March 7-9, 2008
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956
Point Reyes News

A conference on the life, works, and legacy of Wallace Stegner will be held to celebrate the 99th anniversary of the birth of this influential writer, teacher, and conservationist. To benefit the Tomales Bay Library Association's Writer-in-the-Schools Program.

Presenters Include:
Conference Chair Robert Hass
Carl D. Brandt
Sharon Butala
Philip L. Fradkin
James D. Houston
William Kittredge
Barry Lopez
Rebecca Solnit
Lynn Stegner
Page Stegner
David Rains Wallace
A conference celebrating the writing life, teaching, and environmental legacy of author Wallace Stegner. Chaired by poet Robert Hass, the event includes literary conversations, presentations, public art installations, a special young writers’ session, and field trips to farms, ranches, wetlands, and wilderness areas in the surrounding countryside.

Registration
Full weekend $250 (includes light meals). Attendance is limited to 250 people. Some scholarships available. Limited seating on a per panel basis at $25 per session.

Who Will Be Attending
Leaders in publishing, arts, culture, conservation, and Western literature; Stegner friends and colleagues; creative, environmental, and Western history writers, teachers, and students; Stegner readers.

Information, Registration & Schedule of Events
www.ptreyesbooks.com
geohope@ptreyesbooks.com
415.663.1003

And presenting:
Wallace Stegner and the American West by Philip L. Fradkin
The Selected Letters of Wallace Stegner by Page Stegner
Ranches & Rolling Hills, The Art of West Marin—A Land in Trust by Elisabeth Ptak
West Marin Review, a literary journal

Accommodations
Contact Point Reyes Lodging Association at www.ptreyes.com for special rates.
January 21, 2008

Dear Ivan:

Saturday evening at the dinner before Bob Hass, Page Stegner and I talk about our different perspectives of Wally, approximately fifteen to twenty minutes has been set aside to read messages from people who couldn't be there. That includes yourself, of course, and Wendell Berry, Gretel Erlich, Terry Tempest Williams, James Houston and Stewart Udall.

We would like to read something from you. It can be something you have already written or something written specially for this event. If you can mail your submission to me at P. O. Box 817, Pt. Reyes Station, CA 94956 in the near future we would appreciate it. The schedule and description of the conference is on the website for Point Reyes Books at www.ptreyesbooks.com and I have included a brochure.

It is going to be an incredible event that has been and is exhausting to organize.

Sincerely,

Philip L. Fradkin
Dear Philip--

Okay, here's an already-written piece (with specific Northwest references marked out) I did for the Seattle Times just after Wally's death; I hope it'll serve for your Saturday evening roundup of remarks. Sorry I haven't been able to do better by you for the conference, but things are at least as busy as I forecast to you they would be by about now--just sent in my next novel and am waiting to hear from my editor, the movie script of *The Whistling Season* is on its way for my approval, and I'm lining out storyline and characters for the next next book. Please greet Bob Hass for me and convey congratulations on his National Book Award--my closest writing friend in the Puget Sound country, the great poet Linda Bierds, was one the judges who produced the prize for him.

And here's hoping for the roaring success of the conference.

Sincerely,
Marcia Magill
Senior Editor
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
757 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Ms. Magill:

Two and a half months later, as if by magic, I finally get around to reading the galleys of Ivan Doig's WINTER BROTHERS. They were worth the wait. Doig's reconstruction of the life of James Gilchrist Swan is informed, sensitive, and lit by a high-powered imagination; and in playing back and forth between 19th and 20th centuries, in putting himself intimately into the mind and territory of Swan, Doig does what I have been wanting western writers to do for a long time: he is finding the western present in the real, not the mythic, western past. Not much in the western present derives from Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, or Hopalong Cassidy; but a great deal derives from men like Swan, some of them still to be re-discovered. I admired Mr. Doig's THIS HOUSE OF SKY, a splendid exercise in identity. I admire this one for its broadened horizons and greater historical resonance, and for the way Doig stays stubbornly at the heart of his West, or Wests. He is not only a writer to be watched, he is already important.

If you wouldn't mind sending me Doig's address, I'd like to tell him something like this to his face.

Sincerely,

Wallace Stegner
Dear Ivan,

On Saturday came a package with your new novel in it, and I feasted my eyes on it for a few minutes and then had to go on helping my son and his family get ready to go back to California. Yesterday, on a blustery freezing afternoon, I sat down with the book for the first time, and came upon the dedication. What an absolutely cheering thing for you to do! It would be a gross understatement to say you made my day. You made my September, my 1990, and I'm grateful. You can go along a long time without any particular public recognition—none east of the Mississippi—and you can get into a kind of numbed, resistant state where you tell yourself it doesn't matter. But it sure as hell does matter, as I realize now and then, and as I realized yesterday when I read your dedication. It means that I have mattered somewhat, not only to some readers and a few writers, but to some really good writers. I do thank you.

The book is still mainly before me, but I've read enough to be impressed with your ingenious scheme of making the novel open to all of Montana and all of Montana history by means of the Centennial and this Winnebago trip of the Newsprint Twins. It starts active and strong, and I expect it to continue and to finish the same way. But I didn't want to wait the two or three days it will take me to finish it before I wrote my pleasure and thanks about the dedication.

We're hustling a little, first because we're already in the time of frosts and freezes and worries about the exposed water line, but also because we have to go to New York and Washington for two or three readings, and I have to make sure I have a couple of clean shirts and a tie. I'll be reading at the 92nd Street Y and maybe at the PEN Center if I feel robust enough, and later at the Politics and Prose bookstore in Washington. It could be a lot more inclusive trip that that, but I'm still recovering from a bout of bleeding ulcers at the end of June that lost me half my blood supply. So I've been living on spinach, raisins, and red meat, but I don't yet feel quite like Popeye; and because of the degenerative hip that brought on the antiinflammatory drugs that ate my stomach out, I'm still hobbling on a cane. Maybe when I've got a few fall obligations out of the way I'll check in for a new hip. In any case, after a Wilderness Society meeting in the Adirondacks, we'll go home on October 9. If you come through promoting RIDE WITH ME, we'll expect you to let us know, and to give us time for a lunch, a dinner, a drink, or something. You've missed us two or three times. I have to go to New York, Portland, and Seattle in November, and to Los Angeles on Dec. 10. Otherwise I'll be at home cheering on the old bone marrow.

Thanks again for the confidence-builder. And all the best luck to the book.

Yours, [Signature]
June cont.--into his stories and his editor Jim Fuquay routinely has to take it out.

Next, a great moment. C and I went on over to the convention, I took her by Doubleday to meet Linda Stormes there, now of that sales staff but formerly the Mac'n sales rep who nearly shoeleathered me to death on the pavements of Manhattan Island last fall; and we accidentally met Bill Shinker's wife, Susan Moldow(?), also of D'day. Then C and I headed our separate ways, to my not-very-distant chagrin. For I headed to the Mac'n booth to say good morning there, and as I chatted with Tom Stewart for a minute, Clarus Backes of Denver came up and said, "Wallace Stegner would like to meet you." He went across the aisle and brought over Stegner, to whom I said, "Yeah, I guess I can stand to meet this guy." We talked for the next 15 minutes, planted there amid the convention swirl, in what Tom later told me were fascinating rhythms that he'd never hear in the East: Stegner asking of Carstensen, "Is his wife still alive?" and my answering, "No, Mary's dead but he married a widow he knew from their Ellensburg days," and Stegner being reminded, "My wife and I came up to Ellensburg for Carsty's wedding!" and my asking, "What, is that when you were starting out in the Midwest?" and Stegner, "No, I was down in Salt Lake then..." Stegner is my height, although I'd thought him taller from his photo, and at almost 80 was the probably the fittest person there in the teeming convention booth; he looks much more like a vigorous 70. He had on a nice light blue sportcoat, tieless--a navy blue polo shirt or whatever they are, pullover with a couple of buttons at the neck--and patterned slacks, I think checked; nicely triggered out, in short. Good stand of wavy gray hair, rugged square-cut face, bifocals in either horn rim like mine or what used to be called tortoise shells; I don't know what western genes account for the two of us standing there in don't-give-a-damn heavyframe glasses. Much of our conversation was trying to brainstorm with Clarus, Tom chimping in, about other writers born in the West early in this century who could be included in the book. Clare is doing with Stegner, Guthrie, Frank Waters, Clyde Rice. But as we stood there patient as farmers--at least
June cont.—Wallace was absolutely rooted, while I occasionally flexed my right leg against an end table to ward off the concrete floor's effect on my back—pub'g folk ebbed and flowed around us, Bonnie of Mac'n marketing siding up to me and bashfully asking if I could introduce her to Stegner, an idol; and Tom gallantly heading off to fetch Liv Blumer from the Warner booth, for a bit of reunion about the days when she was at Doubleday and he was a D' day author; somebody from a Kentucky bookstore patiently waiting to meet me, apparently unconcerned whoever Wallace was; Clare's son Joe taking pics periodically. As to any sum of our conversation:

—Stegner quite promptly asked me if Richard Ford was going to become a part of the Missoula writing group, and I teetered a hand this way and that and said, "Not proven."

—Both of us touted Clarus into thinking, or rather rethinking, about Wright Morris as a possible westerner for his book; C had been dubious because of Wright's Nebraska boyhood, but Wallace pointed out that Wright's home area was west of the 100th meridian.

—Talking with Liv about D' day and its takeover by Bertelsmann, Stegner recited the story of the three Germans who founded B'mann after WWII, and at some other point he remarked much the same to someone else, and it occurred to me that it was a set piece such as I've also heard Bud Guthrie say—about working with George Stevens on Shane, for instance, suggesting to Stevens the funeral scene on the hill etc. As both Wallace and Bud are very fluent talkers and in their eight decade have more marbles than I probably do here approaching my 97th birthday, Liv it also occurred to me that if I make it that far I'll probably be reciting set pieces too.

—Stegner is quick. In the B'mann shoptalk, Liv I think said something about them doing good in reviving moribund D' day and Wallace said, "They're doing well, too."

—Finally, a point about perceptions, or impressions we get and more or less accept from others. Carstensen has never made a lot of having been Stegner's college roommate at Iowa State, though in reference to Wolf Willow or some such he will say "Wally," and I had the distinct impression that in mutual careers in and about the West they'd kept in
June cont.—touch, crossed paths occasionally, and so on. But when I mentioned to Stegner that we'd just had dinner a few weeks ago with Vernon, he was keenly interested but also calculated out loud, "Gosh, it must be 50 years since I saw Carsty." Similarly, when Bill Bevis was out here last month, he was properly and understandably basking in Stegner's favorable report to the UW Press on Bill's Montana writers ms. Stegner's version, though, goes this way. "Gosh, there are a lot of writers in Missoula. There's somebody there trying to write about them. He's an outlander, but he seems serious about it." I provide Bevis's name and Stegner says "Yes, I read his manuscript for the U of Washington Press. I told them they'd be making a mistake not to publish it, but they'd also be making a mistake to publish it the way it is."

So, a moment that I thought would not come, C and I having missed the Stegners in Los Altos Hills a year ago spring when they were in Italy. It's never been nationally appreciated—Wallace said he and Wright Morris used to sit around and argue about which of them was most neglected—what a combination of thinker, scholar and writer he'd been. Right now, there's no one in sight to replace him; I lack the passion and energy and breadth about the west to take on the conservation issues etc. that he has.

One more mite of remembered conversation. In talking about the 5,000-word piece he's to do for Clarus's book, he joked that he's already written that topic 17 times. I asked him if he'd put in Great Falls this time, and he said probably not, his main memory of the family's short time in GF is humiliation, I think his word was. Said he started junior high there wearing elk skin shoes, evidently moccasin-like, from the Canadian homestead, and his mother put him in a sweater with an orange band around the middle, so that he looked like whatever breed of hog it is that's striped around the body that way. The urban kids of GF didn't go for that, huh? I asked, and he said, They sure didn't.

On to what we ostensibly went to the ABA for, the Harper & Row "literary luncheon." By way, why not, of the PW photog Helen, whom Plimpton bopped with a book at last year's function involving me. One more time she
Not the least of Wallace Stegner's miraculous qualities was that the December of his life ended in springtime. Age and illness he had wintered past like the sturdy square-cut Westerner. It was an accident to do him in, and when the injuries from a Santa Fe car wreck two weeks earlier finally claimed him last Tuesday, Stegner left amid a late, luminous blossoming of public and critical appreciation for his life's worth of books — 29 of them, across the spectrum of essay and history and fiction and biography. At last people were seeing his work as the vast natural resource it is.

Silly, isn't it? I suppose it is the thing to say next. Wally Stegner himself, born in 1909 and thus a witness to every haywire development in the American West since then, maintained an almost preternatural patience with his fellow humanity: "The West...is the native home of hope," one of his most memorable sentences said.

But temper is a Western commodity, too, and right now mine can't help saying that in undervaluing for too long such an important body of work as Stegner's, the American literary establishment functioned as it had always done — the American reading public and the Western states of America collectively shot themselves in their tangled trio of feet.

Pray upon a little rain for all of us. If you don't know the clues, we're starting our seventh dry year, and God knows what Egyptian plagues will come down on us if we don't get some rain this winter. God knows how many Californians will flee to the better-watered North next April. It's in your own best interest. Pray, man.

— Stegner, in a letter to Doig, Nov. 10, 1992

Over and over he said it, composting, passionately, honestly — "ad nauseam for fifty years," he chuckled in his final book, and then said it one more time: "The whole West, including much of Canada, is open and everyone on an aside, he admitted that the Pacific Northwest is "a vast area of potential land." But another year or two of unreliable rain here, and we're going to be wondering how simply we really are.

In trying to review that last book of Stegner's, "Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemon Springs," I snipped from the Greek poet Archilochus and the philosopher Isaiah Berlin the notion that strong writers, the enduring heaviest type, are said to know one big thing, and Stegner powerfully always knew his: "I really only want to say that we lived in a place and still be dangerous to it."

He and his irritable voice for the bluebird made the right enema. Ronald Reagan saw fit to bestow the Presidential Medal of Merit, Vermont, on Frank Sinatra and Whitaker Chambers, but not on the most distinguished voice for the cultural glory of his own California. Nor did the Jefferson Award of the National Endowment for the Humanities, The Big Rock Candy Mountain, recognize, ever find its way to the obvious candidate during the NEH regimes of Lynn Cheney and William Bennett.

...Good stand of wavy gray hair, rugged square-cut face, bifocals in either horn rim glasses or mine or what used to be called tortoise-shells; I don't know what Western genes account for the two of us standing there in don't-give-a-damn-heavyframe glasses....

— Doig's diary entry on crossing paths with Stegner at the American Booklovers' convention, May 1988

In person, he looked like a one-man Mount Rushmore. That solidity, Stegner's Scandinavian-Saskatchewan-Montana-Utah-etc. men of flat-footed common sense and endurance, was much more than skin-deep. He knew his stuff, and he knew that if he knew it. An academic interviewer once tried to get him to pontificate on "what it is that Western writers will have to do to produce a crop of distinguished novels." Stegner looked at him and said drily: "Write good books."

It took a little self-indulgent but Stegner could laugh at himself. I remember hearing from both him (truthful and A.B. Guthrie Jr. (indignantly) the tale of the Stegner making an overnight stay at the Guthriess' near Choteau, Mont. Trying to be helpful about breakfast-time logistics, Stegner said: "We get up around 7." Guthrie, to whom morning occurred only to smother the night before, glowered at him and rapped: "Well, don't.

Stegner once tallied up that during his hyper-Western boyhood, he lived in "twenty places in eight states and Canada" (the state of Washington among them); part of his novel, "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" is set in Puget Sound country, and one of my regrets is that my home state of Montana was among his uncounted memo-ries.

His main recollection of the Stegner family's short time in Great Falls was "humiliation," he told me with a wary face but obviously meaning it. Fresh from a Saskatchewan homestead, he'd started junior high school there wearing moccasin-like elkskin shoes and a sweater with a broad band around it which he suspected made him, a pudgy boy at the time, look like a striped pig.

Oddly but honestly, Stegner always bore an unnecessary burden on himself from his family's peripatetic pattern: "We turned tail and disappeared, and I never got over the faint residual shame of quitting. I admired the sticklers, and I still do." Maybe it was out of that iron tumbleweed past that he himself learned the stick-to-livetitude, the anger and thinking.


None of us is going to replace him, and it's just about as doubtful whether any half-dozen writers and thinkers at this end of the country can produce a combined rainbow of work to equal his.

So, in the West, this ever-old, ever-new part of the American land, we resort to the lessons that shaped Stegner and that he wrote so long and eloquently about. Go on with what you got. Start over when you have to. Our advantage is that we have his lifework to draw on.

In his last years, when the national bestsellerlist of "Crossing to Safety" and his "Collected Stories" inspired paperback publish- ers to pour his earlier books back onto the bookstore shelves, Wallace Stegner was a bit, bemused at getting mined as a new, literary resource.

"I had no opportunity," he laughed, "just like the West." Was he ever.
Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue, N.W.
Seattle, Washington 98177
Dear Ivan,

Many thanks for your card and your concern. No damage here beyond a lot of broken glass, a lot of dumped books and scrambled notes, and a broken waterline. The City, and Oakland, and especially Santa Cruz, Watsonville, and Hollister, caught it worst. I now have a project of fastening all bookcases to the wall. Free-standing equals free-falling.

Your wife, whom I have unfortunately never met, is obviously a woman of taste and discernment. Give her my thanks for the encouraging word. And if you come this way, don't go by without visiting us. We don't travel much any more, except to Vermont and back, and are not likely to make Seattle. But you, who go everywhere, will be coming by here. Make it a duty to let us know.

Yours,

[Signature]
Dear Ivan,

No, I'm sorry to say I won't be at the ABA in Las Vegas. In fact, it would take more than an ABA meeting to get me to Las Vegas. I'll be happy any time to deface any number of books for you, but it can't happen in the ABA, I'm afraid. You're not coming through here, by any chance? We'll be here through June, except for a two-day trip to Salt Lake, and shortly after July 1 we'll be off to Vermont until October. In November--Nov. 28, for Seattle Arts and Lectures--I'll be talking in Seattle, but I don't expect you want to wait that long. Why not send them down, and I'll promptly sign them and send them back. I note with great pleasure the coming galleys of your new one. I'll be looking out for it when it comes out. Meantime, my warmest thanks for your words on COLLECTED STORIES. It was a kindly act.

Best,

[Signature]
Marcia Magill
Senior Editor
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
757 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Ms. Magill:

Two and a half months later, as if by magic, I finally get around to reading the galleys of Ivan Doig's WINTER BROTHERS. They were worth the wait. Doig's reconstruction of the life of James Gilchrist Swan is informed, sensitive, and lit by a high-powered imagination; and in playing back and forth between 19th and 20th centuries, in putting himself intimately into the mind and territory of Swan, Doig does what I have been wanting western writers to do for a long time: he is finding the western present in the real, not the mythic, western past. Not much in the western present derives from Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, or Hopalong Cassidy; but a great deal derives from men like Swan, some of them still to be re-discovered. I admired Mr. Doig's THIS HOUSE OF SKY, a splendid exercise in identity. I admire this one for its broadened horizons and greater historical resonance, and for the way Doig stays stubbornly at the heart of his West, or Wests. He is not only a writer to be watched, he is already important.

If you wouldn't mind sending me Doig's address, I'd like to tell him something like this to his face.

