

# The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 14

www.emrsociety.com

March 2013

## 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XV Annual Conference in beautiful Harrodsburg and Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 20-22, 2013. The conference headquarters—site of the opening banquet, keynote session, and annual business meeting—is the lovely and legendary Beaumont Inn in historic Harrodsburg. Academic paper sessions will be held at Saint Catharine College, just outside of Springfield, Roberts' hometown.

Please direct conference inquiries (registration, lodging, special events, etc.) to the Co-Conference Directors, H. R. Stoneback and Matthew Nickel, at:  
English Dept.

SUNY-New Paltz,  
New Paltz, NY 12561

or

<hrs714@gmail.com>

<mattcnickel@gmail.com>



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Matthew Nickel

This year's Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference will mark our 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The last decade and a half has seen a worldwide resurgence of scholarship about Roberts' works and an increasing interest in her life. Roberts' growing popularity is testimony not only to her writing but also to the hard work of the Society.

The Roberts revival is alive and well, and there are numerous events and advancements in just the last year. Of note most recently is the induction of Roberts into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame along with Robert Penn Warren, James Still, Harriette Arnow, William Wells Brown, and Harry Caudill. Gregg Neikirk has been hard at work on a play about Roberts' life. The University of Kentucky Press has accepted Jane Keller's proposal for her biography of Roberts. William Slavick and Sharon Peelor are pushing through the Roberts Letters Project. Hesperus Press, a UK based press, recently published a new edition of Roberts' *The Great Meadow*.

A major event of the past year was the creation of the Reading Roberts Series under the General Editorship of H. R. Stoneback, a series of volumes designed to provide close reading, glossary, and commentary on every Roberts book. Several volumes are currently in progress and the full publication schedule will be published later this year. Last year at our annual conference, the Roberts Society gave out to all registered participants the first three volumes from our Read-

ing Roberts Series: *Flood*, an unfinished novel by Roberts edited by Vicki Barker; *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*, a volume of critical essays on Roberts' work edited by H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel; and *Kentucky: Poets of Place*, an anthology of poetry including numerous poems by Roberts and fellow Kentucky writers (Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, Vivian Shipley, Dave Smith, and others) edited by Matthew Nickel.

Roberts Scholarship is advancing rapidly beyond the mere discovery of a so-called neglected writer. Conference papers and publications during the last few years have placed Roberts justifiably alongside writers like Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, James Still, and many others. Her place at the table of literary masters is fixed largely through the effort of H. R. Stoneback, William Slavick, Jane Keller, Becki Owens, and past Roberts Society presidents Steve Florczyk, Gregg Neikirk, and William Boyle, but also through conference papers at the annual meeting, at national and international conferences like SAMLA, ALA, and in France and Italy at the Imagism/Aldington Conference, and in Kentucky with the help of Nell Haydon and Springfield Renaissance, Chad Horn, The Beaumont Inn, Saint Catharine College, Jeanne Penn Lane and Penn's Store, and Joan Hamilton as she graciously invites us all into her home—into Roberts' Elenores—each year.

The Society has plenty to be thankful for, and with your help we can continue to grow toward a deeper love and illumination of Roberts and her writing. Thank you all for your effort.

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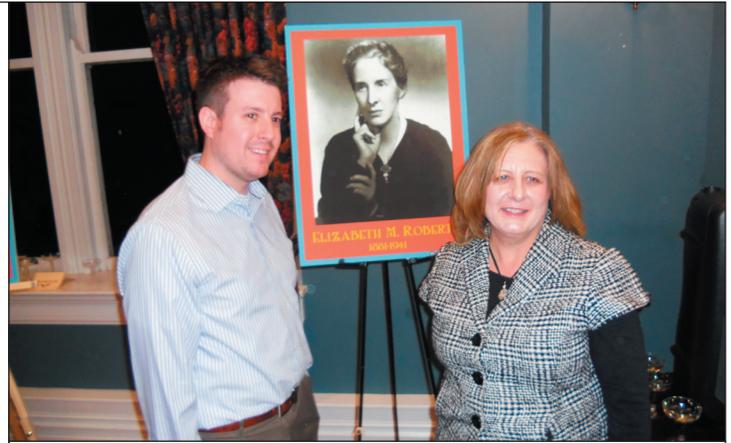
The Society has plenty to be thankful for, and with your help we can continue to grow toward a deeper love and illumination of Roberts and her writing. Thank you all for your effort.

## Roberts Among First Writers Inducted Into Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame

Rebecca Roberts Owens

On January 24, 2013, more than one hundred people were on hand to witness Elizabeth Madox Roberts' induction into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame. Roberts enters the Hall as part of an inaugural group of six writers who were elected from thirteen finalists, chosen from an initial group of over two hundred nominees that included Thomas Mer-ton and Jesse Stuart. The criteria for selection required the writer to be deceased (a requirement that will be lifted in future years) and to have enduring, universal stature with significant connections to Kentucky. The five writers joining Roberts in the Hall this year are Harriette Arnow, William Wells Brown, Harry Caudill, James Still, and Robert Penn Warren.

The Hall of Fame was created and is sponsored by the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in Lexington, Kentucky. Committee chair Neil Chethik, executive director of the center, gave the opening remarks for the event. Lexington Mayor Jim Gray followed Mr. Chethik with observations about the important role literature has played in the history of Lexington. Finally, the portraits of the inductees were unveiled one by one after a brief description of their life and work. A selection from each Hall of Fame author's work was then read by a noted living Kentucky writer/literary scholar. We were honored that Frank X Walker (recently named Kentucky Poet Laureate) chose to represent Roberts during these readings. Walker read two of Roberts' poems: "The Picnic" and "Three Dominican Nuns." Walker said that he chose these selections because they created such vivid imagery and speech for the reader. At the conclusion of the program, guests made a champagne toast to the Hall of Fame members and their work, and George Ella Lyon summed up, "they are looking down on us from that great library in the afterlife."



*Michael and Becki Roberts Owens at the ceremony*

My son Michael and I attended the event (pictured above), representing the Roberts family, and we met a number of people who: were familiar with Roberts' writing; were interested in teaching her writing as part of a body of work on KY writers; were interested in attending a future conference; and were interested in Roberts' letters. One lady said that her mother, who passed away last year at the age of 97, was a schoolmate of EMR at Covington HS. (Not chronologically possible but amusing nonetheless.)

Other exhibits at the event included a local book collector who showcased many first edition, signed works by the various nominees (as well as other pertinent memorabilia), and Morris Book Shop who, I am happy to report, was selling originals and reprints of the Hall of Famers' works including *The Time of Man* and what looked to be the new reprint of *The Great Meadow*. The evening was rounded out with abundant refreshments and guitar music from a local artist. It was indeed a fabulous evening!

This honor could not have happened without the hard work and dedication of the EMR Society, and for that the Roberts family is most grateful. I would also like to give a special thanks to Jane Keller who submitted a short bio for the Hall of Fame selection committee.

## Charlie Hughes Retires from Editing Kentucky Literary Newsletter

Steve Florczyk

Charlie Hughes, editor of the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter*, recently announced that he will be "handing over the reins to the good folks at Lexington's Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning." In his email, Hughes wrote: "I believe the newsletter has had a positive effect on Kentucky's literary atmosphere." Roberts enthusiasts and scholars might agree. For more than a decade, he has informed his subscribers

(now more than 2,300) about Roberts Society events, related publications, and Roberts' work. Through his press, Wind Publications, Hughes also made possible the publication of "the first book-length collection of critical essays to deal with the life and work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts," *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, 2008). As editor of the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter* for over eleven years, Hughes will be missed. Roberts Society members who wish to contact the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter*, can send emails to [kylitnews@carnegiecenterlex.org](mailto:kylitnews@carnegiecenterlex.org). Best wishes to Charlie in his next endeavor.

## ***The Time of Man and All the Living:* C. E. Morgan and Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

Ever since C. E. Morgan's novel *All the Living* was published in 2009, informed writers and readers—and I don't just mean Kentuckians and Southerners—have been telling me: *You simply must read this book!* I recently read it and they were right. The praise and honors heaped on Morgan and her first novel are richly deserved: the 2010 Lannan Literary Fellowship for Fiction, the Weatherford Award for the outstanding work of fiction depicting Appalachia, the United States Artists Fellowship, selection as Editors' Choice by the *New York Times Book Review*, named one of the Five Best Writers Under 35 by the National Book Foundation, and the list goes on and on. Morgan, who lived in Kentucky until recently, studied at Berea College and Harvard Divinity School where she earned a master's degree in theological studies.

From the United Kingdom to New York to Australia, reviewers of *All the Living* have lavished fulsome praise on this debut novel: from Morgan's compelling vision and her superb craft of character-making to the astonishing language and the expansive style that captures beautifully the rhythms of country dialect to the prose "both earthbound and hymnlike, with the slight inflection of Southern scripture" (*Bookforum*). Consider this observation: "Rarely in this reviewer's memory has a debut novel emerged with such a profound sense of place . . . Descriptions are so vivid, yet so integrated and organic, that the reader can almost feel the lassitude of stifling humid air; smell the rich, warm earth; and see the furrowed fields, the dark mountains in the distance." That

may sound exactly like a reviewer's praise for *The Time of Man* but it is what Karen Campbell said about *All the Living* in *The Boston Globe*. Indeed the reviews place Morgan in the august company of Wendell Berry, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and—oddly enough—John Steinbeck. I would say Morgan has more in common with Faulkner and Hemingway, their precision and passion, than with Steinbeck. And none of the reviews I have seen link Morgan with the most apt literary ancestor: Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

When I recently read Morgan's novel at one all-night sitting, I wrote to some friends who had been pestering me for three years to read *All the Living*. I told them they were absolutely right. Someone said, in deep cover and very much off the record: "It's Ellen Chesser in a pick-up truck. With the sex included." And I said maybe so, but it's much more than that, starting with one of the three best sermons in Southern literature. Her preacher's hammered-by-grace sermon stands with William Faulkner's Easter sermon in *The Sound and the Fury* and James Still's *River of Earth* homily.

Immediately after reading her novel, I also did what I have rarely done after encountering a stunning work of the highest art: I wrote to the author. She wrote back with perspicacious praise for *The Time of Man* as a neglected masterpiece and the best first novel in American literature, noting also that she had only discovered Roberts very recently, after she wrote *All the Living*. Our correspondence continues, and I have invited her to be our honored guest at a Roberts Conference but she cannot make it this year. There's always next year and, in the meantime, I urge Roberts Society members to read Morgan now and to propose papers on Morgan and Roberts for the 2014 conference. Read this amazing novel! Stay tuned.



Joan A. Hamilton (above with H. R. Stoneback at the Beaumont Inn), owner of the Roberts House in Springfield, has graciously hosted over the years the tours of the EMR house by Society members. In April 2012 she was the honored guest of the Society at the opening banquet, where she was made an honorary life member of the EMR Society.

