

Literary Lights

Wisconsin has long provided great tales and writers to tell them

The Chippewa Valley Book Festival will be held October 22-24 at venues all around Eau Claire, including the Chippewa Valley Museum. (See the enclosed program calendar for details.)

As a small part of the fun, we offer these excerpts from a speech given by Marjorie Mitchell Barnes in 1948.

*Wisconsin is still a young man with names remembered.
He can think of Black Hawk and Red Bird and Yellow Thunder,
and He can think how slowly years turn past things under.
Hearing the long cry of locomotives in the night and motors
humming in the air:
He can remember how canoes came down his rivers, and how
the rafts, and how the river boats, went up and down.
And he can think of ox-carts trailing into valleys from the hills.
Every spring and every summer he can hear the whippoorwill
singing in the early evening, and in this nostalgic mood
he can tell himself again a round of memories.*

*

*Carver and Marquette and Joliet
drowsing down his yesterday:
Dewey and La Follette scarcely gone,
Schurz and Garland fingering his dawn.*

These short excerpts from **August Derleth's** *Dusk over Wisconsin* may well serve to tell us how it is but little more than three centuries since Jean Nicolet donned his mandarin robes to surprise the Winnebago on the shores of Green Bay, and that not quite two centuries ago the enormous fur canoes skimmed the coast of Lake Superior. . . .

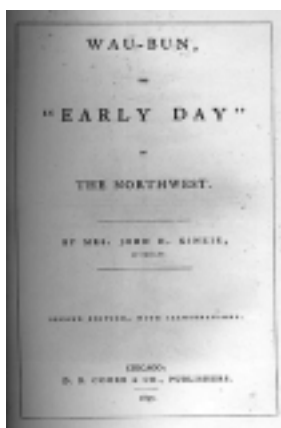
Since 1634 the flags of France, Great Britain and the United States have flown over the land that has become our state of Wisconsin which is now celebrating its centennial. . . . Generations have passed since the pioneering settlements of the mid-1800s, yet the traits of character that are peculiar to the American frontier have persisted — yes, even dominated — much of the literature of our region. You will find individualism, self-reliance, practical materialism, and a skepticism of custom and tradition unless rooted in common sense in the stories and accounts which have emanated from our state's writers. . . .

Even to decide those to be claimed as Wisconsin authors is difficult. Those who are native and still

live within our state like **August Derleth** present no problem, but what about those who are native but have since taken up their abode elsewhere and dip pen to paper within the confines of other commonwealths like **Hamlin Garland** did? What should one do with those who live here now but lived elsewhere when writing, like **John Goadby Gregory**, and how about those who were educated by institutions within our Wisconsin state like **Emily Hahn** and have gone on to what may be greener fields in their eyes? So you see I just threw all these problems out the window and have chosen to confine myself to the field of entertaining literature and, within that, to some of the writers who are associated with the Wisconsin tradition in the public eyes. . . .

To appraise Wisconsin's full contribution to literature one would include the achievements of transplanted old world Scandinavian myths and all the other touches of quaintness that have produced legend, story, fact and history within our borders. To go back to the very beginnings of our state's literature one would have to consult the works of those

priests whose stories and accounts make up the Jesuit Relations that were published each year by the society in France. These Jesuit Relations are our first travel accounts. They are quite different from **Fred L. Holmes'** books such as *Alluring Wisconsin* and *Old World Wisconsin* seen from the driver's seat of an automobile. A hundred and fifty years after the Jesuit Relations one could not forget to mention **Jonathan Carver's** account of three years in interior parts of America — much of which was in Wisconsin. . . .



After that period of exploration and discovery there was little time for writing. The more pressing needs of food and shelter had to be met first and then a country may turn to the matter of self expression in the arts and *belles lettres*. Farming leaves little leisure for writing and reading — especially when that farming means clearing fields for cultivation first. This pioneering period in Wisconsin lasted well

into the 1860s and for that matter is still going on in parts of our State. Precious little was written in the first five decades except flowery moral exhortations in imitation of European writers. This period is beginning to be explored by modern historians such as **Lillian Krueger** whose little monographs on *Motherhood in Wisconsin in the 1840s* is a part of the centennial observance. Yet we do find **Mrs. John H. Kinzie's** account of her travel experiences in the Baraboo region back in 1831 entertainingly set forth in *Wau-Bun* some 20 years later. . . .

By 1850 native-born writers were expressing themselves in poetry and prose but much of it was imitative and does not merit mention here. But the seeds of naturalism flowered in the Middle West even earlier than elsewhere in the United States and Wisconsin was fortunate to give birth to **Hamlin Garland**. . . . Garland made his mark in the field of the novel as the first dirt farmer and one of the first important realists in American literature. . . . It might be nice to know that **Grant Showerman**, one-time professor at the University, has recorded memories of a happy childhood in eastern Wisconsin in his two books. And one must not forget **John Muir**, that wonderful writer about nature, who has told an interesting story of his boyhood in this state in the 1850s. . . .

But as the flood of naturalism increased and interest in the small town with its opportunities for realism, romance and humor came to the attention of regional writers one still small voice took up the song and we know her in our state as **Zona Gale**. Her literary achievements and personal power are well known in southern Wisconsin and through her *Friendship Village* and *Miss Lulu Bett* she

reached the larger audience of all America. Wisconsin has some real humorists too. Around the turn of the century **George W. Peck** wrote one of the most mirth provoking stories, "Peck's Bad Boy," and some of you are undoubtedly familiar with it. **Bill Nye's** *Comic History of the United States* is most entertaining. . . .