Sincerely,

Wallace Stegner
Route 1, Box 1220  
Greensboro, VT 05841  
Swpt. 17, 1990

Dear Ivan,

On Saturday came a package with your new novel in it, and I feasted my eyes on it for a few minutes and then had to go on helping my son and his family get ready to go back to California. Yesterday, on a blustery freezing afternoon, I sat down with the book for the first time, and came upon the dedication. What an absolutely cheering thing for you to do! It would be a gross understatement to say you made my day. You made my September, my 1990, and I'm grateful. You can go along a long time without any particular public recognition--none east of the Mississippi--and you can get into a kind of numbed, resistant state where you tell yourself it doesn't matter. But it sure as hell does matter, as I realize now and then, and as I realized yesterday when I read your dedication. It means that I have mattered somewhat, not only to some readers and a few writers, but to some really good writers. I do thank you.

The book is still mainly before me, but I've read enough to be impressed with your ingenious scheme of making the novel open to all of Montana and all of Montana history by means of the Centennial and this Winnebago trip of the Newsprint Twins. It starts active and strong, and I expect it to continue and to finish the same way. But I didn't want to wait the two or three days it will take me to finish it before I wrote my pleasure and thanks about the dedication.

We're hustling a little, first because we're already in the time of frosts and freezes and worries about the exposed water line, but because we have to go to New York and Washington for two or three readings, and I have to make sure I have a couple of clean shirts and a tie. I'll be reading at the 92nd Street Y and maybe at the PEN Center if I feel robust enough, and later at the Politics and Prose bookstore in Washington. It could be a lot more inclusive trip that that, but I'm still recovering from a bout of bleeding ulcers at the end of June that lost me half my blood supply. So I've been living on spinach, raisins, and red meat, but I don't yet feel quite like Popeye; and because of the degenerative hip that brought on the antiinflammatory drugs that ate my stomach out, I'm still hobbling on a cane. Maybe when I've got a few fall obligations out of the way I'll check in for a new hip. In any case, after a Wilderness Society meeting in the Adirondacks, we'll go home on October 9. If you come through promoting RIDE WITH ME, we'll expect you to let us know, and to give us time for a lunch, a dinner, a drink, or something. You've missed us two or three times. I have to go to New York, Portland, and Seattle in November, and to Los Angeles on Dec. 10. Otherwise I'll be at home cheering on the old bone marrow.

Thanks again for the confidence-builder. And all the best luck to the book.

Yours, \[Signature\]
Dear Ivan,

The letters arrived, for which I am deeply grateful. I owe you both a lot more than a beer and a hamburger, and I shall pay if we get up your way (I live in Seattle) or you get down here. I'll keep my eye out for an explanation to the Collected Stories

Best, Jane
From a letter from him, in 1992:

Wally was our great literary weathermaker, here in the big half of America that is, as he tirelessly said, a land of little rain and big consequences.
Ivan Doig  
Author Mail  
Harcourt Trade Publishers  
15 East 26th Street 15th Floor  
New York City, NY 10010

July 3, 2007

Dear Ivan:

You may recall that we talked on the phone about three years ago as part of my research for a biography of Wallace Stegner. Well, the book will be published in February by Knopf under the title *Wallace Stegner and the American West*. I am also working with a filmmaker on a PBS documentary of Stegner’s life and work.

We are putting on a Wallace Stegner conference in Pt. Reyes Station on March 7–9 and would very much like you to attend and be on a panel. Steve Costa, the bookseller in town, has been quite successful with single events for one author. Wendell Berry drew 400 people. Barry Lopez and Gary Snyder, among others, have been here and drawn large crowds. We are expecting more than 500 for the conference. The enclosed fact sheet will give you all the current information. We would pay your air fare and provide lodging and meals for those dates.

I should be a lot of fun, a reunion of sorts. I hope you can make it.

Sincerely,

Philip L. Fradkin
Ivan Doig  
Author Mail  
Harcourt Trade Publishers  
15 East 26th Street 15th Floor  
New York City, NY 10010  

July 3, 2007  

Dear Ivan:  

You may recall that we talked on the phone about three years ago  
as part of my research for a biography of Wallace Stegner. Well,  
the book will be published in February by Knopf under the title  
*Wallace Stegner and the American West*. I am also working with a  
filmmaker on a PBS documentary of Stegner’s life and work.  

We are putting on a Wallace Stegner conference in Pt. Reyes  
Station on March 7–9 and would very much like you to attend and  
be on a panel. Steve Costa, the bookseller in town, has been  
quite successful with single events for one author. Wendell  
Berry drew 400 people. Barry Lopez and Gary Snyder, among  
others, have been here and drawn large crowds. We are expecting  
more than 500 for the conference. The enclosed fact sheet will  
give you all the current information. We would pay your air fare  
and provide lodging and meals for those dates.  

I should be a lot of fun, a reunion of sorts. I hope you can  
make it.  

Sincerely,  

Philip L. Fradkin
CELEBRATING WALLACE STEGNER
A preliminary fact sheet for participants and others

A major conference on the life, works, and legacies of Wallace Stegner will be held in Pt. Reyes Station, California, March 7-9 to celebrate the 99th anniversary of the birth of this influential writer, teacher, and conservationist.

For more than sixty years Stegner wrote numerous novels and nonfiction books and articles, taught thousands of writers at Stanford University and elsewhere, and helped conserve western lands and rivers as an aide to Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall, a writer about the use of lands and water in the West, and a member of the National Parks Advisory Board and the boards of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society.

Why Pt. Reyes Station? Because the small ranching, farming, and residential community on the edge of the Pt. Reyes National Seashore north of San Francisco symbolizes “the geography of hope” that Stegner wrote about in his famous Wilderness Letter. West Marin is a leader in land use preservation and the organic and sustainable agricultural movements.

The chair for the two-day conference is Robert Hass, two-term U. S. Poet Laureate, twice winner of the National Book Critics’ Circle Award, MacArthur Fellow, and University of California English professor. Hass was a student at Stanford when Stegner taught there, and they had frequent informal conversations. With his personal knowledge of the man and academic credentials, Hass is well qualified to locate Stegner in the pantheon of American literature.

Early confirmations of conference participants have been received from Page and Lynn Stegner, the son and daughter-in-law of Wallace Stegner. Both are authors and writing teachers. Page headed the creative writing program at the University of California at Santa Cruz. He is the editor of the selected letters of his father to be published by Shoemaker & Hoard this fall. Other early acceptances have come from Philip L. Fradkin, whose biography Wallace Stegner and the American West will be published by Knopf in February; novelist and Stegner Fellow James D. Houston; Carl D. Brandt, whose literary agency Brandt & Brandt represented Stegner from 1937 to 1993; and Jonathan Kirsch, author, a book critic for the Los Angeles Times whose “Westwords” column dealt with books about the West, and literary property rights attorney. Jonathan’s father, Robert Kirsch, was the longtime book critic for the Times. Stegner received the first Robert Kirsch Award given by the newspaper for lifetime achievement. The most recent recipient of that award——teacher, essayist, editor, Stegner Fellow, and novelist William Kittredge——will also attend. Other well-known authors associated with Stegner who have been invited include Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez, Robert Stone, Ivan Doig, and David Rains Wallace.

There will be a reading of the play “Fair Use” written and directed by Sands Hall on Friday night followed by a panel discussion. The play deals with the plagiarism issue surrounding Stegner’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel Angle of Repose. On Saturday there will be panel discussions on Stegner as a writer, teacher, and conservationist and his legacy. Saturday night Hass, Fradkin, and Page Stegner will participate in a discussion titled “Wallace Stegner: Views From Inside and Outside the Family.” Sunday’s guided nature hikes and tours in West Marin will reflect Stegner’s hope for the American West.

The proceedings will be filmed by Bill Jersey of Quest Productions for a documentary to be shown on PBS. The conference is a benefit for the West Marin Review, a literary journal that will debut later this year.

Contact: Steve Costa, Point Reyes Books, 415-663-1542, sgcosta@earthlink.net
7/9/07
Dear Phil--

Pt. Reyes Station and Stegner and you are beguiling, but the conference timing is just too close to the manuscript deadline I'm facing. (Since my beloved publisher, Harcourt, has just been bought and the fallout from that is unclear, it behooves me to mind my craftsman p’s and q’s even more than usual, I feel.) Thought I'd better let you know sooner than later. Anyway, all good luck with the gathering, and I'm much looking forward to the biography.

Best,
Ivan Doig
C/O Author Mail
Harcourt Inc.
525 B Street #1900
San Diego, CA 92101

June 19, 2006

Dear Mr. Doig:

I enjoyed the quietness of *The Whistling Season* and, like some reviewers, was reminded of Wallace Stegner who I am sure would have written a sterling blurb had he been alive. I am completing a biography of Wally for Knopf and have had the full cooperation of his son, Page. I have used some material from your chapters in *Wallace Stegner: Man and Writer* and *The Geography of Hope*. By any chance do you have any letters from Wally that I could use for the biography? Any exchange of correspondence would be helpful.

Sincerely,

Philip L. Fradkin

---

Phone message 7/6: he's "meaning end of project" sort of fully join to talk...
PHILIP L. FRADKIN
P.O. Box 817
Pt. Reyes, CA 94956
415-663-8733 (phone and fax)
philfrad@earthlink.net/www.philipfradkin.com

Summary:
Wrote ten books and numerous newspaper and magazine articles. Shared in a Pulitzer Prize as a journalist. Held a high-level position in state government. Taught at two major California universities and a highly-ranked New England liberal arts college.

Professional experience:

• 1981-1995: Writer. Lecturer, Department of Rhetoric and the Graduate School of Journalism, UC Berkeley. Lecturer, Stanford University Mass Media Institute.


• 1975-1976: Assistant Secretary of the California Resources Agency. Responsible for energy, coastal, and public affairs for the state’s principal environmental agency.


• 1960-1964: Reporter on three small California newspapers.

Books:

Awards:

Academic background:
Williams College, B.A.
5 Nov. ‘03

Dear Page--

Santa Fe sounds like a good enough place to alight. Will think of you now shaded up in adobe O’Keeffian surroundings, elegantly going through letters, letters, letters...

Herewith, ours from and to Wally. So you owe me a beer and Carol a beer and a hamburger, as she did the task of organizing and photocopying these babies. Will look forward to the collected result in print.

If you’re into his Random House correspondence in this project, do me a mild favor and keep an eye out for any explanation why mine is the solo blurb on the back of his Collected Stories, would you? Maybe I’m just an amazing blurbster, which would be a hard thing to admit, but I was floored when the book came and there were my words dancing alone. None of his Stanford students, or his short-story peers? I frankly didn’t know what to say when the galley came to me as I really don’t know anything about short stories and don’t even much like the format—indeed, heard your dad say in a lecture that he’d sworn off them because they keep using up your capital (characters, I think he meant) as a writer—and so I simply punted in a master-learning-his-craft graf which I was pretty sure couldn’t possibly make the cut in the book’s profusion of blurb candidates. Yet there it is in lonely damn splendor (James Dickey subordinated on the front flap, ha) and I always figured Wally must have had his finger in that choice. So if you come across any correspondence between him, and who was the editor, Joe Fox?, about this, I’d be curious as to the contents.

Anyway, a small point but mine own. It’s going to be good to have more Stegner words in the world. We’ll surely look you up whenever we next make it to Santa Fe, and similarly keep us in mind if you ever find you need to come to Seattle to remind yourself what rain is.

Best wishes.

p.s. Note new address on the letterhead; the old one you used caused your letter to wander the neighborhood a bit.
W. Stegner  
13456 So, Fork Lane  
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022

America the Beautiful  
USA 15

Ivan Doig  
17021 10th Avenue, N.W.  
Seattle, WA 98177
Dear Ivan,

Many thanks for the vote of confidence in The West as Living Space. I was trying to say everything I thought I knew about the West in 3 45 minute lectures, and I have always been aware of the gaps and elisions. But I'm delighted that you liked it, gratified that you read it.

We're just on our way, Thursday AM, to Vermont for the summer. I hear that the Census Bureau just announced the Rocky Mt. states as poorer than Appalachia, the poorest in the US, but Vermont comes kind of close, and feels like home after 51 years. Address: Route 1, Box 1220, Greensboro, VT 05841. Have a productive year. I count on you.

Best, [Signature]
Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue, N.W.
Seattle, WA 98177
Dear Ivan:

I was sorry to have to miss you at the Black Oak in Berkeley, and again (I suspect) at the Western History Association meeting in Reno. The immediate problems have subsided, and we hope to see you in Portland (we will be at the Heathman Hotel Nov. 26 and 27) and Carol, whom we have never met, in Seattle. I will search the signature-line.

Your last book is splendid, with one stylistic habit that the schoolteacher in me yearns to attack. Sometime I want to sit down with you for about six hours and discuss the future of the West, and specifically Montana. There's a lot of it in your book, most of it pessimistic. I don't want to argue—just discuss. And see you. We'll search the elevators. But call our room, whatever it is, so that we can get together.

Yrs. truly,

[Signature]
We...need that wild country...even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be...a part of the geography of hope.

Wallace Stegner
the dunes and the Sangre de Cristo Range,
Great Sand Dunes National Monument, Colorado.
photograph by Stephen Trimble
words from The Sound of Mountain Water, Doubleday, 1969
(reprinted by permission).

published 1977 by Stephen Trimble, 2640 Lamar, Denver, Colorado 80214

Dear Ivan Dzig - I'm delighted missing you
by only a week in Bozeman. But I
too has been visiting hot springs, and
everywhere I see, and hear praise of
Dancing. What in more, I finally
got to read it, in broken chunks on
the trip. It's splendid, and there's
gold, plenty of it. Nobody will ever
need to write another novel if the
settlement. Good luck to it and you.

Sincerely,

Dallas Dzig

Ivan Dzig
17021-10th Ave.
N.W.
Seattle, WA 98177
Greetings from Vermont

The Green Mountain State
Dear Ivan -

Many thanks for your note. I'm delighted that the Rascal Fairy is shortly to be extended, and that you've been touring Montana. Never forget to go back to Montana! Tell Carol I appreciate her urging me in her course. We were here for one more month before we got Californiaed again. Collected about 8000 in press, due in March. I'll meet you in the orchard. Best wishes.

Ivan Doig
17021 10th Ave. N.W.
Seattle, Wa. 98117
May 28, 1982

Dear Dean Doig:

I'm pleased to hear from you, having admired all three of the books by you that I've read, and having, as you indicate, a lot of friends who are also yours. I'm glad you're doing a new one -- book, not friend. I'll be on the watch for it.

And of course I'd sign any book you send on, up to and including the Gideon Bible. I'll be here at least until September.

If you see Bud Guttrie, or Jim Welch, or Bill Kittredge or Dennis, or any of our mutual Montana friends, please give them greeting from me.

Good luck with your new book.

Yours,

Wallace Stegner
Settling of Connecticut, 1636

Ivan Doig
17021 Tenth Ave., N.W.
Seattle, Washington 98177
Dear Ivan Doig:

We don't live right, apparently. We'd love to meet you and have lunch with you and talk to you, and could keep it up a long while, but we won't be here on March 23. We're leaving for Italy tomorrow morning, and won't be back here until early April.

Would there otherwise. Maybe your next trip down this way.

Best,

[signature]
Dear Wallace Stegner—

I can’t quite cash in on your offer to sign even a Gideon Bible, but I did think of my wife’s copy of THE GATHERING OF ZION. I would have married her anyway, but it was a nice part of the dowry—anyway, would you mind signing that one to Carol Doig? She has much admired the Patience Loader portion of the book, and the bonus of your permanship would be greatly welcome. I’ll surprise her with it for her birthday in Choteau this summer.

Yes, the ubiquitous mutual friends. We partied yesterday at Jim and Lois Welch’s rented house, and two weeks from today will mooch off them in Missoula. Jim is thriving, has a lot of his Blackfeet novel written.

Many thanks for enhancing the pair of books. If anything brings you to Seattle, look us up.

best

18 June ’83

Dear Wallace Stegner—

The books arrived, the inscriptions are lovely. Many thanks for going beyond civility into kindness.

And now, off to Montana. You’ll come to mind when I look northeast from the country I’m writing about and see the Sweetgrass Hills.

best
Dear Wallace Stegner—

You’ve come to mind by a couple of routes recently. My friend Bill Bevis, of the U. of Montana English faculty, house-swapped with us earlier this spring, and said he’d talked to you not long before. Bill is a zealous gent on behalf of writers this side of Nebraska. And next, the immediate reason for this letter, I’ve at long last laid my hands on a hardback of WOLF WILLOW. If I send it and appropriate postage, would you be game to sign it up for me?

I’ve been immersed in manuscript—a Montana-during-the-Depression novel, which slowly is beginning to resemble something like a book—but am about to head for the Choteau country. I hope to be able to see both Guthrie and Maclean during this summering (my novel is set in the next drainage north from Guthrie’s neighborhood). Meanwhile Jim Welch is out here, teaching at the U. of Washington this spring, and I saw Bill Kittredge and Max Crawford within minutes of each other in Missoula this spring—I sometimes wonder about the West’s reputation as a big place.

I hope your own work is going well. A fine piece on Wattchamacallum in the recent Wilderness.

best regards

Ivan Doig
Marcia Magill  
Senior Editor  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.  
757 Third Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10017  

September 24, 1980  

13456 South Fork Lane  
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022  

Dear Ms. Magill:  

Two and a half months later, as if by magic, I finally get around to reading the galleys of Ivan Doig's WINTER BROTHERS. They were worth the wait. Doig's reconstruction of the life of James Gilchrist Swan is informed, sensitive, and lit by a high-powered imagination; and in playing back and forth between 19th and 20th centuries, in putting himself intimately into the mind and territory of Swan, Doig does what I have been wanting western writers to do for a long time: he is finding the western present in the real, not the mythic, western past. Not much in the western present derives from Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, or Hopalong Cassidy; but a great deal derives from men like Swan, some of them still to be re-discovered. I admired Mr. Doig's THIS HOUSE OF SKY, a splendid exercise in identity. I admire this one for its broadened horizons and greater historical resonance, and for the way Doig stays stubbornly at the heart of his West, or Wests. He is not only a writer to be watched, he is already important.

If you wouldn't mind sending me Doig's address, I'd like to tell him something like this to his face.

Sincerely,  

Wallace Stegner
Dear Wally—

If the aftermath echoes of your mishap are anywhere near accurate, you're out of Santa Fe and home now, and, Carol and I fervently hope, on the mend.

Your ears may be burning—for good and non-medical reasons—the next few weeks as Carol and I track around in some of your country: Salt Lake City, and the slickrock parks where the Moab photog Tom Till did that beautiful UTAH, MAGNIFICENT WILDERNESS book replete with your prose. To my shame, I haven't seen that part of the West. Anyway, we'll be thinking of you as you tussle with the medicos. My dad used to say, mending from some ranch calamity or another, "I'm awful little, but I'm awful tough." And hell, you've never even been little.

all best,

[Signature]
Dear Wally—

Maurice Shadbolt
Box 60028
Titirangi, Auckland 7
NEW ZEALAND

I wish now you'd been sent Maurice's 1972 novel STRANGERS AND JOURNEYS. I only recently read it when my own New Zealand shipment at last caught up with me, and I think it's his BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN. I've liked the guts and zest of the first two of his Māori trilogy, which I believe were what you received, and Maurice seems to be ahead of the NZ historians in what he savvies about those extraordinary "land wars," but STRANGERS AND JOURNEYS has a resonance to it. I can't remember if I managed to tell you in a note how all this came about, but Maurice once had hoped to study with you at Stanford, knows your work like Braille from loving handling, etc. And to give you a pretty approximate idea of what Shadbolt and Doig looked like together, I'm sticking in a copy of our Christmas letter; Carol joins me in wishing you and Mary the best.
10 June '90

Dear Wally—

By God, the "Collected" is indisputably a big book. Had to resort to this industrial-strength box to fit two of them in. I hope it's not too inconvenient to handle; much appreciate the bestowal of ink on these two.