## **Roberts in Venice**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

This is to announce that the Fourth International Imagism/Eighth International Aldington Conference will be held in Venice/Torcello, Italy from June 19-21, 2014. (EMRS members who plan to attend the International Hemingway Conference in Venice—June 22-27, 2014—will note that the Imagism Conference immediately precedes the Hemingway Conference.) The Imagism/Aldington Conference,

under the co-direction of Daniel Kempton and H. R. Stoneback, provides the perfect opportunity for EMRS members to present papers on Roberts and Imagism, Roberts and Pound, Roberts and Hemingway, etc. How about a paper on the two masterworks of 1926—*The Time of Man* and *The Sun Also Rises*—and the "secret of the values" shared by these two landmark novels of the mid-1920s? The Call for Papers will be sent out Spring 2013. If you do not receive the CFP or if you have questions about the conference, please contact me (<[hrs714@gmail.com](mailto:hrs714@gmail.com)>).

## EMR year by year: 1881–1916

### Jane Eblen Keller

Something so fundamental as a detailed, *documented* chronology of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' life has proved to be extremely difficult to establish. It has taken me years to determine her whereabouts and activities year by year (and after 1917, month by month) from birth to death. Still, some gaps and uncertainties remain, and many errors and unsubstantiated guesses have found their way into print. Especially fuzzy is the period between 1881 and 1916. Records are sparse, to say the least. After 1917, many more pieces of the puzzle are available, but even these are far from easy to assemble into a coherent, accurate picture. For now, here is an outline of what I've been able to discover about the early years. The narrative includes way too many qualifiers in the form of "probably," "possibly," "it seems," etc. In the absence of reliable data, such terms are necessary if lamentable—but better than the highly speculative, usually non-sourced, and sometimes blatantly false statements that too often have passed for fact. Further research might turn up new bits and pieces. I live in hope.

1881 On October 30, EMR was born in Perryville, Kentucky, where her family was living. Her father was teaching somewhere in the village, possibly-to-probably at the Ewing Institute, a private academy established in the 1840s for girls. By the 1880s, the school was co-educational but still housed in a two-story brick structure built in 1856. This building stands today but is abandoned, in serious disrepair, and when last I visited, in the spring of 2012, for sale.

We know little to nothing about the house where EMR was born except that it has long since vanished. It seems to have stood on the east side of the Chaplin River and has been described as a frame structure on East Third Street, a block or so south of what is now Route 150, the old Danville Road. But no one, not one single person, has ever cited a source for any of this information so we need to take it with a good many grains of salt. In any case, the east side of Perryville has been much rebuilt, and unlike the carefully preserved Merchants Row and other structures on the west bank, suggests little of what it might have been like in the late nineteenth century.

1882–1883 The Roberts family moved to Springfield at some point during this period, but it is not clear exactly when or why, nor do we know where they lived when first they arrived.

1884–1886 We know the family was living in Springfield in early 1884, and by the spring of 1885 they had bought

and were living in the house on East Main Street, near the corner of Walnut, the setting for the poems in *Under the Tree*. This was a four-square, two-story frame residence with a central doorway, chimneys at both ends, and many small-paned windows. A kitchen wing projected into the back yard where the Roberts children played under a large silver leaf poplar tree. Rose bushes and other shrubs grew in a side garden (to the east) enclosed by a fence. The house was torn down by around 1916.

1887/8–1896 EMR attended school at what was then called the Covington Institute on East Main Street, a short walk from her home. The private school, housed in a brick building, had been established in the 1850s and named for its first headmaster, one Alva Covington. The school was torn down in the early years of the twentieth century, but the teacher residence, built in 1884, survives near the corner of Covington and Main.

1896–1900 In September 1896, just before she turned fifteen, EMR enrolled at the Covington High School, Covington, Kentucky. She lived in the home of her recently widowed maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Garvin Brent, at 32 East Ninth Street. Her uncle, William D. Brent, a lawyer, also lived and kept an office in the house, and Mrs. Brent took in a few boarders. For the next four years, EMR spent the school year in Covington and summers at home in Springfield, and in June 1900 received her high school diploma.

1901 In September, EMR was a teacher in the primary department of what was by then known as the Washington Collegiate Institute, the successor to the old Covington Institute and housed in the same building. At this time, the school was sometimes called Professor Grant's Academy after its proprietor, one Orville B. Grant, who ran the academy from 1900 until 1903. EMR seems to have taught here only briefly, probably no more than a year.

1902 This year or somewhat earlier, the Roberts family moved to a rented house at what is now 405 North Walnut Street, the so-called Polin-Simms House, which is still standing. Here, EMR gave private lessons to a few pupils.

1903 Her private lessons probably continued in the rented house.

1904 In the late summer or early fall, EMR began the school year as the teacher in the Pleasant Grove School, about five miles north of Springfield. The much gussied-up schoolhouse still stands behind a lovely old church in what is truly a pleasant grove.

Also in 1904, Simpson Roberts sold the Main Street House,

which had been serving as a notions/grocery store, and bought a cottage (the future “Elenores”) on Walnut Street, a few blocks north of the rented house. The family moved in at some point in the late fall when Simpson opened a new grocery store on the ground floor of the Opera House on Main Street.

1905 EMR was unable to complete the term at the Pleasant Grove School, reasons unknown. Miss Hettie Rudd stepped in to finish out the school year, which ended in April 1905.

In September, EMR was the fourth grade teacher at the new Springfield Graded School, which had opened in its new building the previous year. The handsome structure still stands.

1906 EMR seems to (but may not) have finished the school year at the Graded School but did not return in the fall. The same Miss Rudd who had replaced her at Pleasant Grove took over the fourth grade class.

1907 Some evidence suggests that EMR was teaching in the area around Fredericktown, a hamlet of about seventy-five people some ten miles northwest of Springfield.

1908 We know very little about what EMR was doing this year except that she spent several weeks at Tatham Springs, twenty miles north of Springfield. The hotel there, since burned to the ground, was a well-known spa whose mineral springs were thought to restore and/or improve health.

1909 In the spring, EMR was a teacher in the area around Maud, another tiny village a bit north of Fredericktown. We do not know how long this teaching stint lasted, but we do know that this was a difficult, unhappy year in her life.

1910 In August, EMR left Springfield for Larkspur, Colorado, where she lived in a cottage with her brother Charles, who was working for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. Here she undertook a serious study of English literature and began writing poetry in earnest.

1911 In August, EMR and Charles visited the family in Springfield for several weeks, then returned to Colorado.

1912 It is possible that EMR again visited Springfield in the summer; we know her brother Charles did, but there is nothing to prove that EMR was with him.

1913 In the late summer/early fall, EMR did come home from Colorado for a lengthy visit with family and friends. This was when she met Cotton Noe, a professor at the State University in Lexington, and Lucia Clark Markham, a local poetess. Both took a keen interest in EMR and in her

early poems, and Professor Noe saw to it that one of these, “Prophecies,” was published in the university’s weekly student newspaper in December.

1914 Back in Colorado, EMR continued to write poetry, and in November submitted several poems to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Her original letter to Harriet Monroe exists, but there is no record that Miss Monroe replied.

1915 In the spring, EMR once again went home for a visit and returned to Colorado at some point in the summer. In September, three of her poems were published in *Sunset* magazine. In December, she and Kenneth Hartley self-published their little book, *In the Great Steep’s Garden*, with her poems and his photographs.

1916 By July, EMR was back in Springfield and in late December left for Chicago in preparation for a January 1917 enrollment at the University of Chicago.

## **Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

For some years now I have been making inquiries and hearing vague reports regarding the possible influence of EMR on the work of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the celebrated Florida writer, author of the 1939 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling* and many other esteemed works. My friend and colleague in Durrell and Hemingway studies, Anna Lillios, who teaches at the University of Central Florida and is a leading authority on the literature of Florida, first brought to my attention some years ago the fact that Rawlings was aware of Roberts and her work. I asked Professor Lillios, who is the Executive Director of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, to let me know if she unearthed any evidence that Rawlings and Roberts had met. To date, no evidence has been reported.

In her recent fine volume, *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (University Press of Florida 2010), Lillios cites a lecture entitled “Regional Literature of the South” that Rawlings gave at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (New York 1939), in which Rawlings discussed how the regionalism rubric could be a dismissive term and talked about the work of Roberts. That essay was published the following year in *College English* and reprinted in *The Uncollected Writings of Marjorie Kin-*

*continued on page 12*

## A Letter from Chris Offut

### Matthew Nickel

The following letter was written by Chris Offut and sent to the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society courtesy of Chad Horn, poet and proprietor of KentuckyLit, Harrodsburg, KY. Offut is a writer born and raised in Kentucky. His books include *Kentucky Straight*, *The Same River Twice*, *The Good Brother*, *Out of the Woods*, and *No Heroes: A Memoir of Coming Home*. He has also written for the television shows *True Blood* and *Weeds*. His writing has received awards from the Lannan Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Whiting Foundation.

His letter below indicates a clear point many of us in the Society have been making for years now, and it is worth repeating: Roberts has been and still is a major presence in the literary landscape of Kentucky, of agrarian writing, of place writing, for contemporary writers, and, above all, in American literature. For instance, see H. R. Stoneback's piece on C. E. Morgan and her masterpiece *All the Living* in this newsletter (page 3), in which Morgan offers "perspicacious praise for *The Time of Man* as a neglected masterpiece and the best first novel in American literature." It is a phrase worth uttering repeatedly in certain academic circles: "the best first novel in American literature."

Morgan's statement is something many of us have felt deeply for years, and Offut's testimony, that he was, "knocked . . . for a loop" after reading Roberts, is poignant and fitting. I think many of us who continue to return to Kentucky, to experience the bright light and the rolling earth, to hear in one phrase on the Rolling Fork or in one song beyond the Little South our own love come from the highway, know what both Offut and Morgan express in their emotions about Roberts. It is indescribable, and some of us are lucky enough to experience Kentucky not only during the conference but always in her writing. Say it again: "the best first novel in American literature."

The Society would like to thank Chris Offut for taking the time to write his thoughtful letter and for his kind words. We hope to see him at future events and we wish him good luck writing.

### An Open Letter Addressing the EMR Conference KentuckyLit Reception April 21, 2012

Due to youthful rebellion in my twenties, I read everything I could find EXCEPT fiction set in Kentucky. My naïve

thinking was that since I grew up there, I wanted to read about other places—California, New York, Europe, Asia, Africa—even as far away as Ohio. I read absolutely no contemporary fiction or Southern fiction until I was past age thirty. Then, in a fit of slight maturity, I began reading Southern fiction, beginning with Kentucky.

*The Time of Man* knocked me for a loop. I was 32 when I read it, the ideal age for me to interact with Miss Roberts' restless, original, and creative mind. I loved her powerful character Ellen Chesser. I recognized the world Ellen inhabited, and understood both her simple needs and her deep naiveté. She didn't have much and didn't want much. I was living the same way—and still am. Ellen mostly walked everywhere she went, as I had grown up, and even left Kentucky—walking along the interstate with my thumb out. I knew Ellen's isolation and loneliness. She was an "old soul," a term that people began applying to me before I knew what it meant.

Later I understood it meant feeling ancient inside, as if born in the wrong era. It's hard to speculate what being an old soul might have meant to Ellen. I admired her ability to continue under duress, to find solace in the small moments of nature, to accept and endure. She seemed to have an instinctive understanding of such necessity to her life, lessons that for my part, I keep on being compelled to relearn.

