

The National Steinbeck Center

By William Groneman III



John Steinbeck (1902-1968) needs little or no introduction to the Western Writers of America. The Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winning writer is recognized by many as this country's greatest author. He wrote both fiction and non-fiction, with at least seventeen books set in the American West—California or Mexico.

The Salinas, California, Chamber of Commerce launched a plan to honor their native son in 1975. The realization of their dream is the National Steinbeck Center, which opened its doors on June 27, 1998. The city had come a long way from the 1930s when copies of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* were burned in front of the Salinas Public Library.

The Center, comprised of an exhibition hall, archives, orientation theater, meeting rooms, changing exhibit galleries, and museum store, is located at 1 Main Street in Salinas. The word "center" rather than museum is well chosen for this facility. While it may not be at the geographic bull's eye on the map, it is a focal point of the cultural and literary life of Salinas.

A visit to the Center begins with a ten minute orientation film on Steinbeck's life followed by a tour of the 8,000 square foot exhibition hall. This walk through Steinbeck's life and literature takes one seamlessly through six distinct themes.

"Growing up East of Eden" explores Steinbeck's childhood in early Twentieth Century Salinas and of course his most ambitious novel *East of Eden*. The displays throughout the exhibit are visual, audio, sensory, and interac-

tive. If a visitor has never cranked the handle of a model T-Ford, this is his or her chance. One or more television screens in each station show interviews and excerpts of films based on Steinbeck's work.

"An' Live off the Fatta the Lan'" brings one to the author's agriculturally themed books, especially *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and Men*. Here children can operate some farm tools or ride a model of the Red Pony.

"Grapes of Wrath" centers on Steinbeck's greatest novel and one for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. Interviews with his wife Elaine and clips of Henry Fonda as Tom Joad are featured in this area.

"Cannery Row" highlights Steinbeck's Monterey novels, *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and its sequel *Sweet Thursday*. Edward Flanders Ricketts, Steinbeck's closest friend and the "Doc" of *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday*, and the inspiration for characters in several other novels, figures prominently in this section.



"Adventures on Land and Sea" focuses on Steinbeck's works outside the United States, most notably his Mexican writings, *The Pearl*, *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*, and *Viva Zapata!* His World War II books, *The Moon is Down*, *Once There was a War*, *Bombs Away*, and films, **A Medal for Benny** and **Lifeboat** are also featured in this area.

The exhibition concludes with "Steinbeck's America." Here one can listen to Steinbeck's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and see a symbolic replica of the author's six-sided writing hut, "Joyous Garde," from his Sag Harbor, Long Island, home. This inspired a certain sentimentally inclined Western Writer, on his latest visit, to sit at the desk

in the exhibit, take a page from his note book, and simply write "Once upon a time..."

This station also highlights two of Steinbeck's later books, *America and Americans*, and the classic *Travels with Charley*. "Steinbeck's America" a personal favorite since it displays "Rocinante," the actual GMC camper truck in which Steinbeck traveled the country with Charley the poodle in 1960. A plexi-glass wall protects Rocinante but it is not so tall that a 5'10" writer cannot reach over and touch the camper with whatever pen he happens to be using at the time of every visit. Sentimental? Corny? Superstitious? Yes, to all of the above. Don't tell the management.



The archives are available to researchers by appointment. More than 30,000 pieces including original manuscripts are housed here.

The Center hosts an annual festival based on Steinbeck related subjects. Last year's was "Legends, Myth and Magic," with the author's posthumously published *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* as the theme. This year's will focus on Steinbeck abroad.

Some of the other festival themes have been:

"Steinbeck and Mexico," 2008;

"A Culture of Discontent: Steinbeck and the 1960s," 2007;

"The Price of Fame," 2006;

"Folk, Film and Fish," 2005;

"Steinbeck and the Environment," 2004;

"Collaborators and Connections," 2003;

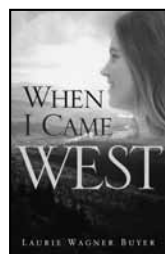
"Steinbeck's Legacy," 2002;

"The Birth of America's Author," 2001;

"From Manuscript to Masterpiece: John Steinbeck and the Arts," 2000.

Besides keeping Steinbeck's legacy alive, the Center offers year round educational programs in the form of literary events, lectures, classes, and workshops. Many of its events are geared to children, encouraging reading,

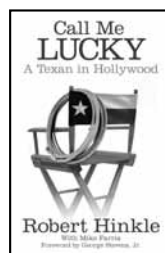
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WHEN I CAME WEST

By Laurie Wagner Buyer
\$14.95 PAPERBACK
200 PAGES, 17 B&W ILLUS.

As a young college student in the early 1970s, Laurie Wagner had never camped out, never gone hiking, and never lived without electricity or indoor plumbing. Yet she walked away from these comforts and headed for the wildest reaches of Montana to live with a man she had not met in person. *When I Came West* is Laurie Wagner Buyer's account of her terrifying and exhilarating years in Montana as she changes from a girl too squeamish to touch a dead mouse to a toughened frontierswoman unafraid to butcher a domestic animal.



CALL ME LUCKY

A Texan in Hollywood

By Robert Hinkle with Mike Farris
\$24.95 HARDCOVER
272 PAGES, 42 B&W ILLUS.