Best thing about Vegas was the chance to talk to Tony Hillerman in an ABA aisle. Seems to regard with nice irony the flow of attention and $$$ now that, as he puts it, he's reached Social Security. You were prominent, may eminent, in absentia, by way of giveaway copies of LA Times Book Review with your PEN talk and Bloomsbury Review with the Hepworth interview of you (in which your answers were a triumph over loco questions).

It's not cause am effect, but when you come to Seattle in November I'm leaving town. I'll be bookselling (or at least trying) in the Willamette Valley then, but I hope Carol can wedge her way in to hear you. The two of us may be in your part of the world sometime in December; will check with you this autumn to see if we can cross paths then, if nothing transpires before. In the meantime, the Doig household hopes Vermont will be as fine as ever for you and Mary—and thanks for taking time to dab signatures onto these books.

all best,

20 Aug. '90

Dear Wally—

If my publisher is functioning (never an odds-on bet), you'll be getting a copy of my novel in approximately the same mail as this and will see how I've taken your name in vain there in the front matter. As usual, this is probably an idiosyncratic lumbering book, but I don't think it's so berserk that people will even hold it against the dedicatees.

Carol and I embark to Montana and its bookstores in a couple of weeks, starting with an overnight in Missoula with Jim and Lois Welch. Jim's book The Indian Lawyer comes out in Oct.; could be a dandy, drawing as it does on his years of serving on the Montana parole board.

We hope the Vermont summer has been a fine one.

all best,
Dear Wally--

Maybe it's Halloween that brings this to mind, but I thought I'd drop you a logistical line about Doig's popping up like jack-o-lanterns when you do your Seattle-Portland readings in November. I'll be out of town--on the bookstore trail--when you hit Seattle, but Carol has snagged a ticket and will say hello at the reception afterward if the throng can be forced to do so. I coincide with you in Portland on Nov. 27--in true reverence, the Catbird Seat bookstore and I are ever going to stop huckstering my stuff a full half hour before you begin speaking--and will tuck myself in the audience; if we cross paths at a mutual hotel (the Heathman) afterward or in the morning I'd certainly without be pleased, but I know travel schedules are tough enough with complicating them further. Anyway, I simply wanted to alert you that if you bump into a guy in an elevator who looks a helluva lot like me, odds are it's me.

I hope you've mended from the summer's ills of medication.

all best,

Ivan Doig
Dear Wally--

I do have to say, I get a kick out of the New York Times bestseller list carrying a book with my name on it—even if it is on the back cover instead of the front. I hope Collected Stories is romping out of bookstores everywhere; all the reviews I've seen have been blissful.

Our last occasion for getting together was the Booksellers' convention at Anaheim—I dunno, is it some kind of natural progression that this year's literariness takes place in Las Vegas?—and as Carol and I gear up to go, I thought I'd find out if there's any chance you'll be there. We'll be on hand at the ABA June 2-3-4 and would like to cross paths with you at least briefly. I'd also like to get your John Henry on a couple copies of Collected Stories, one for this household and, if you wouldn't mind, one for Craig Lesley, a good writer and a good man (down in Portland); will pack the books along if you're going to be on the Vegas premises and wouldn't mind a couple more signatures. According the schedule in Publishers Weekly, I'm to be reading on the same card with Elmore Leonard; from pictures I've seen, he and I beardedly and horn-rimmedly look somewhat like each other, but I think the resemblance ceases at the wallet.

We had a Bozeman trip a month ago, Mike Malone importing me to Montana State U. for a conference. Besides the absolutely beguiling weather—I swear to God, Montana has had a climate transplant since I lived there—one of the winsome moments was hearing an MSU prof, Stuart Knapp, tell me about the Honors Night lecture he plans to do on Edith Wharton. I understood him to say he's talked with you about her. I don't know Stu Knapp well, but he once provided me a fascinating Montana vignette of his own; it was the time Mike Malone and his wife took the Doigs and the Knapps up into the mountains somewhere toward the Spanish Peaks for a picnic supper, and all evening the other five of us sat safely at the table as swarms of every imaginable Montana bug attacked Stu, hunkered under his parks—his field of science is parasitology, and the bugs somehow knew.

All is well here. Carol is in the kind of countdown-to-the-end-of-the-teaching-year-and-then-SUMMER! that you will remember, and I'm in suspended animation until galley proofs of Ride With Me, Mariah Montana reach me in a week or two. We hope your household is thriving.

best,
Dear Wally—

It likely won’t make any difference one way or another in my typing, but this is written with fingers crossed, hoping you and yours came through the quake undamaged.

Academic note: in her Western Lit class, Carol got her students’ noses down into "The American West as Living Space" by dissecting for them—diagramming, we would have called it back in Valier High School—what you had done in the opening graf, the rhythms, the balances, the turns of phrase, which got me to squinting at that passage more closely than I had when I hurried into reading the book. That opening graf is a damn masterpiece.

All best. If you trot through Seattle on behalf of the short-story collection next spring, you’re welcome to an overnight, a meal, a drink, whatever, with us.

Maria

18 Oct. ’89

Dear Wright and Jo—

Not wanting to encumber the phone lines in the quake aftermath, we’ll try this route of hoping you came through undamaged.

Best wishes, now more than ever.

18 Oct. ’89
Dear Wally--

Just a quick almost-end-of-summer line. Wanted to pass the word that my wife Carol is going to be using The West as Living Space as a text in the Western Literature course she's developing for this fall (at her institution, Shoreline Community College), U. of Michigan Press willing; at the start of the summer they promised they could ship 11 copies right away and come up with the remainder (Carol's course enrollment is 35) by the time the bell rings. After a lot of years of journalism and journalistic courses this is Carol's first venture into the territory of Stegner, Welch, Erdrich, Hugo and, um, well, me, but she found the enrollment for this course filled damn near instantly. Reminded me of Carsten's annual chant when he comes back from Western History Ass'n conventions: every year, he says, speaker after speaker laments the declining campus interest in history of the West, and every year the WHA attendance goes up and up, more western history pros and students than ever.

We buzzed through Montana, four thousand miles' worth, earlier this summer for the sake of this last novel of mine in the Rascal Fair trilogy and literary reports seem good from there--Jim Welch finishing up a novel, Bill Kittredge doing the book about his family's baronial Oregon ranchholdings that so many of us have nudged him toward for so long. Have review in Publishers Weekly for Rick DeMarinis's new novel, The Year of the Zinc Penny, a title I will ever envy him. You asked me at the Anaheim ABA about Richard Ford's fit into the Missoula scene, and I guess that's being answered by the news that he's supposed to be moving to Ann Arbor, wife going into law school there.

Getting to feel autumnal, nights here along Puget Sound. Sometime I would like to experience New England fall, as I guess you have. I hope you've had a superior summer there; out here it's been muggy/gray/dank enough that I say to Carol day after day, "At least we're not missing great hiking weather."

all best,
Dear Wallace Stegner—

It may be the case that there's no such thing as a free lunch, but the Doigs hereby offer the Stegners the closest possible approximation. Carol and I will be passing through your neighborhood on Monday, March 23, driving from an overnight in Berkeley to spend a few days in Monterey, and if you have a favorite lunch place and your schedule permits, we'd be delighted to buy. (For that matter, given your generosity in providing blurbs for my books, I probably owe you three square meals that day.) We'll be leaving Seattle on March 20; if you can take us up on this, a note of time and place to meet will get us there. And if this is unhandy this time, maybe we can do better another time.

I'm some months out of date on news of the Missoula writing gang, having been holed up here finishing my next book. But we spent some pleasant time with Jim Welch when he was out here plugging Fools Crow last fall; the book did well at least here in the Northwest, and Jim was duly gratified.

best wishes
8 April '87

Dear Stegner--

Welcome home from Italy--which even we have to admit was a better choice than lunch with us.

best
Dear Wallace Stegner--

A few days ago my editor at Atheneum passed along your comment on English Creek, and I've been wondering ever since what to say, other than that I'm floored with gratitude. Maybe I can pick myself up enough to add, there's no one whose words would mean more to me.

Now I have to tell you, and Dick Etulain, what keeps coming to my mind from that impressive interview book. You cutting Charlie Russell's lawn. My buddy Bill Lang at the Montana Magazine of History is coming out with what he proclaims to be the ultimate, all-and-more-than-any-of-us-ever-wanted-to-know, Charlie Russell issue; and you can bet I'm going to riffle through to see if CMR ever happened to dab a scene of the kid mowing his lawn!

I hope your work is thriving. If anything brings you to Seattle, Carol and I would much like to see you.

best

Ivan Doig
October 20, 2003

Ivan Doig
17021 10th Ave., NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan,

Greetings from Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the Stegners (Lynn, Page, and Allison) have come to roost after blowing off Santa Cruz, California and wandering around in a rootless fashion for about five years in search of God knows what. We tried Truckee, but it lacked a bookstore. Reno was a dubious draw. We tried living east of the Mississippi for a while, but that didn’t take either. How we drifted into Santa Fe is not entirely clear, but apart from an overabundance of drunk drivers and Texans, northern New Mexico seemed to us about as good as it could get, so we bought a 75 year old house made out of mud and we aim to stay here, soberly, at least until missiles start landing on Los Alamos. But that’s not what I’m writing you about.

For reasons that are somewhat opaque (at least to me) I’ve agreed to undertake the collecting and editing of my father’s letters — a task, as you may imagine, that is going to be formidable. Just the index to the correspondence deposited with the Marriott Library at the University of Utah is over an inch thick -- some 56 boxes of personal, literary, business, and fan mail. I haven’t actually paid witness to this agglomeration as yet, but I’m hoping that what they mean by “box” is something along the order of a manuscript sized packet and not a room full of wine cartons.

In any event, what the special collections index suggests is that much of this archival material consists of letters to, rather than letters from WS, and obviously it is the latter that I am trying to search out. His prolonged correspondences with people like Frost, Benny DeVoto, Malcolm Cowley, Frank O’Connor, John Cheever, Katherine Ann Porter, etc., etc. I can retrieve from the libraries where their documents have been deposited. But for those, such as yourself, who are still alive and kicking and may not as yet have bequeathed your papers to institutional care, I am making this direct appeal. In short, Ivan, might you have kept any epistles from my old man in your files that would be relevant to this here project of mine, and if so, would you be willing to let me consider including them in the collection? Copies of letters are what I seek, obviously, not the originals.
Hope you are doing well. I picked up a copy of *Prairie Nocturne* at Garcia Street Books the other day and am looking forward to a little Montana *redux*. I think the last thing I read of yours was *Heart Earth*, and that's been too long of a while. If you ever get down this way, please look us up. I can't promise any rain, but the beer is cold.

Warmest regards,

Page Stegner
Nevertheless, the surprise and disbelief expressed by many people at what they have seen, plus the reluctance of several individuals to speak of their experience for fear of being ridiculed, suggest that they might be telling the truth. In some cases multiple witnesses have corroborated each other’s descriptions.

Many skeptics acknowledge that the observers have encountered some strange animal. The interpretation of what witnesses saw is most often not accepted by scientists, who suspect some error of observation and are wary of jumping to conclusions on the basis of irreproducible evidence, and by laymen, who feel threatened by novelty. Thus, a plethora of alternate explanations has come forward: “What you must have seen is an oarfish,” insists the dismissive critic. Others are equally sure that a pod of leaping dolphins or belugas were seen, or a leopard seal, a family of sea lions, a tangle of giant kelp, and so on.

Most cases of misinterpretation can be eliminated by admitting only the best evidence such as sightings at close range, under good conditions, by sober and (preferably) numerous witnesses who provide detailed and consistent information. The eyewitness accounts reported here are among the best. None of the “monsters” is reconcilable with any known living marine creature, which indicates that perhaps witnesses saw a creature thought to be extinct. This possibility has gained respect since 1938 when Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer identified a bluish, man-sized fish captured in the Indian Ocean off South Africa as a coelacanth, previously known only as a fossil fish with stubby, leglike fins, thought to be ancestral to land vertebrates. The last known living coelacanth had lived eighty million years ago! The prospect of discovering more “living fossils” has fired both public and scientific imaginations.

Numerous marine cryptid sightings have been explained in terms of extinct animals such as Steller’s sea cow, a sluggish sirenian hunted to extinction by starving Russian fur traders soon after its scientific discovery in the Bering Sea in the eighteenth century; the zeuglodon, a serpentine, primitive whale known from shallow seas of the Miocene Period (twenty-five-million years ago); and long-necked plesiosaurs, marine reptiles from the Jurassic Period (more than sixty-five-million years ago). Each of these hypotheses has its proponents, but none draws universal approval.

The final possibility is, of course, that the animals observed are entirely new and unknown to science. Most oceanographers readily concede that the ocean may yet have secrets to reveal. New animals continue to be discovered, usually by accident. For example, the megamouth shark, a fifteen-foot-long filter feeder, was found tangled in the anchor chain of a United States Navy ship near Hawaii in 1976. It had never been observed before, and only five other specimens have been seen since.

What unknown animal hides in the coastal waters of the Pacific Northwest? A creature with a long neck, whiskers, a mane, and a large body with lumps on its back. An animal that makes noises and hisses when it surfaces; by all appearances an air-breather and a mammal. But why would a large air-breather be seen so rarely at the surface? Where would this unknown, presumed mammal, perhaps even Heuvelmans’s hypothetical “merhorse,” breed? Heuvelmans has attempted to classify marine cryptids according to their characteristics and has hypothesized a variety of new animals to fit the observations. One of them is the “merhorse,” a long-necked, horse-headed marine mammal with large eyes, whiskers, and a mane, similar to many of the observations of Caddy. Seals and other pinnipeds congregate in gregarious rookeries; whales engage in musical frolics. How could such a large, unknown marine mammal be so elusive?

The mystery is not likely to be solved in the near future. Sightings are rare and apparently random. The development and funding of a research program that embraces review of evidence, formulation of hypotheses, search strategy, and instrument design in what is, after all, a legitimate scientific question tends to be thwarted by the stigma of “frivolity” that mars the subject, as well as by the absence of any obvious practical application. Cryptozoology, without a clear prospect for the betterment or enlightenment of humankind, remains a science that seems too “pure” for most oceanographers to pursue seriously.

PAUL H. LEBLOND is professor of oceanography and director of the Program of Earth and Ocean Sciences, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. His scientific interests range across the field of physical oceanography, including waves, tides, coastal currents, and the influence of the ocean environment on fisheries. LeBlond has been collecting eye-witness reports on marine cryptids since 1967. This article is adapted from Mysteries of the North American West (Fulcrum Publishing, 1993).

19. The megamouth shark (Megachasma pelagios) was described by L. R. Taylor, L. J. V. Compagno, and P. J. Struhsaker in “Megamouth—A New Species, Genus, and Family of Lamnoid Shark (Megachasma pelagios, family Megachasimidae) from the Hawaiian Islands,” Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences, 43 (July 6, 1963), 87-110.

20. For a survey of observations of marine cryptids, see Heuvelmans, In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents, and Michael Bright, There Are Giants in the Sea (London: Robson Books, 1989).
Tribute to Wallace Stegner

The following essays are drawn from a special symposium held September 17–18 in Missoula, Montana, to honor the memory of Wallace Stegner. Few people can claim the title of renowned historian, Pulitzer Prize–winning author, or nationally and internationally acclaimed essayist. Wallace Stegner commands deserved credit for having been all three.

Born in 1909 in Iowa, Stegner died on April 13 this year in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In between, he had lived at one time or another during his youth in North Dakota, Washington, Montana, Saskatchewan, and Utah. He had taught at the university level at Wisconsin, Harvard, and Stanford, the latter for twenty years as head of Stanford's famed creative writing program.

A partial bibliography of Stegner’s writing is included here, but some of his most famous works include Angle of Repose, a novel based on the life and letters of Mary Hallock Foote, that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1971; The Ugly Chair, his biography of friend and mentor Bernard DeVoto; Beyond the Hundredth Meridian, a biography of western explorer and scientist John Wesley Powell; and Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, a collection of essays published in 1992 in what would be his last book.

The Missoula symposium was sponsored jointly by the Montana Historical Society and by the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, University of Montana History Department. Symposium participants assessed varied aspects of Stegner’s contributions to the literature, history, and public policy issues of the American West. As these essays show, Stegner was recognized as one of the foremost spokesmen for the West in much of the twentieth century.

The first essay appearing here is by Wallace Stegner’s son, Page Stegner, a professor of creative writing, University of California, Santa Cruz. Among Page Stegner’s own numerous publications are a book, co-authored with his father and titled American Places (1981), and a special issue of Atlantic Monthly, titled "Rocky Mountain Country," appearing in April 1977.

Other essays are by Jackson J. Benson, Elliott West, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Dan Flores, Ivan Doig, William Kittredge, and Richard W. Etulain.

Benson is professor of English at San Diego State University and author of numerous books and essays on various facets of American literature. Winner of the PEN/WEST award for his True Adventures of John Steinbeck in 1985, he is writing the authorized biography of Wallace Stegner.


Ivan Doig is a writer living in Seattle. He is author of the Two Medicine novels and, in non-fiction, This House of Sky (1978) and Heart Earth (1993). William Kittredge is professor of creative writing and English, University of Montana, and author of We Are Not in This Together (1984), Owning It All (1987), and Hole in the Sky (1992).

Richard W. Etulain is professor of history and director of the Center for the American West, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, and author, editor, and co-author of numerous works on the American West, including Conversations With Wallace Stegner (1983, revised in 1991).

All photographs used in this essay are provided courtesy of Mary and Page Stegner unless noted otherwise.

Wallace and Mary Stegner, 1989
A Brief Reminiscence
Father, Teacher, Collaborator

by Page Stegner

When Chuck Rankin wrote me last spring to invite me to this conference I said, without deliberating very seriously about whether I had anything to contribute, that I would be delighted to do so if I didn’t have to pretend to be scholarly, and if I could just mauler on anecdotally for a few minutes and sit down. I think it was the opportunity to hear such distinguished speakers that compelled me, because both before my father’s death and since, I have been asked if I would speak about, or write something about him, and heretofore I have always refused. It would have embarrassed us both when he was alive and that hasn’t much changed since his death. And anyway, I don’t have any “daddy dearest” tales to tell; if there are skeletons in the closet I am unaware of them; and I have never been all that interested in the subject that seems to pique the curiosity of most of the magazine editors who call—to wit: How tough was it growing up in the shadow of a mountain as big as Wallace Stegner.

Having nothing to compare it to, I don’t know how tough it was. Also, it has occurred to me, when I was growing up, the mountain wasn’t yet that big or the shadow that long. In fact, at Stanford in the early 1960s I can remember defending the *pater familias* at a rather drunken English department party by depositing one of my graduate student colleagues in the chairman’s fish pond for proffering, through his faux British nose, the sonorous observation that Wallace Stegner was plainly a minor figure on the American literary scene.

That opinion was clearly in error, then as now, and I imagine a number of the speakers here this weekend will bear witness to the major importance of such books as *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, *Wolf Willow* (which contains the superb novella, *Genesis*), *The Gathering of Zion*, and the two collections of short stories, *Women on the Wall* and *The City of the Living*—all of which were written and published well before I deposited my colleague in the fish pond. If there was any question of literary standing in 1964, *All the Little Live Things*, *The Sound of Mountain Water*, *Angle of Repose*, *The Uneasy Chair*, *The Spectator Bird*, *One Way to Spell Man*, and *Crossing to Safety* dispelled them. Among other things.

When I think about lineage and kinship—my own, that is—I do not think of shadows, mountains, or difficulties associated with being the offspring of an increasingly famous father. I think, rather, of being the lucky son of a man who was as devoted to his responsibilities as husband and father as he was to his public reputation, and whose ambitions did not include the pursuit of any literary reputation beyond that generated by the works themselves. I think, too, of having been the lucky son of a consummate teacher, because it has shaped the direction of my own life profoundly, and when I think about him now (as I have been doing for these remarks today) it is in that capacity around which most of my recollections revolve. And by consummate teacher I mean one who was able to share and impart a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to a very recalcitrant student (me) who up until his late twenties didn’t think he much needed to learn anything. (Of course, as a sub-adult I knew everything worth knowing.)