I've always objected to the term "regional writer," because it denigrates even as it elevates. All writers, I believe, are regional. And I suspect that Miss Roberts' literary reputation has suffered unfairly due to such a limiting designation. There were other factors as well—timing and the whim of literary trend. She was not part of a literary movement, Southern or otherwise. Though she wrote about farm life and undoubtedly influenced the Agrarians, she is not associated with them. And though she wrote about poor working people, her work is not considered part of the proletarian literature of the 30s. For a reason I cannot fathom, her work has not been whole-heartedly embraced by later women writers.

The work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts is overdue for a fresh resurgence of interest by readers. It is merely a matter of time. I want to personally thank the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society for its sharp interest in a brilliant Kentucky writer.

Have fun in Kentucky. And remember—shake a jar of moonshine and inspect the bubbles before you drink any. If the bubble is perfectly bisected by the surface of the liquid, you have good shine.

**Chris Offutt**

## News & Notes

### Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect* (Eds. Stoneback, Boyle, and Nickel, 2012); *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008); and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Eds. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as original pieces of writing by her that have never before been published. The books are essential to the ongoing discussion about her life and work, and we hope that they will become available in libraries across the country for current and future readers alike. For more information regarding ordering, please visit <[www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com)>.

### EMR Panels at November 2012 SAMLA Convention in Research Triangle, NC

The Roberts Society was well represented this year at the SAMLA Convention in Research Triangle, North Carolina. **James Stamant** (Texas A&M) chaired the Roberts and Poetry Session with presentations by **Jessica Conti** (SUNY-New Paltz), **Amanda Capelli** (Independent Scholar), and **Matthew Nickel** (SUNY-New Paltz). **Gregg Neikirk** chaired the Roberts and New Works Session with presentations by **Sharon Peelor** (University of Oklahoma), **Adam Neikirk** (University of Mississippi), and **Jared Young** (SUNY-Albany).

### CFP: SAMLA 2013 (Atlanta, GA; November 8-10)

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect

Papers for this session may deal with all aspects of Roberts' work and life. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to, the following: Roberts and new work (particularly her posthumously published unfinished novel *Flood*); Roberts and her manuscripts; Roberts in the context of Southern literature; Roberts and Southern Agrarianism; Roberts' literary and stylistic influences (i.e., Synge, Hardy, Joyce, Homer, Hopkins, Beethoven, Pound); Roberts and religion; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and the novel; Roberts as poet; Roberts as writer of short fiction; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and the politics of literary reputation; Roberts and feminism; and Roberts and Kentucky. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2013 to Jessica Mackenzie Conti (SUNY-New Paltz) at [jesmackenzie@hotmail.com](mailto:jesmackenzie@hotmail.com).

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Other Writers

Papers for this session should deal with Elizabeth Madox Roberts and other writers. Topics may include but are not limited to: Roberts and her contemporaries (Roberts and

Pound, Roberts and Faulkner, Roberts and Hemingway, Roberts and Woolf, Roberts and Wescott, etc); Roberts and her influences; Roberts' literary friendships; Roberts' epistolary relationships; those influenced by Roberts; Roberts as Kentucky writer; Roberts as Southern Writer. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2013 to Matthew Nickel (SUNY-New Paltz) at [mattnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattnickel@gmail.com).

### College English Association

(Baltimore, March 27-29, 2014)

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Past & Present

Papers for this session should deal with Roberts' life and work. Suggested topics include but are not limited to: Roberts' legacy past and present; Roberts and biography; Roberts and influence; Roberts and intertextuality; Roberts and Southern Literature; Roberts, Place and Time; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and Feminism; Roberts and neglect; the Roberts revival; Roberts and other writers (Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, Tate, etc). Please send 250 word abstract to Matthew Nickel at [mattnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattnickel@gmail.com) by 15 August 2013.

### EMR Lectures

**H. R. Stoneback** featured Roberts in his recent visiting lecture (January 2013) at Palm Beach State College ("Spirit of Place . . ."), and his plenary paper at the 20th Anniversary Cormac McCarthy Conference at Berea College (March 2013) dealt with *The Great Meadow* and the probable influence of Roberts on McCarthy's work ("Order and Chaos: Roberts, McCarthy, and the Cumberland Gap"). In addition, he plans to feature Roberts in two major national addresses already booked for 2014 and 2015: his Keynote Address at the national convention of the College English Association in Baltimore (March 27-29, 2014) and his 2015 Presidential Address at the SAMLA Convention (dates and location tba). It is to be hoped that many EMRS members will present papers at these events; if so, we will bury forever the now-dated platitudes regarding the *neglect of Roberts*.

**Vicki Barker**, Professor of English at Carson-Newman University presented a program on Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Flood* on October 4, 2012 at the Carson-Newman Appalachian Center. Barker was introduced by Professor Shawn O'Hare, chair of the Carson-Newman English Department. She introduced the audience to Roberts and explained the history of the 1937 flood in Louisville and the background of the novel. She showed a clip of the newsreel titled, "1937, The Flood: The Story of the Worst Flood in American History" to further highlight the background for Roberts' story. Following the film, Barker read a portion of the novel. A question and answer session followed the reading. At the conclusion of the program, the Appalachian Center hosted

*continued on next page*

### News & Notes from page 7

a reception and book signing. The Appalachian Center provides a showcase for Appalachian visual and performing arts and hosts local, regional, and international writers.

### 2012 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

#### Award Winners:

2012 *Terry Ward Memorial Award* was given to: Jennifer Dellerba (Georgia Southern University).

2012 *Sparrow Memorial Awards* were given to: Adam Neikirk (University of Mississippi), Andrew Limbong (Independent Scholar), and Jared Young (SUNY-Albany).

*Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer at [tina.iraca@gmail.com](mailto:tina.iraca@gmail.com), or send a check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant to: Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery Street, Tivoli, NY 12583.*

#### Reading Roberts

Under the General Editorship of H. R. Stoneback, The Roberts Society published several volumes in 2012 including a posthumously never before published work by Roberts, *Flood*, an unfinished novel (ed. by Vicki Barker); a collection of essays by past and present Society members on Roberts, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*, edited by H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel; and an anthology of poetry, *Kentucky: Poets of Place*, with poems by and about well-known Kentucky writers including Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, H. R. Stoneback, Vivian Shipley, Dave Smith, and others. Please also see "Publication Notes" in this newsletter for Society member publications.

#### Inductees into the Roberts Society Hall of Fame

It was announced at the Roberts Society banquet at the Beaumont Inn in April 2012, that our first Honorary Life-

time EMRS Memberships were awarded to the following honorees: Joan Hamilton, owner of Elenores, the Roberts House in Springfield, who graciously hosts our annual tour; Nell Haydon, Director of Springfield Main Street Renaissance, who hosts our annual Springfield supper and labors tirelessly on behalf of the Roberts legacy; and Jeanne Penn Lane, owner of the historic landmark Penn's Store, who coordinates the annual Kentucky Writer's Day celebrations and for many years has welcomed the participation of Roberts Society members.

#### EMR Digital Archive

Past issues of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter* are now available online. Please go to [www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com) to browse the archives.

### Gisèle Sigal Gives Visiting Lectures on Roberts in New York

#### H. R. Stoneback

In April 2012 Professor Gisèle Sigal, Department Chair at the University of Pau/Bayonne, France, and long-time EMRS member came to New York to deliver two Roberts lectures at the State University of New York at New Paltz. In one lecture, delivered to my Poetry Seminar, Sigal discussed "Landscapes of the Mind: Recurrence and Variation in the Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts." My students found her close reading of the poetry of Roberts engaging and compelling and several students wrote about her lecture in papers they submitted. Her second lecture, "How I Discovered Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Southern Literature in France," was delivered to my graduate seminar in Faulkner and Southern Literature. Again my students found this lecture compelling and several students later expressed that they were "enthralled," "filled with a sense of wonder" that Roberts, whom they had never heard of before my class, was being read and written about in France.

*The EMR Traveling Troubadour Band performs "Love Will Come from the Highway" (lyrics by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, tune by H. R. Stoneback) at the Eddie Montgomery Steakhouse in Harrodsburg, April 2012*



## Springfield Resident Finds Two EMR Letters

Jane Eblen Keller

Mr. Wendell Grayson, now living with his wife, Madeleine, in Springfield, Kentucky, has been an accomplished history buff all his life. When he retired a few years ago as an engineer and moved from the Lexington area to Elizabeth Madox Roberts' hometown, he was able to devote more time to researching all kinds of things, including Kentucky history in general and his own and his wife's family stories in particular. Among the documents he recently investigated were papers from the Kentucky Mintons, his wife's relatives, whose many children married into other prominent Springfield families including the Bosleys and Cregors. And there, within the boxes entrusted to the more-than-competent custody of Mr. Grayson, were two original, heretofore unknown letters from Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Mr. Grayson immediately recognized the importance of these letters and took steps to make them public. His discovery can only be described as a significant, historic event, and our gratitude for his initiative is without bounds.

The longer and earlier of the two letters is to Celia Minton Bosley (born 1873), the youngest of eleven children in the Minton family. She was eight years older than EMR, but the two women shared a love of music, literature, weaving, gardening, and fine sewing. Celia and her husband, Charles Fleece Bosley, Jr., lived down the street from the Roberts home on Walnut Street, and in the early years of the twentieth century, the three forged what turned out to be a lifelong friendship.

We have a number of letters EMR wrote to Celia—"Miss Cele" or "Miss Cile" as EMR called her—over the years, but most are handwritten copies. This one is thus among the few originals on record and all the more valuable for that. It is typed on both sides of a sheet of EMR's personal stationery, engraved with her name and all that was necessary in the way of an address, i.e., "Springfield, Kentucky," and signed, simply, "Elizabeth." But it was written from Chicago and gives her temporary address as 4949 Indiana Avenue, "Care of Mrs. Lesemann." It is undated, but it is easy to ascertain that it was written in early 1925, January or February, when EMR was visiting the Lesemann family. They lived at the Chicago Training School, located at the address above, an institution for men and women preparing to be Christian missionaries and other kinds of church workers. The school's president was the Rev. Louis F. W. Lesemann, a Methodist minister and father of Maurice, EMR's friend and fellow poet from their days at the University of Chicago. We know from other sources that during this visit, EMR was finishing *The Time of Man* and in

the evenings entertained Maurice and his younger brother, Wilbur, known as Wib, by reading passages from the completed drafts.

The letter also tells us that EMR was "having a perfectly grand visit" and that she was particularly enjoying the Lesemanns' "large library of records." She and Maurice were doing a kind of informal history-of-music marathon, "beginning with Bach and progressing downward, being at the moment on Bethoven's [*sic*] 7th Symphony."

The purpose of the letter, apart from letting Celia know that she had arrived safely and had recovered from a sore throat, was to ask her friend to send a very special kind of thread. EMR had made a runner for Mrs. Lesemann but had not yet finished it with "the Italian hemstitch." She had asked her own mother to send the thread, but Mrs. Roberts had sent "the wrong kind and I despair of making her understand since she does not know the materials we used as well as we do. And so if you will send me about five or six yards of this stuff I'll be tremendously obliged."