From his birth in Brownfield, Texas, to a family so poor "they could only afford a tumbleweed as a pet," Hinkle went on to gain acclaim in Hollywood as a speech coach, actor, producer, director, and friend to the stars. Along the way, Hinkle helped James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman, Rock Hudson, and Dennis Hopper, talk like Texans for the epic film *Giant* and Academy Award-winning *Hud*. The author appeared in numerous television series, including *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *Dragnet*, and *Walker, Texas Ranger*. More than forty photographs, including rare behind-the-scenes glimpses of the stars Hinkle met and befriended along the way, complement this rousing, never-dull memoir.



PUSHING THE BEAR

After the Trail of Tears

By Diane Glancy
\$14.95 PAPERBACK
176 PAGES, 2 B&W ILLUS.

Pushing the Bear: After the Trail of Tears tells the story of the Cherokees' resettlement in the hard years following Removal, a story never before explored in fiction. In this sequel to her popular 1996 novel *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of the Trail of Tears*, author Diane Glancy continues the tale of Cherokee brothers O-ga-na-ya and Knobowtee and their families, as well the Reverend Jesse Bushyhead, a Cherokee Christian minister. The book follows their travails in Indian Territory as they attempt to build cabins, raise crops, and adjust to new realities.



THE GOOD TIMES ARE

ALL GONE NOW

Life, Death, and Rebirth in an Idaho Mining Town

By Julie Whitesel Weston
\$19.95 PAPERBACK
248 PAGES, 20 B&W ILLUS.

Julie Whitesel Weston left her hometown of Kellogg, Idaho, but eventually it pulled her back. Only when she returned to this mining community in the Idaho Panhandle did she begin to see the paradoxes of the place where she grew up. Her book combines oral history, journalistic investigation, and personal reminiscence to take a fond but hard look at life in Kellogg during "the good times."

Glidden sold his remaining patent rights to the Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company of Worcester, Massachusetts, which then joined with Ellwood to expand the business further.

Court battles ensued over who had the rights to this new form of fencing and in 1880 a United States District Court decision upheld the validity of the Glidden patent, effectively establishing a monopoly. This decision was affirmed by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1892. In 1898 Gates took control of Washburn and Moen, and created the American Steel and Wire monopoly, which became a part of the United States Steel Corporation.

Barbed wire led to disputes known as the range wars between free-range ranchers and smaller ranchers and farmers in the late 19th century. These were similar to the disputes which resulted from enclosure laws in England in the early 18th century.

With what they called “possessory rights” many cattle barons had effectively claimed millions of acres across the West. This extralegal possession of land, most of which was actually owned by the federal government, led to major disputes with small ranchers and farmers. Possessory rights had, in effect, denied access to the land where grass provided the means for successful cattle ranching. For instance, the Coad brothers in western Nebraska

sold their ranch that included 142,000 acres of grazing land for \$912,853. In fact, they only had legal title to 527 acres.

To reinforce their claims, the big ranchers began fencing land they claimed as possessory rights. They nailed it down with staples driven into fence posts holding barbed wire. And how they fenced! In Colorado the Arkansas Valley Cattle Company fenced over a million acres. Sometimes whole towns were fenced in within the rangeland claimed. One mail carrier complained that he had to open gates to get from place to place.

Small ranchers and farmers, unable to compete with the power of the big ranchers, took the issue to court. The courts decisively found in favor of the farmers and small ranchers and heavy penalties were instituted for cutting a barbed wire fence. Within twenty-five years nearly all of the open range had been fenced in under private ownership. For this reason, some historians date the end of the Old West era of American history to the invention and subsequent proliferation of barbed wire.

Vernon Schmid is the author of Watie's Wolves, a novel of the Civil War in Indian Territory, Houlihans and Horse Sense, and More Houlihans and Horse Sense.

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writing, and a variety of arts.

The Steinbeck Center presents a great opportunity for writers, especially Western Writers, to become involved in its programs. It is also an ideal setting for a future WWA conference in a literary rich environment. Steinbeck's birthplace and childhood home (now a restaurant) is located about two blocks from the Center. Monterey and Pacific Grove, once home to Steinbeck, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Jack London, are approximately twenty miles west. Poet Robinson Jeffers' Tor House and Hawk Tower, located in Carmel, are highly recommended for anyone with a poet or writer's heart. The quirky Henry Miller Library (not really a library, or a book store, or a memorial to Miller but somehow all of these) is a few miles down the coast on the mountain side of Pacific Coast Highway in breathtaking Big Sur.

The National Steinbeck Center is supported by its members, but it needs more members to help keep its support of the literary arts going. It offers several levels of membership. If Western Writers of America are ready to saddle up and ride to the rescue, or explore the possibilities of participating in its programs, the Center can be contacted at:

The National Steinbeck Center
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info@steinbeck.org

Its Web site is www.steinbeck.org.

William Groneman III is a veteran of the New York City Fire Department. He has enjoyed fifteen years with the Western Writers of America, and has served as a member of the WWA Board.

The family of Elmer Kelton

would like to thank all the contributors to the December issue of the *Roundup*. We deeply appreciate the tributes and recollections. WWA and its members held a special significance for Elmer, and he would be pleased to know that his colleagues returned that affection.