My father was a teacher in the most conventional sense: He gave me books to read, endlessly corrected my grammar, gave me detailed instructions on the difference between lie and lay, read my school themes and essays and went through them with me laboriously, suggesting changes to both content and structure that might improve their substance and distinctiveness. He was not, I might add, particularly liberal with praise. “Okay,” he would say, when I came home from school with five As and a B+, “but still room for improvement.” That was about as lavish as it got. Even when I was thirty-five years old with three novels and a critical study of Vladimir Nabokov under my belt he would still write “ok” in the margin of a new manuscript.

Wallace and Page playing cribbage about 1947
I had given him if he particularly liked something, and type out two pages of thoughtful criticism when he thought something had gone astray. Perfection, or as close as one ever gets to it, comes in the fifteenth or twentieth draft, was always his message, and I’m glad I heard it early in my life. I’m sorry so few of the students I’ve encountered in my own twenty-five-year teaching career didn’t have someone like my father come into their room, holding the latest book report between thumb and forefinger as if it were a slightly ripe codfish, and say “well, let’s sit down and go over this one more time.”

But more important, I think, than any formal instruction he offered was his habit of imbuing virtually everything he came across with substance. My father, for example, could never just look at scenery. If we happened to be driving across the Colorado Plateau through southern Utah, say from Cisco to Price along the Book Cliffs, he’d offer up an anecdote about Powell being rescued by Bradley in Desolation Canyon, and then explain to his slightly annoyed eight-year-old boy (me), who was trying to concentrate on his Batman comic, who Powell was and why he was important. Then he’d point out the La Sals and Abajos to the south and tell that boy something about laccolithic domes, betting him he couldn’t spell laccolithic. He’d comment on the immensity of geological time and the number of Permian seas responsible for the deposition of the Moenkopi, Chinle, Wingate, and Kayenta formations (he could identify them all) on our left and the Dakota sandstone and Mancos shale on our right. He’d observe the Fish Lake Plateau far to the west and remember something of his boyhood summers at that lake, though he was never particularly loquacious about his own childhood except in his writing. Crossing over the Wasatch Plateau and heading south through the Spanish Fork canyon would remind him of the specific dates of the Escalante/Dominguez expedition through the region (September 23, 1776), and that it was exactly fifty years before Jedediah Smith came through following essentially the same route. He had a kind of holistic relationship with the land, and he couldn’t look at it without remembering its geological history, its exploration, its social development, its contemporary problems, and its prognosis for the future.

As a boy I always thought I was hearing a lot more about all this than I wanted to know, but in retrospect, I concede I was wrong. In fact, I thought about how wrong I was just two weeks ago when my wife and I were returning from our summer home in Vermont. It was a morning flight, but that didn’t keep US Air from showing a movie to its bored passengers, most of whom they seem to think are more interested in Richard Dreyfus’s romp through the bedrooms of New York than in what’s outside the window. I suppose they’re right. Anyway there was an obvious cultural imperative to close the shade during the show.

The movie began somewhere over Illinois—I know because I looked down and recognized the Illinois River where it runs south from Chillicothe to Peoria on its way to the Mississippi above St. Louis. When the movie was over I opened the blinds and looked out, or down—35,000 feet down—and was a bit surprised to discover it took me about thirty seconds to identify exactly where we were. There was the Colorado where it hooks around Moab and creates the only major wetlands on the entire upper stretch of the river, there was Wilson Mesa, the Island in the Sky, the Green River through Labyrinth Canyon. To the south, off the left wing tip, I could see the confluence of the Green and Colorado at the mouth of Cataraet Canyon and farther south still the Henry Mountains, the Circle Cliffs, the Kaparowitz Plateau. I could identify (and did for my long suffering wife) virtually everything I could see, and it suddenly struck me why this was so, and who had taught me to assimilate the western landscape so completely that I could tell where I was almost anywhere west of the Front Range, even from 35,000 feet in the air. I had a great instructor.

I might add, parenthetically, that I took only one formal class from my father—a large survey of the twentieth-century American novel with about 150 students in it and four teaching assistants. I remember I wrote a term paper on John Steinbeck and got a B+. No doubt there was room for improvement. Okay. I took the midterm and got an A; then took the final exam, for which somehow a numerical grade was assigned, and I scored the second highest mark in the course. My father, naturally, did not want to appear to be playing favorite and gave me a B+ for a final grade. I squawked loudly about this injustice, and he left adjudication of my appeal up to his TAs—who happily overruled him. It made him very uneasy my being in that class. I know because I came across some notes he was writing just before he died, notes, ironically, for an introduction to a collection of my essays, in which he recalled this incident himself.

“If I had known his intentions (to take the course) I might have steerred him away,” he said, “for how could I trust myself to judge him fairly? And I would have to judge him; grades are a vital necessity to a graduate student, as much of a necessity as judicial integrity is to a professor. What would I do if he did badly? Protect him? Flunk him?” And farther down the page he observed, “He was faithful in attendance, silent in discussions. His term paper came in on time and was very creditable. He wrote one of the best examinations in a big class. Relieved, I was ready to give him a respectable but not superlative B plus for the course. My reader protested loudly. ‘Come on,’ she said, ‘he’s an A student.’ To which I replied, ‘How would it look if his father gave him an A?’ After all, I had spent more than twenty years trying to teach that boy that no
matter how well he did, there was always room for improvement. But she insisted so long and vigorously that I finally yielded and gave him an A. But I salvaged my conscience, and reinforced my lifelong lesson by sticking a minus after it.

My father always liked to point to the flaw that weavers deliberately weave into oriental rugs because they know that only Allah is perfect. It was a gesture that greatly amused him.

In 1977 the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, whose name escapes me at the moment, came up with the idea that it would be cute to have Stegner père et fils co-author a special issue of the magazine on the West (I mean the real West, not California or the Pacific Northwest). “Rocky Mountain Country” it was called, and we divided the territory up. My father took Montana, Idaho, and Utah. I took Colorado and Wyoming.

I had written two or three stories for the *Atlantic*, but I had never written a lick of non-fiction prose, other than literary criticism; I had no idea that one could employ many of the devices of the fiction writer in such a composition; I had no investigative skills, did not really even know where to go for information, had no accumulated knowledge, had no time to properly do my homework, was utterly unprepared for such an assignment. I cringe when I think about it. My God I was ignorant.

My father knew, I'm sure, just how ignorant I was, but I think he regarded this in some way as an opportunity, in the guise of a collaborator, to again teach me something. He patiently indicated the directions we might go, the subjects we might cover, people I might want to talk with, and suggested a few bits of background material I might want to thumb through—like Chittenden’s *The American Fur Trade in the Far West*, DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri*, David Lavender's *The Rockies*, maybe a little Lewis and Clark, Francis Parkman, John Wesley Powell, maybe take a look at Atwood’s *Physiographic Provinces of North America*. Just bedtime reading.

Not to worry, he said. In three or four months when we had a draft put together he’d go through it and just sort of clean it up.

I don’t know if he really had any idea of what he was in for—cleaning it up. I do know that when all was said and done I didn’t recognize a whole lot of my own sorry prose and half-cocked social commentary in the final product, and although my nose was a bit out of joint at being so massively revised, I learned so much from the examination of his deconstruction (and reconstruction) of my work that I haven’t written much of anything else but non-fiction essays on the American West ever since. I do remember one part of my narrative that managed to slip through intact in that piece had to do with the Colorado River Compact, with water allocations in the upper and lower basin states, and somehow I managed to re-route the Colorado to drain “into the Gulf of Mexico.” There were more than a few astonished letters to the editor. How my father’s proofreading eye missed that howler, I’ll never know. Only Allah is perfect, I guess.

In 1980 we collaborated again (along with the photographer, Eliot Porter) on a book called *American Places*, and this time I must have gotten it right, or closer to right, because I remember few if any suggested changes to the chapters I wrote and no alterations in my parts of the beginning and concluding chapters that we wrote together.

I don’t know what conclusions to draw from all this. As I said at the outset, I planned just to mumble on anecdotally until it was time to sit down, so maybe I don’t need conclusions. But I guess I come back to those questions about the accidents of birth that I said didn’t interest me much, those “how tough it was” queries, and to my sense, on the contrary, that I have been inordinately blessed and lucky. I don’t mean to be a Pollyanna about it. There were times we didn’t get along, and things we disagreed about, but it is symmetry not dissonance that strikes my reminiscent ear.

If I had to make metaphor out of collaboration I would make it out of something else my father and I happened to team up on, a different form of collaboration that has nothing to do with students, teachers, fathers, sons, learning, books, or any of the things I’ve been talking about, but that forms a similar, if more precise, kind of balance. Fifty years ago I helped my father plant eight thousand Norway pines on two hundred acres of land we owned in northern Vermont—land I still own—and about five years ago I cut down three hundred of those now grown trees, had them milled out flat on three sides, and built a log house out of them. When I stand outside it sometimes on a warm summer evening, and look at it weathering there against its dark background of cedar and spruce, I think, Jeez, this is quite totally amazing. My old man and I, we grew this house. I think it’s about as good a legacy as a human being can ever receive.

The Stegner family and Smokey moved into their home in Los Altos Hills, California, in 1950.
Where the Old West Met the New
Wallace Stegner: 1909–1993

by Jackson J. Benson

Wallace Stegner died the evening of April 13, 1993, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as a result of injuries suffered in an auto accident two weeks earlier. During a long and distinguished career he received just about every award an American writer might receive, including a Pulitzer Prize for the 1971 novel, _Angle of Repose_, and a National Book Award in 1977 for _The Spectator Bird_. Among the many other tributes to him was a PEN Centre-West Freedom to Write Award given to him last fall to mark his refusal of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) medal, to have been presented by President George Bush, in order to protest the politicization of the NEA. In accepting the award, Stegner wrote,

> I believe that government should support the arts. I also believe that its function stops with support—it has no business trying to direct or censor them. Art must be left to the artists. If they sometimes make mistakes, or press too hard, or test too strenuously the boundaries of the accepted, that is part of the commitment and the excitement: creation by definition deals with what has not yet been made. The creation of any art is three quarters error. As Lewis Thomas said, it was only by making mistakes that mankind blundered toward brains.

Born in Iowa, Wallace Stegner spent his childhood on the last homestead frontier in Saskatchewan and then the latter part of his life in the foothills of California—a remarkable span that ran from the horse-drawn plow to the information age. During his growing up, Stegner's father, a "boomer" looking to strike it rich, dragged the family from one place to another, finally—after an interim year in Great Falls, Montana—settling down for a few years as a bootlegger in Salt Lake City. A big, strong, violent man who tried to pursue frontier values in a post-pioneer society, George Stegner became the basis for Bo Mason in _The Big Rock Candy Mountain_ (1943), a novel that embodies the rootlessness, mobility, and rugged individualism that typified so much of western experience.

Wallace, physically weak as a child and scorned by his father, found acceptance in school and ended up working his way through the University of Utah and graduate school at the University of Iowa. He earned a Ph.D. in American literature, by contrast to his parents who had not gone beyond the eighth grade, and went on to teach at Utah, Wisconsin, Harvard, and Stanford. He was a staff member for many years also at the granddaddy of all the summer writer workshops, the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference in Vermont. It was there he met Robert Frost and Bernard DeVoto, both of whom would strongly influence his thought and writing.

During the late 1930s, the 1940s, and early 1950s, he became known as an outstanding short-story writer. One of his stories appeared in each of the successive years, from 1941 to 1943, in the annual _The Best American Short Stories_, and "Two Rivers" won second prize in the 1942 O. Henry Competition. Over the next three decades one of his stories was included in the _Best_ series on six more occasions, and he made four more appearances in the _O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories_, including another second prize, for "Beyond the Glass Mountain" (1948) and a first prize for "The Blue-Winged Teal" (1954).

He was a man, to paraphrase what Robert Stone has said about one of his characters in a recent novel, who practiced the virtues that most of us used to believe in—kindness, courtesy, responsibility, and hard work. He had many roles—novelist, essayist, historian, lecturer, editor, and environmentalist—but perhaps all of them go back to one central role, that of being a teacher. As teacher in the formal sense, he is known for founding the creative writing program at Stanford University, which he directed for twenty-five years,
This attachment to history and his drive to learn about it in various contexts seems to have come out of his own experience. He felt in growing up that he had been cut away from his roots, that he had no history as a basis for understanding his own life. Like Bruce Mason, his semi-autobiographical persona in *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*, Stegner came to think of his family as an outlaw family, always secretive, always on the run, and never in tune with neighbors or community, except for a time during the winters in Saskatchewan. This gave Stegner a need to belong, to find a place that he could relate to and a tradition to be a part of. It also planted in him a life-long admiration for the community-building that he witnessed as a teenager among the Mormons in Salt Lake City.

In his Mormon histories, *Mormon Country* (1942) and *The Gathering of Zion* (1964), winner of the 1965 Award of Merit of the American Association for State Local History, he displayed the fallacy of a West created by the lone horseman and demonstrated how important cooperation was to its actual development. His biography of John Wesley Powell, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* (1924), performed the invaluable service of reminding us that the West was not a New Eden, a paradise, but for the most part an arid, near desert. His biography of Bernard DeVoto, *The Uneasy Chair* (1974), did much to spread the DeVoto gospel concerning the need to preserve public lands and the need for constant public vigilance in their protection. With these latter two works alone he made a substantial contribution to the emergence, development, and agenda of the environmental movement.

In *Wolf Willow*, he recreated the environment of his own roots in Saskatchewan on the last of the homestead frontiers through the combination of a history, a memoir, and a fictional account of the cattle ranching disaster of the winter of 1906–1907. These two stories, “Genesis” and “Carrion Spring,” were the only “cowboy” stories he ever wrote. Growing up he frequently came into contact with the real thing, and in his introduction to the two stories he wrote about their influence, for better and worse, on him:

Many things those cowboys represented I would have done well to get over quickly, or never catch: the prejudice, the callousness, the destructive practical joking, the tendency to judge everyone by the same raw standard. Nevertheless, what they themselves most respected, and what as a boy I most yearned to grow up to, was as noble as it was limited. They honored courage, competence, self-reliance, and they honored them tacitly. They took them for granted. It was their absence, not their presence, that was cause for remark. Practicing comradeship in a rough and dangerous job, they lived a life calculated to make a man careless of everything except the few things he really valued.

As an environmentalist, Wallace Stegner was well-known for his activities on behalf of the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society, as well as for his many publications on the subject. Among these was the “Wilderness Letter” (1961), which defined wilderness as “the geography of hope”:

Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the last virgin forests to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases; if we drive the few remaining members

By 1977 when this photograph was taken, Wallace Stegner had authored twenty-seven books.
of the wild species into zoos or to extinction. . . . Never again will Americans be free in their own country from the noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste. . . . And . . . never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it.


For those who knew Wallace Stegner personally, his loss is particularly difficult to bear. Everyone I knew who knew him expected him to always be there, like a national monument, weathered, craggy, and inspirational. In a way, his finest work of art was himself—he often declared that his motive for writing was to examine himself, his roots, his motives and goals. Out of that self-examination, and a determination to grow, came one of the most remarkable persons of this or any other time. No man ever had more integrity. We in the West can take him, in death, to our hearts to cherish as one of ours, the best of what we can be. But we can also with some pride present him to the world, a great man and a great American writer.
Stegner, Story-Telling, and Western Identity

by Elliott West

Wallace Stegner is the only historian I can think of who titled one of his books after a smell. That alone qualifies him as one of the best and shrewdest members of our guild. The book is Wolf Willow, “a history, a story, and a memory” of the southern Saskatchewan of Stegner’s childhood. Wolf willow is also a gray-leaved shrub. When Stegner, about fifty, revisited the town he had known as a boy and walked down to the muddy river where he had fished and dived and loafed, it was the scent of wolf willow that carried him instantly and completely back to his early years, that made “reality . . . exactly equivalent with memory,” as he put it. Stegner used that moment of “ancient, unbearable recognition” as the starting point of one of his most interesting and provocative works. The choice of such a moment suggests, to me at least, one of the many important things that that remarkable man has to teach us.

The lesson has to do with the subject of an essay Stegner published in 1967, “History, Myth and the Western Writer.” His main point was that western fiction was suffering a sort of paralysis because it was stuck in dichotomies, a series of either’s and or’s. There was the tension between the restless, freedom-loving types (invariably men), forever in search of the main chance, and the civilized (women, of course) striving for domesticity and order. There was the clash between the law, as laid down in books and enforced by institutions, and true justice that good men knew in their upright souls. Above all, there was the distinction between a heroized past of natural beauty and “horseback virtues” and a contemporary West that blights the eye and stifles the spirit. As long as western writing was continually pulled between these opposites, Stegner argued, it would be like a car high-centered between ruts: it was going nowhere.

Stegner was making two interesting points here. First, the people of his region had been left marooned in the present. “Millions of westerners, old and new, have no sense of a personal and possessed past,” he wrote. Most troublesome was the gap that yawned between the present and an earlier, increasingly mythicized

The Whitemud River swimming hole, mentioned by Stegner in Wolf Willow, looks as inviting today as when Stegner and his boyhood buddies swam in it.

60
age. The disjunction of now and then—especially when "then" seemed so uplifted and "now" so botched—left people feeling isolated in time, collectively and individually. And second, Stegner was saying that this lamentable situation was, more than anything else, a failure of story-telling. Westerners had somehow gotten themselves into a terrible fix. They had come to think about a certain period in their history—the time of frontier settlement, especially its last stages—in such a way that they could not find in it the makings of a narrative that connected that time, only a few generations ago, with what they knew of themselves and where they lived. Westerners, in other words, were historically stuck. They had no means of understanding how things around them had come to be, no way to know who in the world they were.

Stegner was writing about a crisis of western identity, a shifty term that refers both to what the West is and to who westerners are. Its common meaning has something to do with how the place and its people have made one another. Its story must include that mutual shaping and how it has unfolded through time. And that, Stegner argued, was the story that was not being told.

In this essay, written more than twenty-five years ago, Stegner was considering what has become the central issue in western studies. We historians, tagalongs as usual, have lately been trying to bridge that gap, to find some threads of experience that tie together, for instance, the Montana of Plenty Coups and Granville Stuart with the Montana of Mike Mansfield and Henry Fonda’s children. Our method has been to look mainly for grander themes of social and economic continuity, from the endless mixing of varied cultures to the long reach of the federal government and the influence of global technologies.

That is all to the good. Those broader developments have to be part of our new history. But when Stegner wrote of a breakdown of a western narrative, he meant a failure of other kinds of stories as well and the absence of other continuities. "Western identity," that slippery rascal, is not so easily grabbed and wrestled down. Historians have written often and well about the West as a physical environment and about the outward occurrences of people trying, with mixed results, to shape it. But the inward history of the West—western history as a perceptual and emotional encounter—that is an approach we have given much less attention than, say, the West as a hydraulic society or as a culture of urban oases.

Telling that inward history is no easy task, but Stegner gave us some examples of how to get on with it. First, his work reminds us of the importance of the family. In both western fiction and history, families have not exactly been an overriding concern. They are there, of course, but mainly to motivate, and sometimes to restrict, the hairy-chested heroics of a variety of stalwart males.

Families hang there like a painted backdrop, while the man stands at center stage in solitary communion with nature, squinting toward the horizon for something to challenge him so he can prove his stuff.