Mr. Grayson enjoys this intimate glimpse into EMR's domestic occupations, her mild, all-too-human exasperation with her mother, and her use of the informal word, *stuff*. I enjoy the sense of how her relationship with Maurice had settled into an easy friendship based on mutual interests and affection. Back at the university, around 1919, EMR had for a time suffered from a non-reciprocated romantic attachment to the much younger man. Whatever awkwardness resulting from that had been resolved.

The second letter is addressed to "Dear Mr. Bosley," Celia's husband, a banker who helped EMR with financial matters. Her formal salutation is matched by her signature as "Elizabeth Roberts." Like the first, this letter is undated but is easily placed in the chronology. Its two typed paragraphs are on a single sheet of an early (pre-1929) version of the letterhead of the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, so we know it was written in late October 1927 when EMR was in the city to prepare for the publication of *My Heart and My Flesh*. She reports in the second paragraph that "the new book, not yet out for five days, has already sold out the first edition of six thousand." Alas, initial sales and enthusiastic reviews did not prove to yield the long-term "quite generous sales" she and her publishers hoped for.

These letters add to our knowledge of EMR's close relationship with the Bosleys and their extended network of kin in central Kentucky. One of Celia's sisters, for example, Mary Elizabeth Minton ("Miss Minnie") Cregor, was also a supportive friend. EMR's letters include frequent and affectionate references to "Mrs. Cregor," a fine musician, as was

*continued on page 11*

## Conference Report 2012

### Jessica Mackenzie Conti

The XIV annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 21-23, 2012. Our conference began with a gracious reception at KentuckyLit, hosted by Chad Horn and with a performance by Sarah Elizabeth. William Boyle, President of the Society, welcomed us at the Beaumont Inn, and then H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Roberts Society followed with his keynote address: "Elizabeth Madox Roberts in the WPA Literary Landscape of Kentucky." We enjoyed a wonderful meal with our honorary guest Joan Hamilton, topped off with the presentations of the Terry Ward and Sparrow Memorial Awards and a conference book give-a-way. Later in the evening, the Roberts Society and members performed at Eddie Montgomery's Steakhouse in Harrodsburg.

On Sunday, attendees traveled to Roncevaux Farm, followed by Kentucky Writers Day. In the afternoon, the society was honored at the Springfield Opera House by Mayor John W. Ceconi, The Springfield City Council, Nell Haydon and Main Street Renaissance, and the Ladies of Springfield, and we were entertained by the fabulous Wheeler Family. Conference participants were then given a tour of Elenores, Roberts' house, hosted by Joan Hamilton.

Monday morning the Society was greeted by President William D. Huston and Leo Hamelin at Saint Catharine College. Academic papers were presented throughout the day by many new and veteran Roberts scholars. The conference ended with a poetry reading at Roberts' grave.

**Session 1: Jane Eblen Keller** (U of Baltimore): "All My Songs: Chapter One of the Biography of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Vicki Barker** (Carson-Newman C): "'Honor my Resting Muse': Editing Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Flood Manuscript*"; **William Slavick** (U of Southern Maine): "Roberts, the Poetry Club, and *Poetry*"; **Chad Horn** (Independent Scholar): "Capturing Bigfoot on the Sacred Stomping Grounds of Thomas Merton: How a Blind Squirrel Named Rovit Stumbled over a Magical Acorn Whilst Scampering Frantically Under the Tree"

**Session 2: Gisele Sigal** (U de Pau): "Drama and Trauma in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *My Heart and My Flesh*"; **Jessica Conti** (SUNY-NP): "'The lamb had bleated softly . . . like the cry of a small child': Roberts' Morality Play, 'The Children of the Earth'"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State U): "'The Life of Elizabeth Madox Roberts': On the Springfield Central Community Theatre Stage"; **Adam Neikirk** (U of Mississippi): "Between the Meadow and the Mouth: *Song in the Meadow* and the Romantic Chronotope"

**Session 3a: Jerry Salyer** (Jefferson CCC): "Envisioning Origins: Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and the American Frontier"; **Shawn Rubenfeld** (U of Idaho): "Discovering Place: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Carol Ryrie Brink"; **Amanda Capelli** (SUNY-NP): "The Points Where Poetry Touches Life: Conceptions of Beauty and Pleasure in *The Great Meadow*"; **Chris Paolini** (SUNY-NP): "'White Light in the Ewe-Itide': The Mysteries of Man and Beast in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'Holy Morning'"

**Session 3b: Lyndsey Brown** (Georgia Southern U): "The Mysterious Complexities of Home in Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Jenny Bugna Lambeth** (Georgia Southern U): "If These Walls Could Talk: The Roles of Domestic Space and Hostess in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Virginia Woolf"; **Melissa Hay** (Georgia Southern U): "Romantic Overtones in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Zora Neale Hurston"; **Alex Shakespeare** (Boston C): "Marianne Moore in Brooklyn, Elizabeth Madox Roberts in Kentucky"

**Session 4a: Matthew Nickel** (SUNY-NP): "'Time flowed tightly . . . Outside, singing': Yearning Toward Vision in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Robert Penn Warren"; **Brad McDuffie** (Nyack C): "'My Love Will Come From the Highway': Not By Strange Gods of the Road in Roberts' 'Love by the Highway'"; **Jared Young** (SUNY-Albany): "Roberts and Faulkner: Consequences of Found Fortune within *A Buried Treasure* and 'The Bear'"; **Andrew Limbong** (SUNY-NP): "Growth Spurts and Pains: The Realization of Mortality in Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Roberts' *Song in the Meadow*"

**Session 4b: Chris Lawrence** (SUNY-NP): "Intimations of Eco-Socialism in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Megan Morris** (Georgia Southern U): "Feminine Individualism and Sexuality in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* and Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*"; **Jennifer Dellerba** (Georgia Southern U): "The Passionate Human Spirit in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"

*Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society 2012*



### Two EMR Letters from page 9

her daughter, Lillian “Dolly” Cregor, some ten years younger than EMR but also a valued friend. (This same Dolly Cregor married a Roy Bateman, and her descendants—cousins of Mr. Grayson’s wife—are the ones who saved and passed on the parcels of documents discussed here.)

EMR counted all these people among Springfield’s intellectual and artistic elite, her natural allies, and they returned her fondness with constant faith in her abilities and substantial help in many concrete ways.

An abiding mystery (one of many) in EMR’s story is what happened to the other letters we know she wrote to these faithful Springfield friends. As I mentioned above, most of her letters to Celia Bosley survive only via copies, and these in the sometimes illegible handwriting of Woodridge Spears who wrote his dissertation on EMR in the early 1950s, the days before the Xerox machine. He evidently returned the originals to the family, but for whatever reason, or so far as we know, these have vanished.

This does not in any way diminish our delight in the discovery of these two new letters—or our huge gratitude to those who saved them. Miracles do happen, helped along by Springfield’s indispensable Nell R. Haydon, Director of the City of Springfield Main Street/Renaissance, who put Mr. Grayson in touch with us. We can always hope that other boxes in other attics might turn up more treasures. Meanwhile, I hereby recommend that we appoint Wendell and Madeleine Grayson and their relatives as the EMR heroes of the decade.

We formally acknowledge Madeleine and Wendell Grayson and Mary Minton Bateman Angel (Dolly Cregor Bateman’s granddaughter and Mrs. Grayson’s cousin) as the owners of the two Roberts letters, and we heartily thank them, again, for making these available. We also thank Rebecca Roberts Owens, EMR’s literary executor, for permission to quote from them.

### The New Edition of *The Great Meadow*

#### H. R. Stoneback

As some readers of this note will know, the Hesperus Press of London brought out a new edition of *The Great Meadow* in 2012. Hesperus announces itself as “committed to bringing out . . . works written by the greatest authors, and unjustly neglected.” The selection of *The Great Meadow* resulted from the Hesperus “Uncover a Classic” competition in 2012, in which readers “were invited to nominate one out-of-print book they considered worthy of reprinting, and to write an introduction of no more than 500 words explaining why.” Michael Wynne, the Irish writer, selected the winning novel, *The Great Meadow*, and his brief essay introduces the volume.

Wynne’s brief but perspicacious introduction praises the “astounding ease and immediacy” of the prose, and the way “the reader experiences the pain and the beauty of the inevitability of life’s purposive push and momentum, as well as that ever-pressing sense of the mysterious that we all carry within us.” In conclusion, he writes that *The Great Meadow* is “permeated by a fierce, natural courage that issues from the unshowy lyricism with which it communicates virtually incommunicable inner truths.”

And this is more than just another paperback reprint of the novel. It is one of the most handsomely produced so-called paperbacks I have ever held in my hands, with its semi-hard or cardboard covers with folded-in flaps that produce a dust-jacket effect. The front cover, with its apt and evocative illustration of Diony gazing out over the fields of Kentucky, is emblazoned with the tag “Short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction,” and underneath the title and Roberts’ name we read this:

‘That rare thing, a true artist’

Robert Penn Warren, author of *All the King’s Men*

On the back cover is a quote from the *New York Times*: “Lucid and arresting, rhythmical, fresh in phrasing and construction, giving always the effect of effortless arrangement.” And this from the *Chicago Tribune*: “A noble piece of work.”

All in all, this is a fine edition, worthy of our finest novel of settlement and the Kentucky frontier, a true American epic. Buy this book, hold it in your hands, and you will see. And if you haven’t yet read *The Great Meadow*, read it now and consider yourself lucky to be reading this edition. Better yet, do as I plan to do very soon—teach it in your classes. Let’s help keep this edition in print! (For information and ordering: <[www.hesperuspress.com](http://www.hesperuspress.com)>; also available at Amazon and Abebooks.)

**Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings** *from page 5*

*nan Rawlings* (UP Florida, 2007). If any reader of this newsletter needs a topic for the EMR Conference in 2014, take it and run with it.

I often go to Florida on my winter break to do visiting lectures and poetry readings, and while there I meet many of the literary and scholarly luminaries of Florida. Roberts always enters the conversation and I am not always the first person to mention her. Some years ago, when I spoke on Hemingway and Florida in a visiting lecture at the University of Central Florida, Lillios led me on a tour of Hurston's hometown Eatonville, very close to where EMR wintered, and we talked about possible connections, direct or indirect, between Hurston and Roberts. This past January, my winter speaking tour took me to Palm Beach State College, where Steve Brahlele hosted my visit to his campus. Professor Brahlele, who is a Trustee of the Rawlings Society, informed me that Roberts is mentioned in the Rawlings letters. We hope to have a Brahlele article on Rawlings and Roberts in the next issue of the newsletter.

Professors Brahlele and Lillios have expressed interest in participating in our EMR conferences. I hope they will come bearing news of Roberts and Rawlings and Hurston. Rawlings and Hurston are sometimes characterized as *two of America's most beloved southern female writers*. Add Roberts to that list. Beyond possible meetings of these writers, literary connections or influences or resonant intertextualities might be explored at future Roberts conferences and for that matter, at future Rawlings conferences. The Rawlings Society (website <rawlingssociety.org>) will hold its 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in late April 2013.