And for sheer nonsense that has developed into a cycle of native American folk lore, Wisconsin owes much to **Eugene S. Shepard** whose imagination furnished much of the color and romance that has enriched the literature that has made Paul Bunyan a mythical immortal. His daughter, **Lillian Shepard Kearney** has collected many of his stories in *The Hodag and other Tales of Logging Camps*. . . .

Edna Ferber uses the lumber camp background to the delight of those who would claim her as a Wisconsin writer in her novel called *Come and Get It* which portrays the life of lumber barons as it used to be lived in upper Michigan and northern Wisconsin. *Fanny Herself* tells the story of her own experiences as a young newspaper woman in Milwaukee and her *Peculiar Treasure* is a delightful autobiography with much about Wisconsin in it. You also know her as the author of a long series of stories and plays which include such well known titles as *So Big*, *Show Boat*, and *Dinner at Eight*.

We would be remiss indeed, not to mention our own Eau Claire authors this evening. We are fortunate to have such a poetess as **Ida Linton Hainer** and a children's story writer with the ease and grace of **Eva Skerry Olson** whose *Pim* is available now. Then too, there are **Amalia Baird's** nostalgic memories of her child-

hood. **Waldemar Ager's** *Christ Before Pilate* as well as all his work in his native tongue Norwegian. . . . Have you eved **June Culver's** *So Stood I* whose locale is in our own Third Ward? And **Bucklin Moon** has written two books, *Dark Brother* and *Primer for White Folks*, which are important for their emphasis on racial tolerance. There is **Norman Carlisle**, **Richard Barry**, and a whole group of others that could be mentioned.

Poetry in Wisconsin has ranged from flowery tributes and moral exhortations that are typical of the beginnings of literature to the hauntingly beautiful verses of **Adelaide Crapsey**, the popular songs of **Carrie Jacobs Bond** in her *Roads to Melody* as well as those of **Eben Rexford**. . . . That popular rhyme "Laugh and the world laughs with you — weep and you weep alone" was written by **Ella Wheeler Wilcox**, whose *Poems of Passion* were considered almost if not quite risqué at about the turn of the century. One would also mention **James Gates Percival** and **John Goadby Gregory**, too, as well as the German poets who formed a group around the genius of **Madame Annetta** in Milwaukee.

By 1912 a literary renaissance had begun to take place. In the decade that followed, many of the great poets of our time emerge such as Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent Millay. Among this group stands Wisconsin's **William Ellery Leonard**. . . . His best known works are probably the series of tragic sonnets called *Two Lives* and his psycho-analytical autobiography called *Locomotive God*. . . .

From Leonard we turn to a group whose novels display a consciousness that institutions and social customs are changing.

Honore Willis Morrow wrote *Still Jim* which considers divorce and her *Lydia of the Pines* takes up the matter of conservation. **Sterling North** has written *Ploughing on Sunday* which shows clearly the changes that are occurring in a southern Wisconsin community. Some of you have probably read his more recent *So Dear to My Heart*. **Glenway Wescott's** *The Grandmothers* and *Goodbye Wisconsin* are full of realistic details.

Thornton Wilder has gained a reputation for studies in how people meet their fates. His first really popular novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, is such a study, and now his latest., *The Ides of March*, deals with Julius Caesar and his last days.



Berton Braley, one of our popular Wisconsin poets, has written so much that it can be computed in miles. **August Derleth**, one of our younger writers, is amazingly prolific

too. . . . His latest is a history of the Milwaukee Road which was published in March. Perhaps some of you are following his series of newspaper articles entitles "History Passed Here" which is currently running in the Sunday Milwaukee *Sentinel*. . . . There several volumes of poetry to his credit, a sensitive and appreciative biography of Zona Gale called *Still Small Voice*, a series of mystery detective stories in which one Judge Peck plays an important role, and at least eleven books which deal with Wisconsin.

His most ambitious work is the *Sac Prairie Saga*, which is a project to make a life story of Sac Prairie, Wisconsin, from the early 1800s to 1950 or thereabouts, which will emphasize the contributions of the small town to the history and philosophy of the Middle West. . . . But the one I have liked the best is *Bright Journey*, an exciting and sometimes beautiful picture of life on the frontier between 1812 and 1840 told simply and directly in the calm, tireless manner of the old

historical novel. The chief character is Hercules Dousman. . . . His home, the Villa Louis, still stands high on a mound overlooking the placid blue of the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien.

Of such are some of the literary lights of Wisconsin. Their rays creep in to every type of writing endeavor and Wisconsin citizens can well be proud of their work in the past and be confident that much more of equal or better worth will be done in the future to tell others of the beauties of our landscape, of the interesting characters and folklore that our state produces, and the way of life that Wisconsin people believe in.

Excerpts from a speech given by Marjorie Mitchell Barnes at the Eau Claire Public Library, May 27, 1948, on the occasion of Wisconsin's centennial.

This transcript has been edited for length. Readers can find the full text of Barnes' speech in CVM's Glenn Curtis Smoot Library and Archives, open 1-5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays or by arrangement.

THE BACK STORY



CLUES EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK

Candy maker Gunda Anderson stands at Ploof's popcorn stand, corner of Gibson and South Barstow, Eau Claire, about 1915-1918. Several clues narrow the date.

In the background, you can barely see the sign for Charles Chop House Restaurant, 320 Gibson Street. James Martin Charles opened the Chop House in 1892. In 1919, Charles turned over the restaurant to his son James Jr. It closed in 1929.

Anderson's relatively short dress and big hat suggest women's style of 1910 or later. Another Eau Claire photograph in the CVM collection, dated 1913, shows similar multi-tiered electric lines as can be seen above and behind her.

Finally popcorn vendor William Ploof, who had been proprietor of the Eau Claire Bowling Alley as late as 1914, died on February 9, 1919. His stand is first listed in the 1916 Eau Claire City Directory.