Stegner made the family what it ought to be in our stories and what it always has been in western history—a central part of people’s lives, a powerful shaping force on the land and institutions, and the main emotional area in which a western identity has developed. It is true, as Stegner himself pointed out, that Bo and Elsa in The Big Rock Candy Mountain fit the usual formula of restless man and civilized woman, but the resemblance to the usual pattern stops there. Who, after all, is the story about? Bo? Elsa? Bruce? It’s hard to say, and that’s the point. Among many things, the book is about how we all turn out the way we do in part because of the wonderful and the perfectly god-awful things that happen to us in our families, and also about how
looking back into that intimate world, as Bruce begins to do in the book’s final paragraphs, is a continuous act of revelation and reinvention. And so, if nothing else, Stegner teaches me that if we want to know what the West is and who westerners are, and also what we should and shouldn’t do and be, we need to spend more time trying to reconstruct the western past through the thousands of stories like that of the Masons. We need to make our history, in the root meaning of the word, familiar.

Doing that, Stegner’s second lesson quickly becomes obvious. The family as a focus of understanding has its own severe limits. Bruce Mason became who he was partly out of interactions with parents and brother but also because of what he took from the world beyond their reach, and for Bruce—as for Wallace Stegner—those other influences were largely of the physical environment. Stegner’s writing is full of finely drawn descriptions of the western country—or, more exactly, perceptions of those places. I would guess that all fans have their favorite passages. Mine is the first ten paragraphs of chapter four of Big Rock Candy Mountain: Bruce’s impressions of the Canadian homestead, a collage, the “mousy smell of the house, the musty smell of packed quilts,” the Russian thistle hoed out of the garden, the “grasgrown wagon track,” “the way the grass grew curling over the lip of a burnout, and how the prairie owls nested under those grassy lips.” This, of course, is from Stegner’s own childhood, when he was, in his own words, “a sensuous little savage,” and these passages, like many others he gives us, are remarkable in their vivid particularity. Reading them, it occurs to us that these are as much descriptions of the characters as of their surroundings. Bruce says so: “The yard and chicken house and fireguard and coulee were as much a part of him as his own skin.”

We have to tell better stories, Stegner said, if we are going to have “a personal and possessed past,” and however our new history is written, it must include not only those outward, visible events and transformations but also that inward narrative, familial and sensual, that plays such a prominent part in Stegner’s writing. By its nature, that story weaves together the generations and pulls us across those decades between the frontier and today. It makes possible a layered sense of place like that of Port William, Kentucky, the fictional creation of Stegner’s student and friend, Wendell Berry. It tells us something about the lessons we are now feeding our own daughters and sons who later will know the West of Stegner’s dying as the old West, their first West. If all this sounds abstract and speculative, it is my failure, because in the recent flourish of western writing there are plenty of examples of what I am talking about—books by, among others, Ivan Doig, Bill Kittredge, Mary Cleerman Blew, Terry Tempest Williams, and most recently Teresa Jordan, a small tribe of former “sensuous little savages” who have started to record what are essentially the gut memories of those connecting generations between the frontier and today. All these books are about families, about land and air seen and felt and smelled, about the inseparability of identities and particular places. They strike me as just the kind of story-telling that Stegner said we needed but were not getting.

A few years after the essay mentioned above, Stegner wrote in a different form of the westerner’s peculiar historical isolation and the way to break it. This time he spoke through Lyman Ward, narrator of Angle of Repose. A western historian past the middle of a troubling life, chairbound with one withered leg, Ward has given up writing monographs to piece together the stories of his grandparents, how they faced the West and were changed by it and by each other, and doing that, he hopes to find for his own life a resonance and connection he has never known. “As I look down my nose to where my left leg bends and my right leg stops,” Ward tells us at the outset, “I realize that it isn’t backward that I want to go but downward. I want to touch once more the ground I have been maimed away from.”

Ward speaks for a lot of us who are trying to connect now to then so that we might, literally, know where we stand. More than anyone, Wallace Stegner showed us how that work can be done, and as we get on with the job of telling better stories, he is the one who deserves our first and deepest thanks.
Precedents to Wisdom

by Patricia Nelson Limerick

Wallace Stegner faced facts, and found in those facts both poetry and history. In a wonderful chapter in Wolf Willow, Stegner wrote of the town dump in Whitemud in southern Saskatchewan, where he and the other boys took up a pioneering project in recycling. When they brought items they discovered at the dump back to the town, adult reaction was not overwhelmingly enthusiastic. "Occasionally," Stegner wrote,

something we really valued with a passion was snatched from us in horror and returned at once. That happened to the mounted head of a white mountain goat, somebody's trophy from old times and the far Rocky Mountains, that I brought home one day. My mother took one look and discovered that his beard was full of moths.

"I remember that goat," Stegner ended this passage from Wolf Willow: "I regret him yet. Poetry is seldom useful but always memorable."

Stegner knew that the workings of human memory and loyalty are as funny as they are powerful. In Sacramento last February, responding to a panel presentation of writers discussing his work, Mr. Stegner said: "I want to protest first, to all of you. Not one of you, in all this laudatory talk, has mentioned my sense of humor."

Wallace Stegner was a man of humor, and of great foresight, and of wisdom. If you spend your days in a university, "wisdom" is not a word that you hear much. You hear a lot about research and scholarship, but the word wisdom never comes up when vice chancellors and deans gather to discuss the agenda of the university. This is one of the main reasons why the public does not feel much affection for universities, and why the public thinks that scholarly writing is a self-indulgent habit of professors, without much value to anyone outside the university. The troubled state of affairs in higher education adds up to one major reason why Wallace Stegner's example is so compelling and urgent today. He was not a man in flight from the word wisdom.

In 1945, Wallace Stegner, in collaboration with the editors of Look Magazine, published a book called One Nation. When you look at this book, one set way of thinking about Wallace Stegner's work collapses. "Stegner," this pattern of thought runs, "was great on environmentalism, and very much ahead of his time in paying attention to women as morally complex, significant characters in fiction, but ethnic issues were not really his concern." I was myself long under the impression that if you were in the market for precedents in wisdom in environmental affairs, you went to Stegner, and if you wanted precedents in wisdom in race relations, you went to Carey McWilliams.

Look at One Nation, and you learn that Stegner was just as dramatically ahead of his time in the matter of race relations as he was in environmental affairs. "There is a wall down the middle of America," Stegner said in the opening pages of One Nation, "a wall of suspicion, hatred, and guilt. On one side is the majority of our people—white, Protestant, gentle... On the other side are people who because of color, religion, or cultural background are not allowed to be full citizens of the United States."

It would not take a particularly acute thinker to make this observation in 1945, or in 1963, for that matter. But a white writer in 1945, attacking the injustice of segregation and discrimination and launching that attack in a very public arena, adds up to a remarkable and inspirational sight to contemplate. Stegner himself referred to One Nation as a "wartime-patriotism" book. This reference might be puzzling, until
you realize that Stegner meant true patriotism—not an unthinking round of applause for a great country, but an appraisal of the nation’s real situation, an appraisal with a critical and ethical edge. Patterns of racial injustice that “we have permitted,” Stegner wrote, “have a clear relationship with Nazi practice; the difference is only a difference in degree. . . . The Nazi cult of ‘race’ purity . . . has its exponents in America, and always has had.” He gave no white Americans a comfortable exemption: “None of us is so different from the classic Southerner, the unreconstructed Johnny Reb. The germs of prejudice are as common as those of tuberculosis; most of us under the x-ray would show the [signs] of old infections.”

Stegner did not give an inch to any wartime impulse to offer an upbeat or sanitized version of American history. “Two of our minority groups,” he said, “are conquered peoples, the Indians and the Spanish colonists of the Southwest,” while blacks came in a “forced immigration,” and even immigrants who came by choice entered a nation which “showed ugly signs of class and caste distinctions and an ugly will to resent or suspect the foreign and the strange.” In the years since the conquest, Indians, Stegner said, had “suffered almost as much from our indifference and our charity as they did earlier from our Manifest Destiny.”

“Prejudice against the first Americans still persists,” he wrote, “and there are plenty of people quite willing to go back to the exploitation and robbery that we practiced for two hundred and fifty years.”

Stegner was just as clear-sighted in his discussion of the history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. For Mexican workers employed by “large-scale farm operators,” he said, “working for such operators has been a kind of slavery.” And, anticipating what is currently a huge issue in the West, Stegner captured the difficulties raised by shifting an economy toward tourism and offering a romanticized, colorful history for sale. Many Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, he wrote, “neither can be nor want to be ‘professional Mexicans’ for the amusement of tourists in such ‘quaint’ sections of Los Angeles’ Olivera Street. With some justice they commonly feel that everything Mexican in California is picturesque except the Mexican people.”

When one reaches Stegner’s discussion of police brutality toward minorities, the urge—to look back at the publication date and make sure that it really says 1945—becomes overpowering. Almost fifty years before the name “Rodney King” became famous, he wrote:

police protection is too frequently something to make a Negro or Mexican shut his teeth together and bite off the things he wants to say.

It is no secret that many police departments have their quota of sadists who operate by preference on the helpless—and no other grown man in America is likely to be quite so helpless as a member of a disliked and branded minority.

On the chance that some of his readers might take him to mean that a few bad policemen were corrupting a basically sound system, Stegner pulled out the stops:

The law and order which the police are sworn to protect is the law and order of the ruling caste and class and color and faith, and so one is not surprised when Los Angeles police, faced with the problem of a dead Mexican in the street, put out a dragnet and sweep in three hundred Mexican youths on suspicion . . . . As long as we hire police we should expect them to do our collective will. The reason behind the frequent indifference of the police to the rights of minorities is the collective will of the society which hires them.

There is not an enormous amount of text in One Nation, because it is also full of pictures. But, short or not, it is a remarkable text for the tranquility, measured pace, and thoroughness of its coverage. Stegner does not, for instance, waste any time on lamentations over the

“Wally” Stegner, second from right in this 1923 photograph, had little contact with people other than whites during his growing-up years in the West.
whites. On this matter and many others, Stegner was far ahead of his time in 1945. He is, in fact, still ahead of our time, in 1993.

Stegner found space in his brief text for another important, and too often evaded issue. Prejudices and stereotypes, he said, "can even infect minority groups—set one group against another, breed a narrow group spirit that can be fatal to any hope of ultimate harmony." There are Jews who are anti-Semites, Stegner noted; while a "snobbish dislike for lower-class Negroes is by no means uncommon among Negroes who have climbed above the average level." The dangers of stereotyping appeared in every relationship. "It is as dangerous," Stegner said in a line well worth pondering, "for a Negro to think of the generalized 'white man' as it is for a white man to create and then abuse an abstract 'Negro'."

Stegner had clearly and accurately sized up the meaning of his historical moment: "Whether we like it or not, World War Two has been a war of liberation. It will not be possible in any foreseeable future to run a white man's world with yellow or black or brown colonies whose exploitation supports it." The United States was not quarantined from the broad patterns of change on the planet. "It becomes increasingly clear," Stegner concluded, "that racial and religious tensions are the gravest threat to the future that we face."

There are some clear "signs of the times" in One Nation, of course, references to "simple" and "primitive" cultures, for instance, references that do not sound anywhere nearly as hip as the passages I have quoted. But even with a few of the more dated elements included, what Stegner said in the 1940s is still what we need to hear, and to act on, in the 1990s. My point, moreover, is not that Stegner was "politically correct" long before the term was invented. My point is that Stegner was factually correct and ethically correct, and we are much in his debt because he said these things so clearly and so forcefully, before many others were saying them, or even thinking them. He warned Americans in 1945 that they ran the risk of "Balkanizing the nation, splitting it into mutually repellant fragments." The warning stands, having only gained in relevance.

One Nation, with its full ethnic inclusiveness and demand for justice, with its careful attention to the significance of the western half of the United States in the picture of national race relations, was evidence enough that Stegner had the jump on the New Western History. Both the method and the content of his story in Wolf Willow proved the case again. This was place-centered history, beginning with the physical environment, tracking the presence of Indians, telling the full story of the complicated events and maneuverings—of Indians, métis, Hudson's Bay Company traders, and Mounties—that had preceded the arrival of white American farmers. This was a history that faced up to tragedy and failure, and to brutality as well, and connected the whole package of the past up to the environmental and human issues of the present.

As a child in Whitemud, Stegner learned nothing about the history of the place where he lived. The chimneys of an abandoned métis village stood near his town, and no one knew what they were; "we never so much as heard the word métis," he wrote. Instructed in the history of the distant places, he lived in the Cypress Hills without "the faintest notion of who had lived there before me." The Cypress Hills and Whitemud offered all the elements of "a past to which I could be tribally and emotionally committed," he wrote; his home had all "the associations with which human tradition defines and enriches itself"—but no one knew, and no one told the children.

Repeatedly, Stegner declared in Wolf Willow that he wished he had been told this history as a child, given some moorings in his particular place, allowed to know that significant human events had happened in his home, and not just in places far to the east.
Stegner identified the staghound in this photograph as “Puma [the dog] I had in mind in ‘Genesis,’” one of two stories that he wrote about cowboys.

These declarations go right to the core of the new western history. His desire for “a past to which [he] could be tribally and emotionally committed” express exactly what I, and many others, wanted but could not get from the old western history.

In his writing of place-centered history, Stegner had again jumped ahead of his time. In fact, most western writers—historians as well as novelists—were at the very same time resolutely jumping behind their times, jumping backward into a remote and unconnected frontier past. In an essay published in 1967, “History, Myth, and the Western Writer,” Stegner used the important and memorable phrase “the amputated Present,” to describe this failure to connect. “Western writers,” Stegner said, “have shown a disinclination, perhaps an emotional inability to write about the contemporary.” Through all “the newly swarming regions of the West,” he wrote, millions of westerners, old and new, have no sense of a personal and possessed past, no sense of any continuity between the real western past which has been mythicized almost out of recognizability and a real western present that seems as cut-off and pointless as a ride on a merry-go-round.

Twenty-six years ago, Wallace Stegner challenged western historians to stop amputating the present from the past. Fifty years ago, he wrote a text that put the great ethnic diversity of the West permanently on record. And yet professional western historians neither responded to his challenge nor imitated his example. Stegner had the strange and ironic experience of writing in several genres and crossing between the disciplines just at the historical moment when the boundaries between the disciplines were hardening and rigidifying. But things have changed. This is, in fact, one of the most interesting, distinctive, and exciting things happening now in western intellectual affairs: everybody is reading everybody else—academics reading non-academics, writers of fiction reading writers of nonfiction, and people with doctorates in history taking Wallace Stegner seriously as a thinker about the field.

Back in Whittemud, Saskatchewan, Stegner had only one place to go to learn about local history, and that place was the dump, the place “that contained relics of every individual who had ever lived” in town. In the artifacts of that dump, and in the unbridled enthusiasm that Stegner and his friends had for examining those artifacts, we get a very close analogy to the spirit of the new western history. As the boys of Whitemud knew, it does not make any sense to go to the dump in order to edit it, to look only for positive and inspirational relics. You examine everything, whether it is attractive or not, because you want to understand the whole past, not a selected and prettified version of it. Indeed, those who have complained of the harsh realism and “negativity” of the new western history might thank their lucky stars that they were spared participation in the exploration of the Whittemud Dump. In one memorable passage, Stegner described a

welter of foul-smelling feathers and coyote-scattered carrion, that was all that remained of somebody’s dream of a chicken ranch. The chickens had all got some mysterious pip at the same time, and died as one, and the dream lay out there with the rest of the town’s history . . . .

To Stegner the town dump, in all its mixed contents, “was our poetry and our history.” That statement goes a long way to explaining why western creative writers and western historians have found a shared cause in their exploration of the western past, with Wallace Stegner as the guide we have in common.
Stegner, the Environment, and the West

by Dan Flores

I never met Wallace Stegner, but after reading his biography of John Wesley Powell, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian, I followed him through many another of his books. Eventually my own career intersected modestly with his so that I got to review some of his last works, one of which was The American West as Living Space, a magisterial little essay collection published in 1987. No one has ever synthesized the environmentalist position with respect to western development, it seems to me, more thoughtfully, at a more informed level, or with more graceful language. In memorable Stegnerian cadences and rhythms—a language, incidentally, clearly meant to be spoken aloud as much as read—is a rather complete vision of the American West, its space, and its trajectory through time.

Despite its grace of presentation, however, Stegner’s vision was tough-minded, steeped in a knowledge of the layer cake of choices that fold together to make up history, and in its sum, amounted to a pretty caustic social criticism. It was a vision, with perhaps only one or two exceptions, that most any modern western environmentalist would nonetheless be proud to endorse. Yet what gave Stegner’s vision a power that many environmentalist manifestos lack is that it was a product not just of a far deeper knowledge of history but of harder, more penetrating thinking. History and intelligent thought were the main weapons in Stegner’s arsenal, and they gave him at least three key insights into how human societies ought to adapt to living in the American West.

Among the most simple yet compelling ideas Stegner addressed was his conviction that the West is, environmentally, a very different place from the rest of the United States, and that aridity is the cause for that difference. It is aridity that accomplishes the seemingly magical transformation of the landscape beyond the hundredth meridian, aridity that has served as the principal challenge to living in the West, aridity (and, I might add, elevation) that has imparted to the modern West its defining identity as the domain of the public lands. This stamp of aridity not only made Stegner aware that the West was, in truth, far more a place than a pioneering process, Stegner’s appreciation for aridity worked its way into his aesthetic. He loved what lack of moisture did to topography, air, light, life. The West has desert at its heart, and Stegner seemed so attuned to the principle that his books, at first opening, always seem to have just a hint of dry wind and sagebrush about them.

I know Stegner absorbed some of these ideas from Walter Prescott Webb and especially from Webb’s 1931 classic, The Great Plains: A Study of Institutions and Environment. Yet unlike Webb and Kansas historian James Malin, who argued over whether aridity was a positive or negative for the West, Stegner saw aridity simply as fact. But it is all-important fact. Not only has aridity altered history in fascinating ways, most crucially aridity’s consequences have forced westerners to address

Stegner looks over the Black Rock Desert, probably during the early 1960s.
limits, to face the fact that the world is (so to speak) flat and has borders. As with most of his key ideas, Stegner wrote not only well but often about aridity. In one particularly vivid passage, he wrote:

Aridity, more than anything else, gives the western landscape its character. It is aridity that gives the air its special dry clarity; aridity that puts brilliance in the light and polishes and enlarges the stars; aridity that leads the grasses to evolve as bunches rather than as turf; aridity that exposes the pigmentation of the raw earth and limits, almost eliminates, the color of chlorophyll; aridity that erodes the earth in cliffs and badlands rather than in softened and vegetated slopes. . . . The West, Walter Webb said, is a 'semi-desert with a desert heart.' If I prefer to think of it as two long chains of mountain ranges with deserts or semi-deserts in their rain shadow, that is not to deny that the primary unity of the West is a shortage of water.

That elemental premise—that it was not any lack of land, the so-called "closed space" argument, but a scarcity of water that defined western history and possibilities—led Stegner to anticipate the kinds of ideas environmental historians have made their careers analyzing. Water, like air and sustenance, is one of the few things the human animal absolutely must have to survive in a place. A place without water and air—Mars, let us say—can be settled by humans, but the requisites for life must be supplied artificially. Most of the West is not quite so dry as Voyager II photographs show Mars to be, but in fact the mountain snowpacks, while they renew themselves every winter, store only so much water for the drylands that surround them. Western aquifers like the vast Ogallala Aquifer, which saturates the gravels beneath the sweep of the central and southern Great Plains, are essentially fossil lakes, many of them as depletable as mine ore. They will one day be done; the earth really is flat.

To his credit Stegner realized what all this meant in terms of the larger environmental picture for the West, for adaptation and carrying capacity in particular. He consistently ridiculed the big technological fixes for aridity—the dams that have engineered so many western rivers out of existence ("original sin," Stegner called the process)—and was especially critical of the grandiose plans for diversion projects that promised more water from the Southeast or the Pacific Northwest or even the Yukon to transform the West into something it was not.