By the way, Rawlings knew and admired Hemingway and they corresponded: all the more reason to have a conference sometime soon on Florida writers. I know just the place and just the time (in the interest of northerners)—January. Maybe Jane Keller will soon share some information on Roberts in Florida from her forthcoming biography—exactly where EMR stayed in the Orlando area (and anywhere else) and how long, what she wrote there, who she met—and deepen our sense of the Florida connection.

**Publication Notes**

In this occasional newsletter column we will report recent *books* by Society members. Although Society members also publish numerous essays on writers other than Roberts, these articles will not be recorded here. But please send us your citations for any essays published on Roberts that are not included in EMRS publications. *Reminder:* The Reading Roberts Series, under the general editorship of H. R. Stoneback—as reported in the 2012 Newsletter, is a thriving concern. The Series published three books in 2012 and more volumes are in progress. Stay tuned.

- Barker, Vicki. *Flood* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {An unfinished novel by Roberts}
- Florczyk, Steven. *Hemingway, the Red Cross, and the Great War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, forthcoming. {Critical monograph}
- Nickel, Matthew. *Hemingway's Dark Night: Catholic Influences and Intertextualities in the Work of Ernest Hemingway*. Wickford, RI: New Street Communications, 2013. {Critical monograph}
- Nickel, Matthew, ed. *Kentucky: Poets of Place*. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {Collection of poems by and for Kentucky and Kentucky writers}
- Stoneback, H. R. *Voices of Women Singing*. New York: Codhill Press, 2011. {Poems}
- . *Voices from Venice*. New York: Des Hymnagistes, 2013. {Poems: Bilingual Edition with translations of Stoneback's poetry by various Italian writers}
- & Daniel Kempton, eds. *Aldington, Pound and the Imagists at Brunnenburg*. France: Gregau Press, 2012. {Collection of critical essays}
- , William Boyle, & Matthew Nickel, eds. *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect. The Reading Roberts Series*. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {Collection of critical essays}

**Wendell Berry & Elizabeth Madox Roberts:  
Common Ground**

**Matthew Nickel**

In 2012, the Berry Center of New Castle, Kentucky (formed by Wendell Berry and his family) created a partnership with St. Catharine College to provide an interdisciplinary degree program in ecological agrarianism and farming. The program includes academic coursework, fieldwork, awareness of community, local economy, sustain-

*continued on next page*

## Earl Hamner Receives First Society Award

### H. R. Stoneback

This winter the EMR Society's Honorary President H. R. Stoneback proposed and the EMR Executive Committee unanimously approved the creation of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Award for Southern and Appalachian Writing*. The award carries with it Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Roberts Society and an invitation to be the Society's guest of honor at the Annual Beaumont Banquet. Hamner—a novelist and screenwriter from Virginia now living in California, creator of *The Waltons*, one of the most popular series in television history—has written in very compelling terms about how *The Time of Man* is the one book that had the greatest influence on his life and work. Delighted when I relayed the news of the EMR Award, Hamner wrote me that he much regretted his inability to attend this year's conference to receive the honor in person. Citing reasons of distance, health, and age (“now approaching 90”), Hamner will attempt only one trip East this year, to his native state of Virginia to be present for a proclamation by the state legislature that Hamner is in the company of the most “notable Virginians” together with a reception at the Governor's Mansion. In 2011 he received the Literary Lifetime Achievement Award from the Library of Virginia, where his papers will be deposited in the same archive that houses the papers of Edgar Allan Poe and William Styron. The EMR Society is pleased and proud to honor Hamner for his distinguished achievements and to count him among the many long-time admirers who report the transformational effects of reading Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

## *The Time of Man on the NBC Radio Theater*

### H. R. Stoneback

Before Earl Hamner became a celebrated novelist and Hollywood screenwriter, before he wrote television scripts for such shows as *The Twilight Zone*, before he received even more acclaim as the creator of the immensely popular TV series *The Waltons* (and *Falcon Crest*), he wrote dramatizations for the *NBC Radio Theater* in the 1950s. In the volume entitled *You've Got to Read This Book!* numerous famous people report on the single most important life-changing book they have ever read. Hamner writes about *The Time of Man*.

Sometime in the 1950s, the exact date still to be determined, NBC assigned Hamner the task of dramatizing *The Time of Man* for their popular *Radio Theater* program. He read the book, his life was changed, and he wrote the script. First, I would say here that the fact that *The Time of Man* was presented on the most celebrated literary/dramatic radio program of its day amounts to yet another nail in the coffin of the much overstated Myth of Roberts Neglect. And then I would add that as of this writing, I am awaiting the arrival in the mail of a package from Earl Hamner containing the sole surviving copy of the Roberts broadcast, along with his script. Maybe at some future EMR event, we will have a chance to listen to Roberts on the radio.

Finally, this thought: since I listened to the *NBC Radio Theater* as a boy in the 1950s, maybe that's where I first encountered Ellen Chesser and *The Time of Man*, a discovery unaware that pre-dated the oft-told tale of my epiphanic discovery of the novel in the stacks of the Vanderbilt Library in the late 1960s. If I heard that broadcast, I now have no accessible memory of it. But memory is very tricky and, as the French say, *très très très compliqué*. Maybe when I hear this broadcast—and if it arrives in time we may all have a chance to hear it at the conference—memory will speak. If I did hear it in the 1950s, I will remember it, the *sound* will tell, for in the 1950s we still *listened*. Stay tuned.

### Berry & Roberts *from previous page*

ability, local knowledge, and stewardship. The new Berry Farming Program at St. Catharine College is headed by Dr. Leah Bayens. The cross-disciplinary nature of the program utilizes both the sciences and the arts, focusing on the humanities (literature, sociology, cultural geography) as well as farming and marketing, scientific research, community leadership, and environmental arts.

The Roberts Society has enjoyed St. Catharine College (the site of our annual academic presentations) and the surrounding Springfield landscape for fifteen years now. It is

fitting that both Roberts and Berry find common ground, for many of us believe it is writing like Roberts' that offers local knowledge and the love of place central to sustainable farming and agrarian concerns. Many of us believe *The Time of Man* is the quintessential agrarian novel, and several Roberts Scholars have presented papers on Roberts and Berry at past conferences. We look forward to making new connections that will support the Berry Farming Program and continue to bridge the gap between literature and place.

**Earl Hamner—**  
**From *The Time of Man* to *The Waltons***

**H. R. Stoneback**

Brief notes on Hamner and Roberts elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter* provide an outline sketch of his distinguished career as writer and his Roberts connection. Here I will fill in the details—with quotations from his published commentary on EMR as well as his unpublished observations in a manuscript he sent me and from our correspondence—of the story behind his selection of *The Time of Man* as the book that changed his life and led him ever more deeply into his writerly sense of vocation. It seems to me a very difficult matter, this business of choosing the *one* most important “life-changing” book, especially for someone with a long career as writer and *reader*. For example, an editor of a major journal has been asking me for years to write an essay on the most important “sea change” novel in my life and I have been unable to decide which novel holds the number one position on my personal Hit Parade. It’s relatively easy to name the top five, but *one*? For decades now, these novels have been more or less tied for my first place: *The Time of Man*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, and Warren’s *All the King’s Men*. The fifth book on my list is always subject to change: some years it might be a certain French or Russian novel and once, long, long ago, a Thomas Wolfe novel would have been in my top five. In a recent letter to me, Hamner noted that along with Roberts he “revered Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner and your Mr. Hemingway.” But he has no hesitation in declaring that *The Time of Man* is the most profoundly epiphanic novel, indeed the most important *book* he has read in his life.

In the recent volume—*You’ve Got to Read This Book!*—in which “55 people tell the story of the book that changed their life,” Hamner writes about his arrival in New York City as a young man and how he “joined the writing staff at NBC” in the days of radio:

One day, the editor of the show [*The NBC Radio Theater*] assigned me a book to dramatize: *The Time of Man* . . . The first thing that caught my attention was that Elizabeth Madox Roberts had moved to New York from Kentucky and had written the book in a basement apartment on West 96<sup>th</sup> Street. I, too, was a transplanted Southerner, living on 87<sup>th</sup> Street, practically in a basement, so I felt an immediate kinship with her. (Canfield and Hendricks, eds. Collins, 2006: 158-59)

We might well wonder what the source was—perhaps Viking Press publicity?—for Hamner’s account of Roberts in New York. More importantly, he continues:

When I began reading the novel, I discovered some-

thing wondrous and, for me, completely life-changing. Roberts’s characters spoke in a way that, while totally unique, was exactly what I had heard as a boy in Virginia . . . The novel’s language resonated with me and inspired me to later use the same linguistic style in my own work. I was also fascinated by the characters themselves . . . I was immediately struck by Ellen’s marvelous imagination and sense of wonder. Ellen’s mother is a character of great strength and perseverance . . . *The Time of Man* simply delighted me. It embodies the nobility I had always perceived in so-called common, ordinary people. I was elated by this newfound style and deep connection with another Southern writer. Roberts gave me permission to write in my own vernacular. Finally, I had found my voice—and my subject matter. Not long after reading her book, I wrote and published my first novel, *Fifty Roads to Town*. (159-60)

Hamner then skips over his novels (*Spencer’s Mountain* and *The Homecoming*) to *The Waltons*, the Emmy-award winning television series he created and narrated, long-running and immensely popular and beloved worldwide:

If I hadn’t come upon Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s novel, *The Waltons* would probably never have happened. Her work helped me portray the hill people, not as thick-browed, shaggy rednecks and hillbillies, but as the courageous, self-reliant, and honorable people I knew so well. (160)

It is an occasion of wonder to me, and should be to all Roberts aficionados, that *The Time of Man* inspired one of the most successful and admired programs in TV history.

In closing, Hamner notes the universal appeal of the Walton family and how people all over the world “claim them as their own” and find compelling values and “messages” (that he says he never intended as messages—*messages* are for telegrams) in the story of the Waltons. And he concludes: “I suppose, like Ellen Chesser in *The Time of Man*, the Waltons simply appeal to the best in all of us” (160).

Hamner recently sent me a copy of an unpublished typescript of a talk he gave at Berea College “a few years ago.” In this document he writes many of the same things he said in the published essay cited above. But he also says this: “Miss Roberts’s characters spoke a language that was familiar to me. The sound of it was in my ears. But it was language that had been elevated from the everyday spoken word to the level of literature.” And this, about writing his first novel: “The words came in a rush. It was as if they had been there all along and Elizabeth Madox Roberts had opened a flood gate.” He quotes a long passage from his first novel *Fifty Roads to Town* then writes: “If you have read Elizabeth Madox Roberts you will recognize how heavily influenced I was by her work.” And he concludes his Berea speech: “Isn’t it a fine thing that inspiration can be like a river that flows from one generation to another! I was given my voice by Elizabeth Madox Roberts from Springfield, Kentucky.”

