (Summer Orientation about Rivers) sponsored by the Prairie Plains Resource Institute of Aurora, Nebraska. She talked about many themes close to the interests of Eiseley readers, namely nature writing, floating down the river and dancing with the frogs.

When the Friends gather in Morrill Hall on October 23 they will discover something new of elephantine proportions. On display will be a small bronze model of the Imperial Mastodon sculpture which is planned for placement in front of the north door of the museum as soon as funds can be raised. Truly this is thinking big for the sculpture will be 21 feet from tusk to tail and the tip of the trunk will rise 18 feet from the ground. Sculptor Fred Hoppe of Lincoln is creating this monumental bronze of the museum's largest fossil specimen, fondly known to all as "Archie," the ice age elephant. He is also featured as the central figure of the large mural in Elephant Hall. These small figures are being sold to raise the funds needed

for this project.

An exciting art exhibit is planned for the museum during the last two months of the year, the Diamond Festival of the Federal Duck Stamp. The exhibit will include the entire 60 years of duck stamp designs beginning with the 1934 stamp through the current stamp featuring Neal Anderson's red-breasted mergansers. Lincolnite Neal Anderson has just won the artist's competition for the second time and the museum will also be showing a retrospective of his work.

"Nebraska was once a sea of grass. Prairie covered the horizon as far as the eye could see. Trees could be found only along rivers and creeks," so begins a recent article by Al Laukaitis in the Lincoln Journal-Star for July 9th. He tells that Steve Waller of the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources and his colleagues in agronomy have been urging the establishment of a Center for Grasslands Study for the University of Nebraska. Now we can report that the University Regents have just approved this program. People will now have access to the wealth of studies and information that have been compiled over the years about the grasslands and a place for interdisciplinary research, education, and service programs.

Last spring we attended a Symposium on the Grasslands sponsored by the Center for Great Plains Studies. One quotation still sticks in our mind, "the plains are too wide to think of as landscape." As one who has collected plains images in landscape paintings, each of being bound by the frame that holds it, this made us think again about the breadth of the land in these parts. This multi-disciplinary symposium considered the grassland plains from cultural and historical as well as in scientific terms. The general problem was suggested early when a speaker noted that the eastern grasslands are lost forever and now our western tall grass prairies are more threatened than the tropical rain forests. While our youngsters have learned in school to be concerned for the distant tropical rain forest, they, and the rest of us, have scant awareness of the vulnerability of the great ecosystem close at hand.

Other speakers citing the number of studies published demonstrated how the considerable amount of work published on deserts and forests overwhelmingly dwarfs the amount of work that has been done on the prairies. And this idea was echoed by others as they indicated that we are only now beginning to understand some issue under discussion. Consider how much of North America was covered by grassland, and yet how little we have understood it.

But instead of wallowing in lamentations on what has been lost and can't be changed, much of the symposium was concerned with what was possible in terms of preservation, stabilization or restoration of prairie lands, and in considerations of how this ecosystem works and what could be done now to best allow it to continue to function. The final panel asked if we could live on the grasslands without destroying them and the answer was probably not, but there still are things that we could be doing.

The keynote speaker was Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute of Salina, Kansas, a private research and educational organization devoted to sustainable agriculture and stewardship of the earth which looks to nature as a model for the kind of agriculture that will save the soil and support a diversity of life and culture. We found a quotation from Jackson in material describing the Land Institute which not only suggests the theme of his remarks, but seems worth repeating.

While soil erodes in the rolling wheat fields, it stays put in pastures and in native prairie grassland. Soils have stayed put for a long time on the prairies, independent of human action. With the wheat field comes pesticides, fertilizer, fossil energy, and soil erosion. The prairie counts on species diversity and genetic diversity within species to avoid epidemics of insects and pathogens. The prairie sponsors its own fertility, runs on sunlight, and actually accumulates ecological capital, accumulates soil.

Jackson posed the question: "Is it possible to build an agriculture based on the prairie as its standard or model?"

An answer is suggested by the following adapted from their literature.

With constant cover above ground and perennial roots below ground, the prairie produced the deep soils of the Great Plains. . . Our research aims to develop an agriculture based on the native prairie ecosystem. . . perennial grain crops grown in mixtures, or perennial polycultures. Like the prairie itself, mixtures of perennial grains would hold the soil, cope successfully with insects and disease, conserve water. . . and produce significant yields of grain. . . Our strategy is to plant several species together in designs that we have observed at different sites within the native prairie. We're looking at interactions among crops, weeds, pests and soils for patterns of sustainable grain production.

We are not in a position to be able to judge his or any other approach, but we are interested in thinking of the land in systematic terms. Dr. Eiseley thought a great deal about how natural systems operated and evolved. The symposium presentations were essentially made in terms of the great operating system that is the grasslands and the havoc wreaked by our interference with it. No plant or animal or other issue being an independent consideration, but all things viewed as inter-related elements essential to an operating whole.

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



**DUES REMINDER**

**The dues structure is as follows:**

- Individual member - \$10.00**
- Contributing member - \$25.00**
- Supporting member - \$50.00**
- Patron - \$100.00**

**Send checks to:**

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



**NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Lincoln, NE  
Permit No. 440**