In some of his last books, Stegner urged a kind of organicist adaptation for western societies. From the idea that because of aridity the West is substantially different from elsewhere follows the argument that the West is more fragile, that its resources must be managed more carefully, that it cannot absorb the levels of environmental modification or human population the rest of the country perhaps can.

Stegner, meanwhile, knew firsthand the dangers inherent in the transience that is such a part of the American character, and this knowledge led him to a second important insight about human adaptation to the western environment. It led him to admire western societies that created unique responses to their local environments. It was Mormon Utah that first focused Stegner on the dialogue between place and culture. It was not until he left Utah that he realized what a unique lifeway had resulted from the interplay of Mormon culture and the ranges and canyons of the intermountain West. Mormon Country was his introductory exploration of that phenomenon, which deepened considerably in Beyond the Hundredth Meridian when he realized that John Wesley Powell's blueprint for a kind of planned, Darwinian adaptation to the West was based largely on Powell's admiration for the Mormon model.

In the communally based Mormon towns, Stegner found the growing seed of one distinctive sense of place in the West. That recognition made him look elsewhere for the phenomenon and find and ruminates about other cultures he believed were in the process of going native in the West—the New Mexicans of the mountain villages around Taos and Santa Fe, the ranchers of the Absaroka country in Montana, small cities with flavorful personalities like Missoula, Montana, with its literary and environmental colonies. He certainly did not always applaud the details of the process, as in frantically booming modern Utah, but it always interested him. And in his dissonance over whether he had ever managed to go native himself, he wrote a superb essay about creating a small ranch in the Los Altos Hills outside San Francisco that can serve as a guide to conscious place immersion—or what we would call western bioregionalism today.

Because he knew western history as well as he did, Stegner became famous as a literary champion of a third idea that continues to define the West. In the late 1950s, after three decades of agitation by now-famous conservation figures like Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, and Arthur Carhart, Congress began to hear testimony on bills to create a wilderness system in the United States. Stegner was by no means the only voice, or even the most important voice, to speak to the necessity of wilderness to American culture. But his 1960 "Wilderness Letter," now a worldwide classic of environmental history, was a galvanizing document. With good reason it has been quoted endlessly as perhaps the single best statement on behalf of wilderness preservation.

"I want to speak for the wilderness idea as something that
has helped form our character and that has certainly shaped our history as a people," Stegner wrote. In one sense Stegner's rationale was anthropomorphic: Preserving wilderness was crucial for Americans, he believed, not so much because it set aside habitat or preserved slices of the primeval earth, but because American history has tucked the idea of wilderness close in to the spiritual and mystical kernel of who Americans are. In the process of conquering the continent we in part surrendered our souls to the wild and the natural, and this has given Americans a sense of bigness, a primal sense of ourselves as "a wild species" that few modern peoples retain. Preserving wilderness amounted to a "geography of hope," as Stegner's memorable phrase put it, that humans could retain that sanity of knowing they are nature's children. Echoing Henry David Thoreau, Stegner believed that the wild held out to Americans our last, best hope of being "good animals."

More than his awareness of the limits imposed by arid-lands living, or his hope for a bioregional sense of place in the West, it was Stegner's appreciation of wild places and their effects on humans that made him a kind of model westerner. You have to suspect that what Stegner most wanted was to be left alone to read, experience, and write. But the circumstances of his time and his place made it impossible for him to hide in the scholar-writer's life. If he was, as the Sierra recently called him, a "reluctant activist," I think we ought to understand the adjective, yet note how often he set his reluctance aside, and recognize the inspiration his activism has had on many western thinkers and writers of our time. Encouraged by Bernard DeVoto, Stegner began writing environmental essays, usually about wilderness and public lands issues, in the early 1950s and continued to do so throughout his life. His edited volume, This Is Dinosaur, was the first cause-oriented coffee-table book published by the Sierra Club and was a critical factor in the great 1950s battle over western dams and rivers that converted environmentalism into the potent political movement it has been ever since.

It is a simple thing to say that Stegner's influence was large, but like the big, elemental ideas he had about the West, there is an irresistible force in simplicity. As has been said of Aldo Leopold, the man grew throughout his life, and what he came to know became our knowledge as well. But as Edward Abbey once observed, writing books and articles isn't enough. Knowledge isn't enough. Like Bernard DeVoto for an earlier generation, like Abbey for a somewhat different cultural subset, Stegner has served—and still serves—as an apotheosis of environmental activism for writers and even academics whose topic is the West. He married intellectual rigor and literary grace with passion and social commitment, and in his quiet way he promoted those who shared that commitment.

If the enemies of environmentalism have noticed this, and don't like it, blame Stegner. Good animal that he was, I somehow don't think he would mind.

Stegner describes this stretch of road from the Canadian border to Chinook, Montana, with the Bears Paw Mountains on the horizon, in The Big Rock Candy Mountain.
Thoughts on Wallace Stegner

by Ivan Doig

Salt Lake next Tuesday for a speech, and then we can escape to Vermont, which from here looks like a cool green sanctuary. Ah wilderness. There is too much frenzy and noise around here. Give me my scallop shell of quiet/My staff of faith to lean upon. And nine bean rows.

See you in December, I hope.
—Wallace Stegner in a letter to Ivan Doig, June 16, 1990

Not the least of Wallace Stegner's miraculous qualities was that the December of his life ended in springtime.

Age and illness, he had wintered past like the sturdy square-cut westerner he was; it took accident to do him in, and when the injuries from a Santa Fe car wreck claimed him, Stegner left amid a late, luminous blossoming of public and critical appreciation for his life's worth of books—twenty-nine of them across the spectrum of essay and history and fiction and biography, and at last people were seeing his work as the vast natural resource it is.

Better late than never, I suppose is the thing to say next. Wally Stegner himself, born in 1909 and thus a witness to every haywire development in the American West since then, maintained an almost preternatural patience with his fellow humanity—"the West... is the native home of hope," one of his most memorable sentences sang. But temper is a western commodity too, and right now mine can't help saying that in undervaluing for so long such an important body of work as Stegner's, the American literary establishment and the American reading public and the western states of America collectively shot themselves in their tangled trio of feet.

Pray up a little rain for all of us, if you know the chants. We're starting our seventh dry year, and God knows what Egyptian plagues will come down on us if we don't get some rain this winter. God knows how many Californians will flee off to the better-watered Northwest, too. It's in your own best interest. Pray, man.

—Stegner in a letter to Doig in Seattle, November 10, 1992

Over and over he said it, compellingly, passionately, honestly—"ad nauseam for fifty years," he chuckled in his final book and then said it one more time: "The whole west, including much of California, is arid country." (In an aside, he admitted that the Pacific Northwest is "a narrow exception.") In trying to review that last book of Stegner's, Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, I swiped from the Greek poet Archilocus and the philosopher Isaiah Berlin the notion that strong writers, the enduring hedgehog type, are said to know one big thing, and
Stegner powerfully always knew his: "I really only want to say that we may love a place and still be dangerous to it."

He and his irrefutable voice for the land made the right enemies. Ronald Reagan saw fit to bestow the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Frank Sinatra and Whittaker Chambers, but not on the most distinguished voice for the natural glory of his own California. Nor did the Jefferson Award, the National Endowment for the Humanities' distinguished career award, ever find its way to this most obvious candidate during the regimes of Lynn Cheney and William Bennett.

... Good stand of wavy gray hair, rugged square-cut face, bifocals in either horn rims like mine or what used to be called tortoise-shells; I don't know what western genes account for the two of us standing there in don't-give-a-damn heavyframe glasses.

...—Doig's diary entry on crossing paths with Stegner at the American Booksellers' convention, May 1988

In person, he looked like a one-man Mount Rushmore.

That solidity, Stegner's Scandinavian-Saskatchewan-Montana-Utah-etcetera mien of flatfooted common sense and endurance, went much more than skin-deep. He knew his stuff, and he knew that he knew it. An academic interviewer once tried to get him to pontificate on "what it is that western writers will have to do to produce a crop of distinguished novels." Stegner looked at him and said dryly: "Write good books."

It took a little self-prodding, but Stegner could laugh at himself. I remember hearing from both him (ruefully) and A. B. Guthrie, Jr., (indignantly) the tale of the Stegners making an overnight stay at the Guthries' near Chateau. Trying to be helpful about breakfast-time logistics, Stegner said: "We get up around seven." Guthrie, to whom morning existed only to ameliorate the night before, glowered at him and rasped: "Well, we don't."

Shestegner once tallied up that in his hyper-western boyhood, he lived in "twenty places in eight states and Canada" and one of my regrets is that my home state of Montana was among his less fond memories. His main recollection of the Stegner family's short time in Great Falls was "humiliation," he told me with a wry face but obviously meaning it. Fresh from a Saskatchewan homestead, he'd started junior high school there wearing moccasin-like elkskin shoes and a sweater with a broad band around it which he suspected made him, a pudgy boy at the time, look like a striped pig. Oddly but honestly, Stegner always bore an unnecessary burden on himself from his family's peripatetic pattern: "We turned tail and disappeared, and I never got over the faint residual shame of quitting. I admired the stickers, and I still do." Maybe it was out of that iron tumbleweed past that he himself learned the stick-to-itiveness of his writing and thinking.


None of us is going to replace him, and it's just about as doubtful whether any half-dozen current writers and thinkers at this end of the country can produce a combined rainbow of work to equal his.

So, in the West, this ever-old, ever-new part of the American land, we resort to the lessons that shaped Wallace Stegner and that he wrote so long and eloquently about. Go on with what you got. Start over when you have to. Our advantage is that we have his lifework to draw on. In his last years, when the national bestsellerdom of Crossing to Safety and his Collected Stories inspired paperback publishers to pour his earlier books back onto the bookstore shelves, Wallace Stegner was a bit bemused at getting mined as a new literary resource. "I'm a land of opportunity," he laughed, "just like the West." Was he ever.

The Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society has preserved the Stegner home in Eastend and has mounted on the pump a plaque in tribute to Wallace Stegner.
The Good Rain
Stegner and the Wild

by William Kittredge

"You don't go there to find something, you go there to disappear."
—Wallace Stegner

There is no such thing as a landscape, there are only the processes of nature, and those of location, which in humans derive so largely from our incessant story-telling. More than a decade ago, in the introduction to an issue of *TriQuarterly* devoted to story-telling in the American West, Steve Krauzer and I quoted Wallace Stegner and made some generalizations from his work. I'd like to go back to those quotations.

This is from *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*:

Things greened beautifully that June. Rains came up out of the southeast, piling up solidly, moving toward them as slowly and surely as the sun moved, and it was fun to watch them come, the three of them standing in the doorway. When they saw the land east of them darken under the rain Bo would say, "Well, doesn't look as if it's going to miss us," and they would jump to shut windows and bring things in from yard or clothesline. Then they could stand quietly in the door and watch the good rain come, the front of it like a wall and the wind ahead of it stirring up dust, until it reached them and drenched the bare packed earth of the yard, and the ground smoked under its feet, and darkened, and ran with little streams, and they heard the swish of the rain on roof and ground and in the air.

And there's this, from the story, "Carrion Spring," in *Wolf Willow*:

Three days of chinook had uncovered everything that had been under snow since November. The yard lay discolored and ugly, gray ashpile, rusted cans, spilled lignite, bones. The clinkers that had given them winter footing to privy and stable lay in raised gray wavers across the mud; the strung lariats they had used for lifelines in blizzard weather had dried out and sagged to the ground. Muck was knee deep in the corrals by the sod-roofed stable, the whitewashed logs were yellowed at the corners from dogs lifting their legs against them. Sunken drifts around the hay yard were a reminder of how many times the boys had had to shovel out there to keep the calves from walking into the stacks across the top of them. Across the wan and disheveled yard the willows were bare, and beyond them the floorplain hill was brown. The sky was roiled with gray cloud.

Two experiences, one running with water and hope, the other two-hearted, deceptive, and demonic, both from Stegner's childhood in the Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan—a past which was emotionally his, and because of his insistence, worth writing about, fathoming, making sense of.

Those paragraphs echo in me like episodes from my own life. "They could . . . watch the good rain come . . . the ground smoked under its feet . . ." The language seems to call up images from a life which was mine once. I suspect this is true for many people who grew up amid distances in the American West. It's a notion which leads me to wonder how young I was when I first made an attempt at reading *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*. I like to imagine the child who was myself out on the screened-in veranda in front of our house in Warner Valley on a summertime evening with that big book propped up in his lap, listening to the voice and the talk and learning to think about the life I was in the midst of, beginning to imagine my way toward attempts at trying to articulate my own love of the great thunderstorms that came down across our valley.

One reason I like to wonder is because Stegner's paragraphs seem like ideal versions of the ones I wanted to write thirty years ago at Oregon State University when I first got the urge—that sense of how many times the boys had had to shovel out there to keep the calves from walking into the stacks across the top of them. Across the wan and disheveled yard the willows were bare, and beyond them the floorplain hill was brown. The sky was roiled with gray cloud.

Two experiences, one running with water and hope, the other two-hearted, deceptive, and demonic, both from Stegner's childhood in the Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan—a past which was emotionally his, and because of his insistence, worth writing about, fathoming, making sense of.

As I understand it, the Greeks had a word for such moments, *exphasis*, which means that moment which contains the past and implies the future. The impulse to understand them, I think is mostly religious and probably the work I have always wanted to get at. Which maybe accounts for my quite irrational affection for some patches of Stegner's writing.

But there at the beginning I let myself be talked out of my reason for writing—paragraphs like these of Stegner's—by writing teachers. It was a failure of nerve I excuse by saying, well, I was only a kid. But it cost me a lot of years. Now I'm a writing teacher. Beware of people like me.

Stegner is an artist who reminds other artists of fundamental responsibilities. The last week I've been reading a book about
story-telling as it was used by the very early Greeks, people who were in the throes of learning, if you will, to think. The book, The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony by Robert Calasso, seems to me to be about the way the Greeks' early understanding of the fluid world was mirrored by the endlessly transformative cycles of the mythological stories they told in their attempts to make sense of the incessantly metamorphosing place where they lived.

Of Phidias’s great statue of Zeus in the temple to Kronos in Olympia, Calasso writes: “The gold and ivory seethed like an ants’ nest. Zeus didn’t exist except as a support for animals and lilies, arches and drapes, old scenes forever repeated. But Zeus was more than just the motionless guardian seated on his throne: Zeus was all those scenes, those deeds, muddled and shuffled about, rippling his body and throne in tiny shivers. Without meaning to, Phidias had illustrated that Zeus cannot live alone: without meaning to, he had represented the essence of polytheism.”

But as we know, all that changed. The great project of European civilization, the quieting of nature, the conquest and possession, was already under way. Of later, classical Greek interest in attempts to still the writhing of the world, Calasso writes, “[They] were chiefly interested in shaping molds . . . We live in a warehouse of casts that have lost their molds.”

Calasso is, I think, talking about the domestication of plants and animals, the irrigation canals, the pinning things down and the weeding, the history of European conceptions of the wild, making things fit in the New World, genocide and agriculture as practiced in the American West. He is talking about our history of trying to put a stop to the incessant shape-changing, that flow and unceasing interpenetration of energies which we now, together with the early Greeks, understand as that which is actual.

No matter how arrogant we may become inside the convolutions of our technologies, Stegner reminds us, as he shows us those bones from under the snow and the high roiled sky on the horizon, as his great storm of rain sweeps toward us, we inhabit a universe our categorizing cannot remotely approach naming, one which doubtless in any foreseeable future will remain at least partways unfathomable. Stegner reminds us to stay humble and to stay compassionate because this animal life is all we have for sure. He reminds us to love it, make the best of it. He reminds us that such love is the source of our best politics. He reminds us to attempt staying true to what we actually have.
Wallace Stegner: Western Humanist

Stegner’s realistic and probing understanding of the West came neither quickly nor easily. Reared on the tail ends of Canadian and American frontiers, Stegner hopscotched around the two Wests with his migrating family; his father searching for riches at the end of a rainbow, and his mother patiently following. His boyhood in Canada and teen and college years in Salt Lake City also introduced him to western communities as varied as jerry-built East End, Saskatchewan, and as centripetal as the Mormon capital. These initiations into frontier and regional strivings toward identity, although at first personally traumatic, later became revealing themes in Stegner’s mature fiction and histories.

Meanwhile, Stegner was learning other kinds of lessons. Bookish, perhaps a mama’s boy, and pushed rapidly through the grades, he drifted through high school and college before deciding on graduate school in English at the University of Iowa. Early on a ravenous if undisciplined reader, Stegner now tried to educate himself in huge amounts of English and American literature that previously escaped him. Then marriage to fellow graduate student Mary Page and miserable instructor’s salaries at Utah, Wisconsin, and Harvard brought on added financial worries and whetted his interest in free-lance work. Once available, these assignments forced Stegner to think and write about what he knew best—the West and his own life.

From the beginning Stegner consciously mined his life and the histories of his family and friends for his first fiction. After his prize-winning initial novel, Remembering Laughter (1937), based on his wife’s family history, he turned out a series of apprentice works that culminated in his first blockbuster, The Big Rock Candy Mountain (1943). Hailed as a sprawling, picareseque story of the early twentieth-century West, the novel, Stegner admitted, was “family history reasonably straight.” The author’s parents served as models for the stunning portraits of Bo Mason—booming, restless, wandering husband—and Elsa Mason—a nesting, reluctant, and peace-loving wife dragged throughout the Far West. Here was the first major installment of Stegner’s extraordinary career as a western humanist, a superb novel bursting with the stark story of a questing family crisscrossing the two Wests searching for stasis and meaning.

This fertile marriage of region and the human condition spawned other notable offspring. Two collections of stories, The Women on the Wall (1950) and City of Living (1956), illustrated Stegner’s first-rank abilities in dealing with characters in tension, especially in such memorable stories as “The View From the Balcony,” “The Women on the Wall,” “The Blue-Winged Teal,” and “Field Guide to Western Birds.” One of Stegner’s favorite books, Wolf Willow (1962), which he termed a “librarian’s nightmare” because it stitched together history, memoir, and fiction, also overflowed with lyrical and penetrating observations on the history and nascent society of the author’s Canadian West.

Most of all, however, Stegner’s Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West (1954), along with Henry Nash Smith’s pathbreaking Virgin Land (1950) and Earl Pomeroy’s pioneering essays of the 1950s, urged Americans to rethink their mistaken notions about the West. A generation before other westerners, Stegner asserted that if Americans had followed the scientific, rational arguments of John Wesley Powell rather than the romantic idealism of William Gilpin and other expansionistic tub-thumpers, the American West...
Richard W. Etulain

would have been saved from many of its economic busts, environmental disasters, and even cultural tragedies. Like The Big Rock Candy Mountain, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian brimmed with Stegner's humanistic knowledge of the American West and its English-speaking peoples.

Even though Stegner's mid-career sparkled with satisfying achievements as a writer, teacher, and editor, he also continued to learn from buffeting personal and professional disappointments. By his mid-thirties, only he survived from his family, his mother succumbing to cancer, his brother to pneumonia, and his father to suicide. And there were dry spells as a writer. When reviewers did not react well to Preacher and the Slave (1950), later retitled Joe Hill, Stegner "quit writing fiction" for nearly a decade. Even when Angle of Repose (1971) won the Pulitzer Prize and The Spector Bird (1976) the National Book Award, neither was reviewed in the New York Times Book Review. And later, when the lordly Times Book Review lionized Stegner as the "Dean of Western writers," the paper misnamed him William.