As far as I have been able to determine, nobody was aware of the overwhelming influence of Roberts on Hamner until he began to talk and write about it in the last decade. Who would have guessed that John-Boy, the aspiring writer of the Walton clan—*John-Boy was me*, Hamner says—was the progeny of Roberts? My initial response, after reading Hamner on Roberts, was this: *Nobody*. Yet, upon reflection, I recognized certain inklings and divinations from long ago. I recently reread the last chapter of my PhD dissertation written at Vanderbilt in the 1960s. It was a wide-ranging work of great length that aspired to survey what I then called the *Hillfolk Tradition* as it existed in American and English literature for two centuries. I set out to read *everything* that had ever been written about hill people, particularly but not exclusively Southern hill people. It was a daunting task because so much had been written, but along the way I discovered Roberts and *The Time of Man* and she became my exemplar of the tradition, for reasons of style, story, character, and the stunning, stabbing actuality of her writing.

In my closing chapter I wanted to survey the hillfolk terrain as it appeared in the 1960s, considering all contemporary works germane to the matter. I needed a gatekeeper, someone to cull the vast body of hillfolk material. My gatekeeper was Jane Arden Hillman—known to the world as my late wife Sparrow—herself a Kentucky hill-woman who was very much engaged by and involved in my study of hillfolk writing. She rejected some writers as not worth my time—I think she was anxious for me to finish the dissertation and get shed of the project so we could sing again—and one day she handed me three books and said: *You might consider these*. The books were *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark* by Cormac McCarthy, and *Spencer's Mountain* by Earl Hamner. Hamner was better known than McCarthy then, but until my gatekeeper handed me those books I had not read a word by either writer. I decided to include them in the epilogue to my study of the *Hillfolk Tradition*. I wrote several pages on both authors but when my mentor and dissertation director T. D. Young saw those pages he said: “You’re starting another book. You’d better stop now.” I had already written more than 400 pages approved by my committee. What I wrote on McCarthy has not survived and all that is left of what I wrote about Hamner are two sentences near the end of my dissertation, which note that the Spencers (later to become the Waltons) exemplify “traditional ways, and the hill man’s clinging love of the land” and “represent the hill man’s last stand, perhaps, in a modernized mountain setting.” Finding in 2013 these words I had written 44 years ago, I was somewhat surprised

Fast forward a few years into the 1970s—we have moved to the Hudson Valley and occasionally we watch with our

New York village neighbors the most popular new television show: *The Waltons*. Since we swiftly established our Kentucky-identity in that New York village, through singing and story-telling and our love of country ways, some of our New York neighbors, the urban transplants, probably thought *we were* the Waltons. And since it was well-known that I was an aspiring writer at least one neighbor sometimes called me John-Boy when he could get away with it.

After one episode of the show a neighbor said it was “too sentimental” for him. Sparrow said: “Sentiment’s a good thing and it’s not the same as sentimentality.” I said something like *there’s a fine line between sentiment and sentimentality and the best writers always walk that line*. Our resident skeptic or cynic said he didn’t buy the Waltons and their values, *they’re not real*. “Oh they’re real, all right,” Sparrow said. He laughed sarcastically. Skeptic or cynic, he was always a little too sarcastic.

“Skepticism as a settled habit of mind is a form of sentimentality,” I said. And Sparrow added: “Knee-jerk cynicism is the lowest form of sentimentality.” Sparrow was, aside from being a legendary Kentucky mountain singer, an acute literary critic. After our neighbors left that evening, Sparrow said: “This guy Hamner must have read Roberts, he knows *The Time of Man*.” When I told Hamner this in a letter a few weeks ago he was delighted and wrote back: “It is a pleasure to learn that you and your late wife have read *Spencer’s Mountain* . . . and that she recognized the Madox Roberts influence.” So now, four decades later, the inklings and divinations have been confirmed. I wish I had watched *The Waltons* more than I did. It was shown on a night when I taught my evening graduate Seminar in Southern Lit—Faulkner, Roberts, Tate and Warren (the latter two writers, of course, great admirers of Roberts). The other day I had lunch with the recently retired Director of *New Directions*, that press which has long been a bastion of High Modernism and publisher of radically avant-garde works. When Hamner came up in our conversation I asked her if she knew *The Waltons*, if she thought the show was *sentimental*, she said: “Oh no—I loved *The Waltons*. Never missed it.”

I wonder if there is a *Waltons* aficionado out there who might have caught John-Boy mentioning Roberts in some episode, or noticed a copy of *The Time of Man* in John-Boy’s hands or visible on a shelf in the background. Maybe someone will research the matter on the currently available DVD of the complete *Waltons* episodes and we will have a session at a future conference on *The Waltons* and EMR. We should.

## God's Great Flood: Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Robert Penn Warren Revisited

Matthew Nickel

During the XIV Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference in 2012 society members celebrated the Reading Roberts Series. Under the General Editorship of H. R. Stoneback, our inaugural volume for the series was Elizabeth Madox Roberts' unfinished (and never before published) novel *Flood*, organized, edited, and introduced by Vicki Barker, Professor of English at Carson-Newman University. Barker's diligence has created a valuable work for the society, for Roberts scholars, and for the general reader. Though the novel was never completed by Roberts, it still offers a vivid image of Kentucky, of character and landscape, of a major historical moment during the 1937 Louisville flood, and of Roberts' lyrical prose.

The narrative focuses on Joel Marsh, a complex young man forced to reconcile his relationships and traumatic events in his life against the backdrop of the 1937 flood. The novel opens in media res with Joel trying to understand how he became "the village bad man" (6). Shortly thereafter, Joel encounters several teenage girls—one of whom, Claudia Burkhead, Joel had been fantasizing about—and he is scorned by them. In his anger Joel gallops his horse directly at the girls in the road, scattering them into briars and thorns. Later, as he justifies his rage, Roberts offers us one of her classic and allusive modernist passages. Joel explains:

There was a Beatrice, . . . Well, it's the same as if Dante had ridden over the girl in a madness. Is what I did . . . Gazed at her in church to console myself for Katha Flemming and all her darkness. Said my prayers with the preacher, when he prayed for us, and always had Claudia in mind somehow and her face in my eyes somewhere . . . And then what did I do but ride her down on the road? (20)

As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Joel's wife, Kath Flemming, has died, and his infant daughter Emily has been taken by his late-wife's parents. He had fought against marrying the woman, but the child itself had been, as Roberts writes, "the fatal tie that had brought about his marriage to this person whom he hated even before the law bound him and the magistrate said of them 'man and wife'" (33). And his life with Kath was troubled, defined by her anger, violence, never relenting, always apathy, and eventually indifference as her demands increased and he became "a generator or finisher of her sinister desires" (36). The reader learns about all of this as the narrative unfolds in glimpses of memory interspersed with scenes in Joel's house, the comings and goings of his parents, and amid the din of news and predictions about the weather, the ever-falling rain, and the impending flood. Roberts' form exemplifies the struggle

of Joel's life: the past is never past, always informing and dramatizing the facts of the present.

Thematically, Roberts' story is driven by the ominous nature of the flood and all its biblical implications, evident especially in the exchanges between Joel and his father Gabriel. Joel believes their age is defined as the "Age of Electricity. Age of Oil. Mechanical Power out of oil," and his father argues that it is more ruled by the social instinct, "Social Power" (37). Then Gabriel, assuming the posture of an Old Testament prophet, explains: "It's the group instinct, if you can call it so, is what makes him want the oil so bad that he mighty near busts a hamstring to get it. Wars over oil. Finds God in *himself*, in mankind. He leaves Jehovah out then. When he makes himself a God he breaks the first commandment. . . . he breaks all the balance" (37).

Joel's approach to Louisville is filled with imaginings of his sister Tansy and his compulsion to rescue her from the flood. His determination to get to Tansy is at heart an attempt at expiation, to atone for his past conduct and the memories of his life with his late-wife. In his insistence to rescue Tansy and her children, Joel may also atone for the abandonment of his own child. Barker, in her introduction, explains, "Joel can find no peace from the memories of his very public failures, and thus the trip through the flood becomes a kind of penance for him, one that he willingly assumes" (xv).

In Louisville, amid the flood waters, Joel finds a rowboat and he makes his way through the city into the night. The rowing is ominous as he enters deeper into the darkness and he hears almost like a chant, voices warning flood refugees, *eastward, go on eastward*. His journey into the flood moves "forward in a limitless blackness," and he becomes simply himself: "Beyond that there was nothing that he claimed for his own, either as past experience or as making a present" (70). In one scene a big gasoline tank, leaking gasoline on the water, pins him against a wall, and he realizes it is a. He sees then the danger of someone throwing a match out a window, imagines flames engulfing him in the heart of the flood, and thinks to himself that it might be better to light a flame and "make an end swiftly," to bring about his own doom. It is one of Roberts' most explicit *dark night of the soul* scenes, a struggle through failure, the "terror and death into which he had gone to find himself" (73). In the midst of darkness, in the gloom, he sees one candle light flicker. Roberts writes: "he died three times in the violent leap and lap of death when flame ran as a monster tongue" (73), but the flames are only impending, are symbolic, and beyond this epiphanic death of the self, he finds his sister's house.

The narrative ends in the empty house, but Barker adds that Roberts' notes were extensive indicating the direction of the story after the last scene. Indeed, I suspect Roberts would

have revisited many of her chapters, some obviously left unfinished. Regardless, what she has left us is valuable, and her notes about the novel confirm the profoundly symbolic nature of Joel's journey. Barker surveys important passages from the manuscripts wherein Roberts writes: "Relate to the great and profound past of all human learning . . . The original deluge . . . The flood"; "One could never escape from God's great flood of Life and Death"; "Here the great sour flood pours back, the backward flow of life and time, the dark flood/Joel . . . tragic figure . . . some grandeur in his struggle, some universal significance" (xiv).

Her fragments about the story are revealing, and her thematic approach to the flood events indicates possible influence and important resonances with another novel published two decades after Roberts' death: Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*. Though the subjects of Roberts' and Warren's novels differ sharply, Roberts' manuscript notes suggest a deeper thematic resemblance between the two works. In her sketch of Joel as a "tragic figure," Roberts suggests there is "some knowledge far back in his mind that he had destroyed the mother of his child. *Some knowledge that he was not free of his act and that he could in the nature of his psychology not be free. As if he were blind*" (my emphasis, xiv). The leap from Joel to Brad Tolliver does not seem difficult, both imprisoned by the nature of psychology, the mistakes of the past, and knowledge. Nor does it seem difficult to connect Joel's struggle to Warren's other famous novel, *All the King's Men*, and to Jack Burden, also in desperate need to reconcile with knowledge—that *the end of man is to know*—and his own acts, imprisoned in the complicity of time present, time past.

We should all be familiar with the confluence of events after Roberts' death, written about extensively in numerous places by H. R. Stoneback. A brief summary should suffice here to

see how the pieces fit nicely together. Roberts dies in 1941 and by 1943 Allen Tate gets her papers into the Library of Congress, papers he declares, according to Stoneback, "one of the two most important literary sources for textual and critical study" (viii). Then Tate takes leave of the office and gives Warren oversight of the papers in 1944. Within two years of seeing the Roberts' papers, Warren publishes *All the King's Men* (deeper echoes than merely the one above resonate; see Stoneback, "'Strange Caterwauling': Singing in the Wilderness with Boone & Audubon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Robert Penn Warren" for further discussion).