Still, Stegner won increasingly significant attention in the last two or three decades of his life. He gained thousands of new appreciative readers even though his fiction focused on families, friendship, and the humane qualities of his characters rather than on the despair, social criticism, and hyped ethnicity that marked much contemporary American fiction. Moreover, his three most recent books, Crossing to Safety (1987), Collected Stories (1990), and Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs (1992), all appeared on the New York Times Book Review bestseller lists, won major press attention, and were quickly reprinted in prestigious paperback series.

Stegner's outstanding novel of the West, Angle of Repose, tellingly illustrates his brilliant abilities in combining historical research, imaginative characterizations, and humanistic perspectives. Recognizing the cultural significance of Mary Hallock Foote as an eastern woman illustrator who comes west to discover a new local color region, Stegner used her life, not for the biography his graduate student began and abandoned, but as the central source for his premier historical novel. Her story as a snobbish immigrant alien to the frontier West—"I love my West when I am in the East"—became a perfect vehicle for comparing the two regions. Likewise her troubled marriage served as one sample of several imperfect unions that Stegner examined in the novel, all searching for their "angle of repose." Seeing firsthand in his own father and mother what dilemmas and frictions arose from mismatched personalities, Stegner returned to this theme repeatedly in his most noteworthy fiction.

In Angle of Repose and in the remainder of his writings, Stegner assiduously avoided a Wild West. Instead, in his fiction, histories, and essays he called for careful and judicious scrutiny of families, friendships, and cultural landscapes that avoided the frantic adventure, white- and black-hat stereotypes, and unbelievable fantasy of a six-gun West. He once remarked that too many third-rate scribblers were still panning the low grade gravel of the Lola Montezes, Calamity Janes, and Belle Stairs when they should be mining the rich ores of frontier and modern western institutions, social transformations, and cultural shifts.

In its most inclusive meaning, Wallace Stegner was a regionalist. Like southerner William Faulkner and New Englander Robert Frost, he used local and place-based materials to examine wider worlds. True, most of his best writing focuses on his native West, but his human and physical landscapes are as varied and complex as nature itself. The lives of John Wesley Powell, Mary Hallock Foote, Wallace Stegner, and the communities of pioneer Canada, Mormon Utah, and modern California serve as mediums for illuminating commentaries on a plethora of people and experiences. All his life Stegner tried to draw a line between his regional work and stereotyped popular Westerns. Once, when asked the difference between his and Louis L'Amour's Wests, he replied with a chuckle, "a few million dollars."

Westerners know Wallace Stegner as author of more than two dozen volumes of superb fiction, history, and biography about the region, but they and other Americans probably are even better acquainted with his writings about the environment. Well before others became born-again ecological evangelists, Stegner urged his countrymen to show much more care in their uses of land, water, and other natural resources. Urged by pundit Bernard DeVoto and others to employ his powerful pen for environmental causes, Stegner became a notable spokesman for conservation, taking on farmers and ranchers, government agencies, and planners who threatened to redo the vast spaces of the West. Above all he implored Americans to retain wilderness areas to encourage a much-needed "geography of hope" as a counterbalance against the expansionist motives that drove Americans to destroy even that which they loved.

In The Sound of Mountain Water (1969), The American West as Living Space (1987), and Where the Bluebird Sings, Stegner collected his luminous essays calling for more beneficial consideration of the West's landscapes and resources. Yet here, as in all parts of his life, Stegner was a model of humane balance, not a Don Quixote galloping after every doctrine of wilderness idealism. To the end of his fourscore and four years, Stegner was a thinker not a throbber on environmental issues. Obviously no mindless advocate of a Sagebrush Rebellion, neither was he a lockstep follower of pied pipers waiting to redeem all the West from beneficial uses of land and water.

Overall, Stegner learned what so few understand: our lives are
oxymoronic, most often compromised combinations of idealism and pragmatism. Preaching thoughtful sermons on the environment well before latter-day ideologues took to their pulpits, he never forgot that farmers and ranchers had to use resources to make their livings. His fiction and his histories, as well as his writings on the environment, were ever wise marriages of lofty ideals and necessary realities. Avoiding empty landscapes and superficial protagonists, he peopled his settings with full-bodied characters living in, conflicting with, and adjusting to their regional environments.

Stegner’s wisdom and balance were particularly evident to those who knew him personally. First introduced to Stegner’s work when a graduate student in history in the early 1960s, I met him a decade later at a western writers conference in Utah. Angle of Repose had just won the Pulitzer Prize, and he was being lauded as the West’s leading man of letters.

He wore his laurels lightly, and I was especially impressed with his friendliness and energy. He calmly answered questions, his alert, blue eyes and white hair setting off a handsome, masculine face. He took time to chat with me, and we later began a sporadic correspondence. Later, I was elated when he asked me to provide information for the long essay he and his son Page published in the Atlantic Monthly.

I continued to read everything he wrote in the 1970s, and early in 1978 spoke to him about a book of conversations dealing with the West. He encouraged the project, so in the summer of 1980 and in early 1981 we met for two unforgettable weeks of chatting about the West. Nothing before or since matches the stimulation I received in talking with Stegner for three hours a day for two weeks. I experienced firsthand what so many observed in the last generation: no one spoke with more persuasion, with more humane insight about the West than Stegner.

I was even more taken with Stegner as a person. I thought he had experienced in earlier Canadian and American frontiers and Wests what I had known growing up the son of an immigrant Basque sheepman on an isolated ranch twenty miles from the nearest small town in eastern Washington. Stegner exuded the outdoor West, he acutely recalled his rural boyhood, and he dreamed of a wider world through books. These were shocks of recognition. They were my experiences too—just a generation or two later.

Those were the draws—first to his writing, then to him personally, and finally to his experiences in those northern Wests with which I identified. Stegner once wrote that he was not too certain of what he was, but he knew where he was from. He helped me to see that about myself.

What I learned in those memorable conversations in Stegner’s home in the Los Altos Hills west of the Stanford campus parallels what others have recognized through their acquaintance with Stegner the man and writer. He was an enormously talented writer and a generous friend of understanding and foresight. Wallace Stegner stretched our minds while he delighted our souls.

Books by Wallace Stegner

Remembering Laughter, 1937
The Potter’s House, 1938
On a Darkling Plain, 1940
Fire and Ice, 1941
Mormon Country, 1942
The Big Rock Candy Mountain, 1943
One Nation, 1945 (with the editors of Look)
Second Growth, 1947
The Women on the Wall, 1950
The Preacher and the Slave, 1950
Reprinted as Joe Hill: A Biographical Novel, 1969
Beyond the Hundredth Meridian; John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West, 1954
This Is Dinosaur: Echo Park Country and Its Magic Rivers, 1956 (editor)
The City of the Living, and Other Stories, 1956
Great American Short Stories, 1957 (editor, with Mary Stegner)
A Shooting Star, 1961
Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier, 1962
The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail, 1964
The American Novel: From James Fenimore Cooper to William Faulkner, 1965 (editor)
Twenty Years of Stanford Stories, 1966 (editor, with others)
All the Little Live Things, 1967
The Sound of Mountain Water, 1969
Angle of Repose, 1971
Discovery! The Search for Arabian Oil, 1971
The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Bernard DeVoto, 1974
The Letters of Bernard DeVoto, 1975 (editor)
The Spectator Bird, 1976
Recapitulation, 1979
One Way to Spell Man, 1982
Crossing to Safety, 1987
The American West as Living Space, 1987
Collected Stories, 1990
Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs; Living and Writing in the West, 1992
presidential candidate from under a cluster of lights. "As soon as the strains of music filled the inky black midnight air, men, women, and children came trailing over to the William Jennings Bryan home. The street was literally packed with them," Trego recalled. "They came in pajamas, bath robes, negligee [sic], partly dressed, tousled heads, and long braids. What a combination of clothing and array of colors! . . . It was a sight never to be forgotten." Bryan, too, came to his front porch. "His eulogy and praise of the band were an inspiration and a masterpiece." 6

Allotted only two hours before their special train had to leave, the band rushed to the station. On the 838-mile return trip, the train averaged eighty miles an hour, a record for the Union Pacific at that time. "Record breaking rides are thrilling, but their cost is high in nerves," said one delegate. 6

After their return, members changed the name of the band to the Butte Mines Band as new recruits worked in various Butte mines. Over the next fifty years, they would win three amateur band championships, play over one thousand concerts, serenade every troop train leaving Butte during World War I, and perform for presidents Taft, Wilson, Harding, both Roosevelts, and a young senator from Missouri named Truman. Samuel gloated in his later years, "If anyone can name any major event in Montana, at least in Butte, that the Butte band hasn’t played for I’d like to know what it was." 7

DAVID REYNOLDS, professor of music at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana, lectured on the history of the Butte Mines Band as part of the Montana Committee for the Humanities’ Speakers Bureau series. He holds degrees in music from the University of Kansas, Florida State University, and the University of Maryland and performs as principal trumpet of the Billings Symphony Orchestra.

Renamed the Butte Mines Band in 1900, the band leads a throng of miners through the mud during the annual Miner’s Union Day parade circa 1900. Participants follow as far as the eye can see.
THE ASTONISHING ORIGINS OF WALLACE STEGNER’S ENVIRONMENTAL GENIUS

by Beth LaDow

When I was asked to participate in the inauguration of the Wallace Stegner Society, to break the champagne on the launch, as it were, by celebrating a great writer’s contributions to environmental writing and thinking, I imagined Stegner’s vast West as an ocean, and how his ship sailed over the whole of it, and how the champagne had been chilling for this posthumous christening for a long, long time. And then, as with all good ship stories, I thought of a boy.

Picture an alert, undersized, rather sickly child, about age nine, lonely and emphatic as a tiny exclamation mark on a vast, treeless plain. The wind is constant, the heat withering, the cold shattering, the sky a source of seemingly endless cruelty. What is he doing, this boy, busy as a castaway making a home? He kills gophers by the dozen—poisoning, trapping, snaring, shooting, or drowning them as near to oblivion as he can. He chops off their tails to sell to the Canadian government for a few cents apiece. He wins a competition for most tails, so good is he at gopher killing. He watches flies crawl onto heat-softened flypaper and wave their gummy limbs in torturous gestures toward escape, captive, his mother suggests, as she and he are on this arid alkali flat. He traps and cages a ferret to skin for its white winter fur—he thinks it is a weasel—and watches it suck the blood out of the live gophers he tosses it. He spares another weasel with a pitchfork and, fascinated, watches it die. He stones to death a badger in self-defense. He sees his father plow up the prairie, watches his parents’ dreams of agricultural riches pulverized along with the dirt. His hands and feet, victims of Raynaud’s disease, grow cold easily and are sometimes numb in the rigid northern winters. He longs for water, for the rarely heard timbre of a neighboring homesteader’s voice, for the sound of a stream and the sprayed, cooled vales of the distant mountains, tantalizingly visible on the horizon.

In town he has shit-slinging fights in corrals. He mocks and tortures the Chinese laundymen, though privately his friend, along with the other boys. He carries a .22, tramping the countryside, as he told me, to shoot “everything that moves.”

Remarkable! Not for the thousands of children who grew up with the country on the Great Plains frontier. But for the man who was to become the author of the famous 1960 “Wilderness Letter,” perhaps the most eloquent and widely quoted plea for wilderness in the twentieth century, and a leading light of the American environmental movement, this background might be fairly described as astonishing. It is at least not what the fourth graders in my son’s class in suburban Boston, or their parents, might expect from an environmental hero. I know this from experience. Every year at my children’s elementary school the fourth grade holds a “Biography Day,” a kind of living museum where each child, dressed in a costume, plays the part of a famous and admirable American. I have been to a few of these, and among the famous and admirable Rachel Carson and Laura Ingalls Wilders and Henry David Thoreaus, no one yet has dressed up as Wallace Stegner. He has not made it onto the Greatest Hits list of nine-year-olds or their teachers. The reasons are undoubtedly complicated. But I wonder, how does a teacher explain to a fourth grader, a brutally honest audience, the trajectory of such a life as Stegner’s? From where in the frontier cruelties, the macho naming of quick prejudices and the harsh economic struggle that was often purely utilitarian or exploitive toward the land, came the powerful love of the earth and its creatures and the deep recognition that close and widespread human contact with nature is essential to our natures? As Wallace Stegner wrote in his biography of John Wesley Powell, “It is

AS ONE WHO HAD HIS SHOULDERS BENT AGAINST THE YOKE OF TRUTH in a broad territory both literary and geographical, Wallace Stegner was a figure whom everyone wants to claim as his own, and, indeed, since his death in 1993, we have seen a kind of western land grab for the Stegner legacy. “He is ours,” say westerners and environmentalists and writers, and such sentiment is understandable. Stegner himself said of his childhood home on the bald-faced Saskatchewan prairie that if he belonged to any place it was there, and if to any tribe it was that one. But Stegner was too deep a thinker to confine the feeling of belonging to a place with parochial pride or ownership, just as he saw beyond a narrow wilderness ethic to the perhaps conflicting good of people learning to live well in a place. Though rooted in the arid West, his thinking was too broad and nuanced to easily corral into any special interest—an admirable resistance, born of a rare kind of intellectual and emotional freedom. That, as much as anything, is what animates this essay on Wallace Stegner’s legacy as an environmental writer, delivered on May 24, 2000, on the occasion of the founding of the Wallace Stegner Society, deep in Stegner’s onetime academic stomping grounds—Cambridge, Massachusetts.
worth looking for a moment at how he was made.”

When I met Wallace Stegner in 1990 while researching my book *The Medicine Line*, inspired in part by Stegner’s memoir *Wolf Willow* set in the unforgiving landscape of the United States–Canada borderland, we talked about his Saskatchewan childhood. Already floored by his generosity, I asked him afterward if I might have his permission to send copies of the tapes of our conversation to the Medicine Hat Museum in Medicine Hat, Alberta. “I don’t remember saying anything of museum quality,” he quipped. The truth is, even absent from fourth-grade museums-for-a-day, his influence across the twentieth-century conservation movement is a veritable diorama of environmental genius—if by genius we mean that rare ability to make the particular seem universal and to convey what is essential, vital, and true.

Others have written extensively about Stegner’s contributions to twentieth-century environmental writing and awareness. It is an impressive record, triggered here in Cambridge during World War II. While teaching at Harvard, Stegner developed a close friendship with fellow westerner, writer, and public provocateur Bernard De Voto, a human pressure valve whose agitation for the initially reluctant Stegner to become an environmental activist proved irresistible. The two of them, disturbed by what they viewed as thoughtless environmental degradation after the war, became equal-opportunity critics of enemies to western lands, from local stockmen resisting federal control to federal dam builders with grand designs. With *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, his acclaimed biography of John Wesley Powell, in 1954, and an essay that saved Dinosaur National Monument from being flooded by a dam in 1955, Stegner began forty years of muscular conservationist writing and advocacy. Although he dismissed himself as a “paper tiger,” as someone

Pictured here at age twenty, Stegner, who would pen perhaps the most eloquent and widely quoted plea for wilderness in the twentieth century, spent many hours of his childhood shooting “at everything that move[d.]”
At right, Sierra Club past president Edgar Wayburn presents Wallace Stegner with the club’s 1982 John Muir Award. The certificate, in part, praises Stegner’s “wise and forceful essays in defense of the physical and spiritual values of wilderness.”

who put greater stock in the law and hard-nosed political types than in writing, his eloquent activism influenced more than one secretary of the interior, and undoubtedly the National Wilderness Act of 1964. In 1982 he received the Sierra Club’s John Muir Award.

Stegner’s most celebrated piece, and perhaps his most preservative in content, known as the “Wilderness Letter,” was written to David Pesonen of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. The letter’s ideas were not original. They descend directly from Thoreau’s notion of “the tonic of wilderness,” vital, as described in Walden, because “[w]e require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomable by us because unfathomable.” “We can never have enough of nature,” Thoreau told us in 1854: “We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.” Stegner, in 1960, attuned the message to the modern ear:

Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed, if we permit the last virgin forests to get turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases . . . if we . . . push our paved roads through the last of the silence, so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it. . . .

We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.

Stegner made the idea sing.

His environmental notions, though, were not always consistent. Preservationist, conservationist, steward—all the labels fit him somewhat. Even within this last quotation, Stegner’s wilderness may contain human beings—even cattle ranchers, he goes on to say—yet is pristine, separate, set apart. Despite his impassioned paean to the “wilderness idea,” he frequently argued for wise-use conservation and once decried environmentalists of a “sentimental fringe” with a bent toward “blind preservationism in all circumstances,” regardless of people’s lives. In Greek poet Archilochus’s old division of people into Hedges, who know one big thing, and
Foxes, who know lots of little things, Stegner was not always the best Hedgehog. He knew the West was dry and that that made all the difference. He knew that a sense of place mattered. He did not always know how he defined wilderness. But we do not need Stegner to be Hedgehog about the environment. On a topic of such passionate extremes, his breadth of vision is a welcome relief.

Consistency aside, how did the gopher-killing boy from the prairie, whom Stegner later called a “sensuous little savage,” come to write these things? Even Stegner felt the need to explain it to himself. Until recently, I never took much notice that he begins his famous biography of John Wesley Powell with a sentence about Henry Adams. But Stegner’s framing of Powell in the context of Adams makes perfect sense: Adams, a Boston Brahmin descended from two presidents, explained his life as the Education of Henry Adams, the title of his autobiography. The boyhood shaped the man. Stegner trained the same lens on his subject, and through Powell, considered his own culture-starved background, his own possibilities. “The thing that many western boys called their education,” he wrote, “would have seemed to [Henry] Adams a deprivation, so barren was it of opportunities and so pitiful were its methods and equipment. Considered in any way but in terms of its results in men and women, it WAS a deprivation. But the men it produced over a period of several generations . . . constituted a strong regional type, and their virtues as exemplified in a Lincoln or a Mark Twain force the conclusion that this crude society with its vulgar and inadequate culture somehow made noble contributions to Mankind.”

John Wesley Powell, Stegner claims, was one of that persuasion. How did he learn? “[B]y wandering, by hard labor, by the Bible, by an outdoor life in small towns and on farms, by the optimism and practicality and democracy of the frontier, by the occasional man of learning and the occasional books he met, by country schools and the ill-equipped cubs or worn-out misfits who taught them. . . If there were not many opportunities, if the cultural darkness was considerable, it was also true that in that darkness any little star showed as plainly as a sun.” Stegner was one of those suns—a miraculous champion of the environment that the last-gasp, make-a-killing, hard-luck homesteaders of his childhood were so hell-bent on subduing into submission.

Willa Cather wrote that miracles are daily affairs, largely unnoticed because they “depend on our perceptions being made finer so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always.” That refined sensibility describes not only Wallace Stegner as a writer but also his path to becoming an environmentalist. It was a path worn, like those in the grass of his prairie childhood, gradually and lovingly, by intimate experience, smooth with the details of life.

Unlike many environmental writers—Thoreau and Stegner’s student Edward Abbey come to mind—Wallace Stegner had a dazzling quality beyond the requisite impassioned yet detached observation of nature; he was a remarkably balanced human being. He called his former student Edward Abbey, a more radical, misanthropic environmentalist, “a red hot moment in the conscience of the country.” Stegner was a cooler, steadier sort, yet never distant. While he admired Thoreau, he, like E. B. White, censured the man’s shortcomings. Thoreau, to speak plainly, was something of a jerk—wise enough to ask the question, “How best shall we live?” but not quite up to answering it with full honesty or grace.

He is a “zealot,” “intemperate,” notes Stegner in his “Qualified Homage to Thoreau,” a “didactic” and “dogmatic” stylist, totally lacking in humility, “saying something that has been waiting a thousand years to be said so well” in one moment and asserting something “so outrageous” as to set one’s teeth on edge the next. Thoreau was keen with nature, and beyond that, deeply thoughtful about society in general and even the local community sphere. But what Thoreau was least good at was deciding how best to live within the complicated entanglements of other individual people. We have a hard time imagining Walden, the Novel.