Then in 1962-63, Warren is again deep in Roberts' country, finishing his famous essay on *The Time of Man*, "Life is from Within." He writes to Tate about having finished the EMR piece, 25 Nov 1962, and in that same letter mentions being "toward the end of a first draft, a novel I've been working at for two and a half years and thinking about for a lot longer" (*Selected Letters: 1953-1968* 360). By March 1963, the same month his Roberts essay is published in the *Saturday Review*, Warren has finished the first draft of what will be called *Flood: A Romance of Our Time*. The possible influence and the profound resonance is striking. The fact that two of Warren's masterpieces—arguably his two best novels—were written within periods of time he was steeped in Roberts is not coincidental: the aura of Roberts is all over Warren. Many of us have felt this resonance, and now with the hard work of Vicki Barker in organizing this volume and with the ceaseless effort of H. R. Stoneback in encouraging production of the *Flood* novel and in creating and overseeing the Reading Roberts Series, we have another document revealing deeper connections. Perhaps if Roberts had finished her novel, Joel too would have found solace in yearning toward a special forgiveness, or can we call it blessedness, as he sought to rescue his sister beyond darkness in the country of the heart.

### Kentucky Writers Day 2012

*The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society participated in Kentucky Writers Day 2012 at Penn's Store, Gravel Switch, KY. Repairs to the flood damaged store were coming along. The audience was lively and full in the field just in front of the porch-stage (pictured here).*

*H. R. Stoneback and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society read poems for and from Roberts and Kentucky writers. We thank Jeanne Penn Lane for her gracious hospitality and we wish her and the store good luck.*



## Sunday Supper Includes Act I of *Coming Home*

### Gregg Neikirk

A play I have been working on for a long time about Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *Coming Home: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Story*, is complete and ready for production. At this year's fifteenth annual conference, the Central Kentucky Theatre group will present a selected excerpt from the play and "perform" it for Roberts Society members who attend the traditional Sunday afternoon supper at the Springfield Opera House. According to Erika Campbell, the theatre's interim director, and Springfield Renaissance Director Nell Haydon, Act I of the 5-Act play will be demonstrated, and a brief synopsis of the entire play will be available. While the group had hoped to be able to produce the full play in Springfield on the weekend of the conference, a change of directors meant that major alterations in the theatre group schedule were required. The play will go on, however, as best as possible. "We are very happy to be able to give the Society members a rendition of Act I for the conference," said Ms. Haydon. "And bigger and brighter things are coming for Professor Neikirk's play, as we think a little time will tell." The play begins in Orlando in 1940 near the end of Roberts' life. As she thinks back through her career, the scenes present various tableaux of her life, including her early days as a young poet and teacher in Springfield, her time at the University of Chicago, and the successes—and disappointments—she experienced as an author and daughter of her Little Country for the remainder of her life. Since the time that Roberts was inducted into the first Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in January, other theatre directors have expressed interest in possible options for the play.

The first Act of *Coming Home: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Story* is planned for Sunday, April 21, at approximately 5 p.m. (please check conference schedule).

## *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society*

*Honorary President: H. R. Stoneback, SUNY-New Paltz*

*President: Matthew Nickel, SUNY-New Paltz*

*Vice President: Goretti Vianney-Benca, The Culinary Institute of America*

*Vice President: James Stamant, Texas A & M University*

*Secretary/Treasurer: Tina Iraca, Dutchess Community College*

*EMRS Newsletter Editors: Matthew Nickel / James Stamant*

*Visit us on the web: <[www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com)>*

### **Mission Statement**

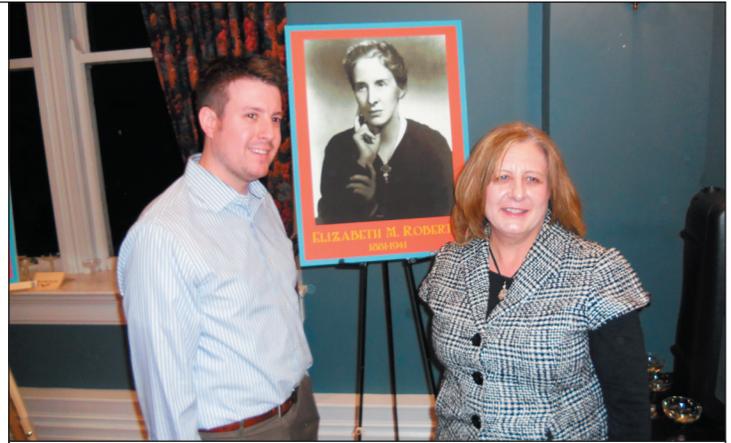
The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and to encourage the teaching of her literature. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but we are always interested in Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Matthew Nickel at <[mattcnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattcnickel@gmail.com)>.

## Roberts Among First Writers Inducted Into Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame

Rebecca Roberts Owens

On January 24, 2013, more than one hundred people were on hand to witness Elizabeth Madox Roberts' induction into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame. Roberts enters the Hall as part of an inaugural group of six writers who were elected from thirteen finalists, chosen from an initial group of over two hundred nominees that included Thomas Mer-ton and Jesse Stuart. The criteria for selection required the writer to be deceased (a requirement that will be lifted in future years) and to have enduring, universal stature with significant connections to Kentucky. The five writers joining Roberts in the Hall this year are Harriette Arnow, William Wells Brown, Harry Caudill, James Still, and Robert Penn Warren.

The Hall of Fame was created and is sponsored by the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in Lexington, Kentucky. Committee chair Neil Chethik, executive director of the center, gave the opening remarks for the event. Lexington Mayor Jim Gray followed Mr. Chethik with observations about the important role literature has played in the history of Lexington. Finally, the portraits of the inductees were unveiled one by one after a brief description of their life and work. A selection from each Hall of Fame author's work was then read by a noted living Kentucky writer/literary scholar. We were honored that Frank X Walker (recently named Kentucky Poet Laureate) chose to represent Roberts during these readings. Walker read two of Roberts' poems: "The Picnic" and "Three Dominican Nuns." Walker said that he chose these selections because they created such vivid imagery and speech for the reader. At the conclusion of the program, guests made a champagne toast to the Hall of Fame members and their work, and George Ella Lyon summed up, "they are looking down on us from that great library in the afterlife."



*Michael and Becki Roberts Owens at the ceremony*

My son Michael and I attended the event (pictured above), representing the Roberts family, and we met a number of people who: were familiar with Roberts' writing; were interested in teaching her writing as part of a body of work on KY writers; were interested in attending a future conference; and were interested in Roberts' letters. One lady said that her mother, who passed away last year at the age of 97, was a schoolmate of EMR at Covington HS. (Not chronologically possible but amusing nonetheless.)

Other exhibits at the event included a local book collector who showcased many first edition, signed works by the various nominees (as well as other pertinent memorabilia), and Morris Book Shop who, I am happy to report, was selling originals and reprints of the Hall of Famers' works including *The Time of Man* and what looked to be the new reprint of *The Great Meadow*. The evening was rounded out with abundant refreshments and guitar music from a local artist. It was indeed a fabulous evening!

This honor could not have happened without the hard work and dedication of the EMR Society, and for that the Roberts family is most grateful. I would also like to give a special thanks to Jane Keller who submitted a short bio for the Hall of Fame selection committee.

## Charlie Hughes Retires from Editing Kentucky Literary Newsletter

Steve Florczyk

Charlie Hughes, editor of the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter*, recently announced that he will be "handing over the reins to the good folks at Lexington's Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning." In his email, Hughes wrote: "I believe the newsletter has had a positive effect on Kentucky's literary atmosphere." Roberts enthusiasts and scholars might agree. For more than a decade, he has informed his subscribers

(now more than 2,300) about Roberts Society events, related publications, and Roberts' work. Through his press, Wind Publications, Hughes also made possible the publication of "the first book-length collection of critical essays to deal with the life and work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts," *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, 2008). As editor of the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter* for over eleven years, Hughes will be missed. Roberts Society members who wish to contact the *Kentucky Literary Newsletter*, can send emails to [kylitnews@carnegiecenterlex.org](mailto:kylitnews@carnegiecenterlex.org). Best wishes to Charlie in his next endeavor.

## ***The Time of Man and All the Living:* C. E. Morgan and Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

Ever since C. E. Morgan's novel *All the Living* was published in 2009, informed writers and readers—and I don't just mean Kentuckians and Southerners—have been telling me: *You simply must read this book!* I recently read it and they were right. The praise and honors heaped on Morgan and her first novel are richly deserved: the 2010 Lannan Literary Fellowship for Fiction, the Weatherford Award for the outstanding work of fiction depicting Appalachia, the United States Artists Fellowship, selection as Editors' Choice by the *New York Times Book Review*, named one of the Five Best Writers Under 35 by the National Book Foundation, and the list goes on and on. Morgan, who lived in Kentucky until recently, studied at Berea College and Harvard Divinity School where she earned a master's degree in theological studies.

From the United Kingdom to New York to Australia, reviewers of *All the Living* have lavished fulsome praise on this debut novel: from Morgan's compelling vision and her superb craft of character-making to the astonishing language and the expansive style that captures beautifully the rhythms of country dialect to the prose "both earthbound and hymnlike, with the slight inflection of Southern scripture" (*Bookforum*). Consider this observation: "Rarely in this reviewer's memory has a debut novel emerged with such a profound sense of place . . . Descriptions are so vivid, yet so integrated and organic, that the reader can almost feel the lassitude of stifling humid air; smell the rich, warm earth; and see the furrowed fields, the dark mountains in the distance." That

may sound exactly like a reviewer's praise for *The Time of Man* but it is what Karen Campbell said about *All the Living* in *The Boston Globe*. Indeed the reviews place Morgan in the august company of Wendell Berry, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and—oddly enough—John Steinbeck. I would say Morgan has more in common with Faulkner and Hemingway, their precision and passion, than with Steinbeck. And none of the reviews I have seen link Morgan with the most apt literary ancestor: Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

When I recently read Morgan's novel at one all-night sitting, I wrote to some friends who had been pestering me for three years to read *All the Living*. I told them they were absolutely right. Someone said, in deep cover and very much off the record: "It's Ellen Chesser in a pick-up truck. With the sex included." And I said maybe so, but it's much more than that, starting with one of the three best sermons in Southern literature. Her preacher's hammered-by-grace sermon stands with William Faulkner's Easter sermon in *The Sound and the Fury* and James Still's *River of Earth* homily.

Immediately after reading her novel, I also did what I have rarely done after encountering a stunning work of the highest art: I wrote to the author. She wrote back with perspicacious praise for *The Time of Man* as a neglected masterpiece and the best first novel in American literature, noting also that she had only discovered Roberts very recently, after she wrote *All the Living*. Our correspondence continues, and I have invited her to be our honored guest at a Roberts Conference but she cannot make it this year. There's always next year and, in the meantime, I urge Roberts Society members to read Morgan now and to propose papers on Morgan and Roberts for the 2014 conference. Read this amazing novel! Stay tuned.