But Stegner was at his best as a novelist, pressing through that middle ground of difficulties—troubles of the heart, conflicting desires, questions of identity, complications where right and wrong do not easily frame the messily human. And he put the natural world at the center of the mix. Nature, in Stegner’s writing, is more than a backdrop or a source of aphorism or cosmic meaning; it is infused with stories—geological, biological, psychological. As he drives back West near the end of The Big Rock Candy Mountain, Stegner’s protagonist Bruce Mason traces, in a stunning example of environmental writing, the feeling of coming home: “[H]e drove directly from rainy spring into deep summer, from prison into freedom,” Stegner writes.

He was a westerner, whatever that was. The moment he crossed the Big Sioux and got into the brown country where the raw earth showed, the minute the grass got sparser and air dryer and the service stations less grandiose and the towns rattier, the moment he saw his first lonesome shack on the baking flats with a tipsy windmill creaking away at the reluctant underground water, he knew approximately where he belonged.
of great coasting clouds looked across acres of flax in bloom... How does one know what wild-erness has meant to Americans unless he has shared the guilt of wastefully and ignorantly tampering with it in the name of Progress?

"We took delight in the animals we killed," he wrote, "his pets burrowing owls, magpies, a coyote pup, "all captives from the wild... I knew them as my little brothers, as fellow creatures, and I have never been able to look upon animals in any other way since." Paradoxical, perhaps. But childhood in the Saskatchewan outback in the 1910s gave Wallace Stegner a wellspring of raw experience that, as he drew from and wrote of it, watered the West for all of us. It introduced him to the great human quarrel with ourselves, which for him required a humble and unflinching conversation with the land. "I may not know who I am," he wrote, referring to that time and place, "but I know where I am from... If I am native to anything, I am native to this."

There are those, I realize, who believe they no longer require this intimacy, who no longer regard human beings and their moral, psychological, and spiritual struggles as part of an exchange with the natural world. These people, so they believe, no longer need the place-infused world of Wallace Stegner. I heard one of them say so recently, at a friend's book group just north of here in Andover, Massachusetts, to which I was graciously invited as a guest. The group had read Crossing to Safety, Stegner's novel about friendship and endurance, and late in the conversation the woman in question, happily under the delusion that the whole plot of life occurs indoors, expressed her exasperation with the book that by this time had become apparent: "I don't need to hear about the color of the field and the bird on the fence post," she gasped, waving a pale hand; "I kept thinking, 'Why can't he just get on with it?'"

If I might apply her impatience to my thoughts on Stegner, allow me to reduce what I have been saying into the simple and ancient adage: "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy."

I have told the story of how, by some mysterious process of moral and spiritual titration, a small boy retains the good of the Saskatchewan frontier and discards the bad. I am tempted to say that we suburban parents have it all wrong—with the tended lawns and groomed and protected childhoods we work so hard to provide. I look at my children in their soccer gear and think that perhaps what they need is to stone a badger or two or in self-defense to come to love a badger. But history and biography have no prescriptions. I cannot take my children to raise on the plains of Saskatchewan and hope they turn out like Wallace Stegner. I can, however, give them his great countrysid of words.

I suspect that Wallace Stegner would take the Wallace Stegner Society with more than a grain of salt. As someone who understood his place in the biosphere, he had the kind of humility that we often call wisdom. "Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights," wrote Thoreau. Perhaps the best part of Stegner's legacy, beyond his remarkable body of writing, beyond his bequest of countless writers trained at his Stanford creative-writing program, beyond the immeasurable good he did toward preserving the landscape of the arid West, is that through these things he shows us a way to live: how to be alert, how to make our perceptions finer, how to see what was in front of us all along. His histories and literature are reason enough for enduring admirers and hangers-on,
reason enough for our wanting to wear a Wallace Stegner costume. And we all have tried on that costume, let us confess (it is neat and even elegant, as Wendell Berry says, but never ostentatious). But if we are going to have any kind of society in his name, it cannot be made of words and word lovers alone. For, like the bird song just outside our window, his words beckon us to understand, and also to reach beyond understanding. Come outside, he calls, as did that boy on the ocean of prairie; come back into the world of plants and animals, rocks and sand, wind and water, to the great bowl of sky that stretches over the seas of grass, to the wind-scoured moonscape of canyons and plateaus. Leave behind your sentimentality, your idealism, your romantic delusions, your pride, your fear of death. Leave behind your costumes. And here, here you will disappear into something worthy of your deepest regard. Here, if you pay close attention, you will find that you already belong to something of museum quality, a place in nature half remembered where, in Stegner’s words, “[S]ome of the beauty, the innocence, and the callousness must stick to [you], and some of the regret.”

BETH LADOW is a writer and historian living in Winchester, Massachusetts. She is the author of Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland (2001).

Stegner’s vision of wilderness always included human beings. “We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in,” he wrote. “For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.” Below, he looks across Nevada’s Black Rock Desert in the 1960s.

Courtesy Mary Stegner
June 16, 1990

Dear Ivan:

Here are the books, only mildly damaged with signatures.

I heard from Alan Cheuse that you were prominently visible at the ABA, and that your new book sounds like a winner. Let us hope. By the time you come through here in December (don't make it the 9th or 10th, when I have to go and speak in Los Angeles), I'll have a copy, and will put the arm on you to inscribe it as well as several back numbers.

Salt Lake next Tuesday for a speech, and then we can escape to Vermont, which from here looks like a cool green sanctuary. Ah wilderness. There is too much frenzy and noise around here. Give me my scallop shell of quiet. My staff of faith to lean upon. And nine bean rows.

See you in December, I hope.
Dear Ivan:

Thank you for the word on Carsty. Curiously, I was thinking about him as I drove home today, before picking up the mail with your letter in it. I was thinking that we were approximately the same age, and that he and I were the only survivors that I could think of of the group of graduate students that used to hang out together in Iowa City in the Thirties. So I just thought of him in time. He was a very amiable, very sensible, very likable man. He made Maquoketa Iowa look good by being from there. But I don't much like being the last leaf on the tree. Too many years.

Thanks, too, for the books from Shadbolt. He is a writer I have read about, but never read, and he or you did send a couple of his novels, with a very pleasant inscription. I will now repair the leaks in my education. If you have his New Zealand address, I'd appreciate your putting it on a postcard and sending it down—I'd like to thank him, and send him some book in exchange.

Also, the mystery of the third book, WHO IS SYLVIA? is now solved. It wasn't by Shadbolt, and I never heard of Lynley Hood, so I had a hard time figuring out why it came to me. Now the answer. It wasn't supposed to. Here it is, as fresh as when it came from Down Under.

Pray up a little rain for all of us, if you know the chants. We're starting our seventh dry year, and God knows what Egyptian plagues will come down on us if we don't get some rain this winter. God knows how many Californians will flee off to the better-watered Northwest, too. It's in your own best interest. Pray, man. Our best to Carol.

Yours,

[Signature]
Monet's Gardens at Giverny
Monet assigned a special gardener to take care of the pond. He rowed about, cleaning the water surface and grooming the waterlilies to Monet's specifications.

Dear Ivan,

Thank you for helping to make "The Geography of Lodge" so magical.

Fondly,

Mary Stephen

Ivan Hoig
17021 10th Ave N.W.
Seattle,
WA 98177

Photograph by Elizabeth Murray © 1991
July 12

Dear Ivan,

Thanks for sending the piece on; it’s as splendid as I remember.

Enclosed is the permission form, which you can mail off to the same club. Books if all looks in order. Hope your summer goes well & you’re still closing.

Best,
[Signature]
Dear Doig —

All the best for Christmas and 1993.
Go on — keep on getting rich and famous — and vocal — and honest.

Nicky and Mary Steger

Season's Greetings
September 19, 1990

Dear Ivan-

just a note to confirm your autograph party here on Tuesday, November 27th, from 5-7 p.m. We're looking forward to having you.

We enclosed a ticket for you to hear Wallace Stegner that same evening at 7:30. Our store is just two blocks from the lecture. I'm sorry we couldn't get two. If Carol will be with you and she wants to go, let me know and I'll try to get another one.

We'll be seeing you in Tacoma next weekend. The book is selling!

Sincerely,

Roberta Iyer
AUGUST WILSON
Wednesday, October 3, 1990
UNDERWRITTEN BY UNIVERSITY BOOK STORE
Playwright, poet.
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (1981, New York-Drama Critics Circle Award); Fences (1986, Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award, New York Drama Critics Circle Award); Joe Turner's Come and Gone (1988, New York Drama Critics Circle-Award); The Piano Lesson (Pulitzer Prize, Drama Desk Award); and Two Trains Running.

WALLACE STEGNER
Wednesday, November 28, 1990
UNDERWRITTEN BY THE ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY

AMY TAN
Wednesday, January 9, 1991
UNDERWRITTEN BY BAILEY/COY BOOKS, BEKS BOOKSTORE, KAY'S BOOKMARK, M.COY BOOKS, AND MADISON PARK BOOKS
Novelist.

E. L. DOCTOROW
Tuesday, March 12, 1991
Novelist, short-story writer, essayist, editor.
Doctorow's published works include: The Book of Daniel (1971); Ragtime (1975, National Book Critics Circle Award); Loon Lake (1980); Lives of the Poets: Six Stories and a Novella (1984); World's Fair (1985, American Book Award); and Billy Bathgate (1989, National Book Critics Circle Award).

EDUARDO GALEANO
Tuesday, April 16, 1991
UNDERWRITTEN BY THE ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY
Novelist, journalist, essayist, poet.
Galeano is respected internationally for his published works including: Guatemala: Occupied Country (1963); Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (1973); Days and Nights of Love and War (1983); Memory of Fire (trilogy) Genesis (1985); Faces and Masks (1987); and Century of the Wind (1988). Books soon to be published include: The Book of Embraces (April, 1991) and We Say No (1992).

JANE SMILEY
Wednesday, May 8, 1991
UNDERWRITTEN BY THE FRIENDS OF SEATTLE ARTS AND LECTURES
Novelist, short-story writer.
Smiley's published works include: Barn Blind (1980); At Paradise Gate (1981); Duplicate Keys (1984); The Age of Grief (1987); The Greenlanders (1988); and Ordinary Love and Good Will (1989).

All lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church.
printed on recycled paper
WALLACE STEGNER

I don’t know what wisdom amounts to, actually, except as I guess I wrote in Angle of Repose: accepting what you have to. I don’t know that I’ve ever taken the line of assaulting the universe for its injustices. You’d better accept, you don’t have any choice. If that’s wisdom, I’ll buy it.

Larry Morgan, narrator of Wallace Stegner’s 1987 novel Crossing To Safety, considers, “How do you make a book that anyone will read out of lives as quiet as these? Where are the things that novelists seize upon and readers expect? Where is the high life, the conspicuous waste, the violence, the kinky sex, the death wish?” A self-reflective query posed on behalf of his own task, Stegner proceeds to illustrate exactly how to transform quiet lives into fiction of enduring value. For such accomplishments, readers look to Stegner’s work for a kind of wisdom that is rarely present in contemporary fiction. In his 50-plus years as a writer, Stegner has penned novels, short-stories, essays, history, and biography: works that are honest, moving, intelligent, expertly crafted and, indeed, wise.

Just as Crossing to Safety was based on the lives of his close friends, Stegner frequently blurs the actual and the imaginary in his fiction. He repeatedly reproaches those who insist upon reading his work as straight autobiography: “It’s all of it not true and it’s all of it true.” In the confluence of fact with fiction, often drawing upon his own personal history, Stegner has written some of his most memorable works.

Born in Iowa in 1909 to a family without roots, the young Stegner migrated throughout the West with his parents, settling primarily on the plains of Saskatchewan and, later, Salt Lake City. His uneasy relationship with his father and his admiration for his mother served as the genesis for The Big Rock Candy Mountain (1943). This novel of enormous range and depth explores the physical hardships of living in remote territory and, on a more personal level, the burden of enduring a difficult relationship with a man who typifies the restless, frontier outlaw. The conflict between father and son, initiated in The Big Rock Candy Mountain, is again played out in Recapitulation (1979).

Wallace Stegner won the Pulitzer Prize for Angle of Repose (1971), a work he has described as technically his most challenging to write. The novel balances two levels of time, establishing strong connections between past and present. Once again, the actual became the raw material for Stegner’s imagination. In his creation of Susan Burling Ward, Stegner made use of the experiences of pioneer Mary Hallock Foote.

Other works of fiction include two Joe Allston books, All the Little Live Things (1967) and Spectator Bird, a slender, perfectly crafted volume that earned a 1977 National Book Award. Although he has not written short fiction in more than 30 years, Stegner recently gathered The Collected Stories of Wallace Stegner, a rewarding collection as rich in past accomplishment as it is in present value.

Stegner possesses a literary sensibility steeped in Western history: “What gives his work its essential character is a deep familiarity with American historical, cultural, and political terrain. Few writers in the recent past have been able to summon as much knowledge of the main strands of our national life.” (Norman Cousins). Noteworthy non-fiction includes his biographies of Bernard DeVoto and John Wesley Powell and volumes on the Mormons. He has also written eloquently and convincingly on conservation issues.

To his impressive body of work, Stegner adds a reputation for having been a remarkable, influential teacher. In 1946, Stegner founded Stanford’s Creative Writing Program. He retired in 1971 and continues to reside in the Los Altos Hills of California with his wife Mary Page Stegner, to whom he has been married since 1934.
IN APPRECIATION OF OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

Seattle Arts and Lectures is a nonprofit cultural organization which presents literary arts events. The ongoing programs and activities of Seattle Arts & Lectures are generously funded by The Literary Circle, a group committed to recognizing and supporting the literary arts.

THE LITERARY CIRCLE

Nancy and Craig Abramson
Linda and Alan Alhadeff
Judine and Terry Brooks
Dana C. Broze
Vasiliki and William Dwyer
Vicki and Gary Glant
Marjorie and Wylie Hemphill
Rhoady and Jeanne Marie Lee
Laura Liswood
Merrill and John Potter
Pepper Schwartz and Art Skolnik
Mrs. John L. Scott
The Seattle Foundation
Kayla Skinner
Mary Jo and Michael Stansbury
Michael Swindling
Camille and Jim Uhler
Haynes and John Winton
Virginia and Bagley Wright

Seattle Arts and Lecturers' 1990-91 six-part lecture series is made possible through the generous support of the following businesses, individuals and foundations.

UNDERWRITERS

The evening with August Wilson is underwritten by the UNIVERSITY BOOK STORE.
The evening with Wallace Stegner is underwritten by THE ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY.
The evening with Amy Tan is underwritten by BAILEY/COY BOOKS, BEKS BOOKSTORE, KAY'S BOOKMARK, M.COY BOOKS and MADISON PARK BOOKS.
The evening with Eduardo Galeano is underwritten by THE ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY.
The evening with Jane Smiley is underwritten by THE FRIENDS OF SEATTLE ARTS AND LECTURES. (see list below)

DONORS

Seattle Arts and Lectures acknowledges and thanks the Aldus Corporation and Wyman Youth Trust for support, the Seattle Public Library for assistance and cooperation; KPLU-FM and Seattle Weekly for support in promoting the literary arts; the Sorrento Hotel and Hunt Club Restaurant for the housing and hospitality of visiting lecturers; Gretchen's of Course for catering services; Douglas Anderson; Maro Imirzian; Cornerstone Development; and Patrons of the 1990-91 season.

The Friends of Seattle Arts and Lectures

Constance and Herbert Abelson
Jenny Allen
Dawn Baker
Julie Bello
Joseph F. Carter
Josephine W. Coe
Cottages at Hedgebrook
Betty Crookes
Betsy and Peter Currie
Kathleen Dickeman
Mary Dunnam
Yolanda Durande and Neil Mullen
Mr. and Mrs. George Fahey
Ann and Ken Feldman
Mr. and Mrs. D.K. Fleming
Lisa Giles
Peggy Goldberg
Betsy Graef
Mary Ann Hansen
Anne M. Jess
Anne Gould Hauberg
Linda Johns
Mary and Allan Kollar
Laura and John Kvasnisky
Julie Hofstrad Larios
Alida and Christopher Latham
Marilyn Smith Layton and Richard Layton
Susan Leavitt
Leimer Cross Design
Vicki Leslie and Rob Duisberg
Rona L. Levy and Andrew D. Feld
Madison Park Cafe
Karen Binder
Peggy Stamm
Kristen Marks
Whitney McCleary
B. McPherson
Nancy Medwell Fine Arts
Jean Millican and Frank Denman
Mrs. Harold D. Mitchell
John S. Moats
Joan Cartwright Murray
Mary and Allan Kollar
Laura and John Kvasnisky
Julie Hofstrad Larios
Alida and Christopher Latham
Marilyn Smith Layton and Richard Layton
Susan Leavitt
Leimer Cross Design
Vicki Leslie and Rob Duisberg
Rona L. Levy and Andrew D. Feld
Madison Park Cafe
Karen Binder
Peggy Stamm
Kristen Marks
Whitney McCleary
B. McPherson
Nancy Medwell Fine Arts
Jean Millican and Frank Denman
Mrs. Harold D. Mitchell
John S. Moats
Joan Cartwright Murray

Penny Orwick and Christian D. Saether
Holly and Steve Overman
Sharon and Lloyd Powell
Nancy E. Reichley and Timothy T. Higgins
Ruth Rohrer
Shelley Rolfe
Gail P. Runnfeldt and Harry H. Schneider, Jr.
Faye Sarkowsky
Norma Shainin
Corky Stark
Robert O. Strauss, C.P.A.
Chris Surawicz and Jim Bushyhead
Anne and Barney Voegtl
Katherine Wagner
Daidre West
Trina Wherry
Nancy Wilson
Jenny and Scott Wyatt
Ann M. Youenes

Board of Directors

Gary Glant
Vicki Glant
Kayla Skinner
Marilyn Staben
Mary Jo Stansbury
Michael Stansbury

SEATTLE ARTS & LECTURES • P.O. BOX 22345 • SEATTLE, WA 98122 • 206-623-8655

Producer: Sherry Prowda
Associate: Beth Morrison
Program Notes: Jenny Wyatt
Graphic Design: Constance Bollen
December 18, 1989

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue N.W.
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan:

Ordinarily, an editor feels somewhat like a supplicant in sending galleys of a new book to a notable author and inviting comment. In the case of Wallace Stegner, however, I feel it is a privilege.

Here are the Collected--not Everything but most, some stories which found their way into the longer books, and some which happily, too, stand alone. As Wally does.

I have my favorites, would enjoy knowing yours if you get a chance. But in any case, it's a pleasure to send these galleys, which will be followed by a finished book, of course, one day. We publish in the spring, 1990.

Best wishes,

Sincerely,

Samuel Vaughan

SV/ot

Call Sam on Mon. to read:

"Emo is yet another welcome ch. say. blythe J is an Amen master...shrewd talent, W S, rare schism...I frac', bleg, bing, bing, essay, can be seen being bared...hard, honest way, only true way - P. G. D., across time...here & 3 dec's worth 't skilled storytell"
I hope that you will consider another visit — another lecture. What a treat to meet you — however briefly.

With fondness and gratitude.

Chris Desser

Dear Ivan,

Thank you for your generous participation in the tribute to Wallace Stegner on behalf of the Stegner Environmental Center at our new library.

The evening was quite magical — an auspicious beginning for this new and important community resource.

You, Gretel, Barry, Terry, Bill and Page wove the literal and the imaginal together and spoke from a place of deep love and respect for Wally — precisely the feelings we hope to engender at the Stegner Center. You were also very funny — thank you for that.

4/30/95
However you read them—puppet shoes, crystal balls, chicken guts, or however, may all the auspices be good.

Remembering you at Christmas because you're special, and wishing you joys to remember warmly throughout the new year.

With love, Mary Stegner