Joan A. Hamilton (above with H. R. Stoneback at the Beaumont Inn), owner of the Roberts House in Springfield, has graciously hosted over the years the tours of the EMR house by Society members. In April 2012 she was the honored guest of the Society at the opening banquet, where she was made an honorary life member of the EMR Society.

## **Roberts in Venice**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

This is to announce that the Fourth International Imagism/Eighth International Aldington Conference will be held in Venice/Torcello, Italy from June 19-21, 2014. (EMRS members who plan to attend the International Hemingway Conference in Venice—June 22-27, 2014—will note that the Imagism Conference immediately precedes the Hemingway Conference.) The Imagism/Aldington Conference,

under the co-direction of Daniel Kempton and H. R. Stoneback, provides the perfect opportunity for EMRS members to present papers on Roberts and Imagism, Roberts and Pound, Roberts and Hemingway, etc. How about a paper on the two masterworks of 1926—*The Time of Man* and *The Sun Also Rises*—and the "secret of the values" shared by these two landmark novels of the mid-1920s? The Call for Papers will be sent out Spring 2013. If you do not receive the CFP or if you have questions about the conference, please contact me (<[hrs714@gmail.com](mailto:hrs714@gmail.com)>).

## EMR year by year: 1881–1916

### Jane Eblen Keller

Something so fundamental as a detailed, *documented* chronology of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' life has proved to be extremely difficult to establish. It has taken me years to determine her whereabouts and activities year by year (and after 1917, month by month) from birth to death. Still, some gaps and uncertainties remain, and many errors and unsubstantiated guesses have found their way into print. Especially fuzzy is the period between 1881 and 1916. Records are sparse, to say the least. After 1917, many more pieces of the puzzle are available, but even these are far from easy to assemble into a coherent, accurate picture. For now, here is an outline of what I've been able to discover about the early years. The narrative includes way too many qualifiers in the form of "probably," "possibly," "it seems," etc. In the absence of reliable data, such terms are necessary if lamentable—but better than the highly speculative, usually non-sourced, and sometimes blatantly false statements that too often have passed for fact. Further research might turn up new bits and pieces. I live in hope.

1881 On October 30, EMR was born in Perryville, Kentucky, where her family was living. Her father was teaching somewhere in the village, possibly-to-probably at the Ewing Institute, a private academy established in the 1840s for girls. By the 1880s, the school was co-educational but still housed in a two-story brick structure built in 1856. This building stands today but is abandoned, in serious disrepair, and when last I visited, in the spring of 2012, for sale.

We know little to nothing about the house where EMR was born except that it has long since vanished. It seems to have stood on the east side of the Chaplin River and has been described as a frame structure on East Third Street, a block or so south of what is now Route 150, the old Danville Road. But no one, not one single person, has ever cited a source for any of this information so we need to take it with a good many grains of salt. In any case, the east side of Perryville has been much rebuilt, and unlike the carefully preserved Merchants Row and other structures on the west bank, suggests little of what it might have been like in the late nineteenth century.

1882–1883 The Roberts family moved to Springfield at some point during this period, but it is not clear exactly when or why, nor do we know where they lived when first they arrived.

1884–1886 We know the family was living in Springfield in early 1884, and by the spring of 1885 they had bought

and were living in the house on East Main Street, near the corner of Walnut, the setting for the poems in *Under the Tree*. This was a four-square, two-story frame residence with a central doorway, chimneys at both ends, and many small-paned windows. A kitchen wing projected into the back yard where the Roberts children played under a large silver leaf poplar tree. Rose bushes and other shrubs grew in a side garden (to the east) enclosed by a fence. The house was torn down by around 1916.

1887/8–1896 EMR attended school at what was then called the Covington Institute on East Main Street, a short walk from her home. The private school, housed in a brick building, had been established in the 1850s and named for its first headmaster, one Alva Covington. The school was torn down in the early years of the twentieth century, but the teacher residence, built in 1884, survives near the corner of Covington and Main.

1896–1900 In September 1896, just before she turned fifteen, EMR enrolled at the Covington High School, Covington, Kentucky. She lived in the home of her recently widowed maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Garvin Brent, at 32 East Ninth Street. Her uncle, William D. Brent, a lawyer, also lived and kept an office in the house, and Mrs. Brent took in a few boarders. For the next four years, EMR spent the school year in Covington and summers at home in Springfield, and in June 1900 received her high school diploma.

1901 In September, EMR was a teacher in the primary department of what was by then known as the Washington Collegiate Institute, the successor to the old Covington Institute and housed in the same building. At this time, the school was sometimes called Professor Grant's Academy after its proprietor, one Orville B. Grant, who ran the academy from 1900 until 1903. EMR seems to have taught here only briefly, probably no more than a year.

1902 This year or somewhat earlier, the Roberts family moved to a rented house at what is now 405 North Walnut Street, the so-called Polin-Simms House, which is still standing. Here, EMR gave private lessons to a few pupils.

1903 Her private lessons probably continued in the rented house.

1904 In the late summer or early fall, EMR began the school year as the teacher in the Pleasant Grove School, about five miles north of Springfield. The much gussied-up schoolhouse still stands behind a lovely old church in what is truly a pleasant grove.

Also in 1904, Simpson Roberts sold the Main Street House,

which had been serving as a notions/grocery store, and bought a cottage (the future “Elenores”) on Walnut Street, a few blocks north of the rented house. The family moved in at some point in the late fall when Simpson opened a new grocery store on the ground floor of the Opera House on Main Street.

1905 EMR was unable to complete the term at the Pleasant Grove School, reasons unknown. Miss Hettie Rudd stepped in to finish out the school year, which ended in April 1905.

In September, EMR was the fourth grade teacher at the new Springfield Graded School, which had opened in its new building the previous year. The handsome structure still stands.

1906 EMR seems to (but may not) have finished the school year at the Graded School but did not return in the fall. The same Miss Rudd who had replaced her at Pleasant Grove took over the fourth grade class.

1907 Some evidence suggests that EMR was teaching in the area around Fredericktown, a hamlet of about seventy-five people some ten miles northwest of Springfield.

1908 We know very little about what EMR was doing this year except that she spent several weeks at Tatham Springs, twenty miles north of Springfield. The hotel there, since burned to the ground, was a well-known spa whose mineral springs were thought to restore and/or improve health.

1909 In the spring, EMR was a teacher in the area around Maud, another tiny village a bit north of Fredericktown. We do not know how long this teaching stint lasted, but we do know that this was a difficult, unhappy year in her life.

1910 In August, EMR left Springfield for Larkspur, Colorado, where she lived in a cottage with her brother Charles, who was working for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. Here she undertook a serious study of English literature and began writing poetry in earnest.

1911 In August, EMR and Charles visited the family in Springfield for several weeks, then returned to Colorado.

1912 It is possible that EMR again visited Springfield in the summer; we know her brother Charles did, but there is nothing to prove that EMR was with him.

1913 In the late summer/early fall, EMR did come home from Colorado for a lengthy visit with family and friends. This was when she met Cotton Noe, a professor at the State University in Lexington, and Lucia Clark Markham, a local poetess. Both took a keen interest in EMR and in her

early poems, and Professor Noe saw to it that one of these, “Prophecies,” was published in the university’s weekly student newspaper in December.

1914 Back in Colorado, EMR continued to write poetry, and in November submitted several poems to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Her original letter to Harriet Monroe exists, but there is no record that Miss Monroe replied.

1915 In the spring, EMR once again went home for a visit and returned to Colorado at some point in the summer. In September, three of her poems were published in *Sunset* magazine. In December, she and Kenneth Hartley self-published their little book, *In the Great Steep’s Garden*, with her poems and his photographs.

1916 By July, EMR was back in Springfield and in late December left for Chicago in preparation for a January 1917 enrollment at the University of Chicago.

## **Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

### **H. R. Stoneback**

For some years now I have been making inquiries and hearing vague reports regarding the possible influence of EMR on the work of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the celebrated Florida writer, author of the 1939 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling* and many other esteemed works. My friend and colleague in Durrell and Hemingway studies, Anna Lillios, who teaches at the University of Central Florida and is a leading authority on the literature of Florida, first brought to my attention some years ago the fact that Rawlings was aware of Roberts and her work. I asked Professor Lillios, who is the Executive Director of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, to let me know if she unearthed any evidence that Rawlings and Roberts had met. To date, no evidence has been reported.

In her recent fine volume, *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (University Press of Florida 2010), Lillios cites a lecture entitled “Regional Literature of the South” that Rawlings gave at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (New York 1939), in which Rawlings discussed how the regionalism rubric could be a dismissive term and talked about the work of Roberts. That essay was published the following year in *College English* and reprinted in *The Uncollected Writings of Marjorie Kin-*

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## A Letter from Chris Offut

### Matthew Nickel

The following letter was written by Chris Offut and sent to the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society courtesy of Chad Horn, poet and proprietor of KentuckyLit, Harrodsburg, KY. Offut is a writer born and raised in Kentucky. His books include *Kentucky Straight*, *The Same River Twice*, *The Good Brother*, *Out of the Woods*, and *No Heroes: A Memoir of Coming Home*. He has also written for the television shows *True Blood* and *Weeds*. His writing has received awards from the Lannan Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Whiting Foundation.

His letter below indicates a clear point many of us in the Society have been making for years now, and it is worth repeating: Roberts has been and still is a major presence in the literary landscape of Kentucky, of agrarian writing, of place writing, for contemporary writers, and, above all, in American literature. For instance, see H. R. Stoneback's piece on C. E. Morgan and her masterpiece *All the Living* in this newsletter (page 3), in which Morgan offers "perspicacious praise for *The Time of Man* as a neglected masterpiece and the best first novel in American literature." It is a phrase worth uttering repeatedly in certain academic circles: "the best first novel in American literature."

Morgan's statement is something many of us have felt deeply for years, and Offut's testimony, that he was, "knocked . . . for a loop" after reading Roberts, is poignant and fitting. I think many of us who continue to return to Kentucky, to experience the bright light and the rolling earth, to hear in one phrase on the Rolling Fork or in one song beyond the Little South our own love come from the highway, know what both Offut and Morgan express in their emotions about Roberts. It is indescribable, and some of us are lucky enough to experience Kentucky not only during the conference but always in her writing. Say it again: "the best first novel in American literature."

The Society would like to thank Chris Offut for taking the time to write his thoughtful letter and for his kind words. We hope to see him at future events and we wish him good luck writing.

### An Open Letter Addressing the EMR Conference KentuckyLit Reception April 21, 2012

Due to youthful rebellion in my twenties, I read everything I could find EXCEPT fiction set in Kentucky. My naïve

thinking was that since I grew up there, I wanted to read about other places—California, New York, Europe, Asia, Africa—even as far away as Ohio. I read absolutely no contemporary fiction or Southern fiction until I was past age thirty. Then, in a fit of slight maturity, I began reading Southern fiction, beginning with Kentucky.

*The Time of Man* knocked me for a loop. I was 32 when I read it, the ideal age for me to interact with Miss Roberts' restless, original, and creative mind. I loved her powerful character Ellen Chesser. I recognized the world Ellen inhabited, and understood both her simple needs and her deep naiveté. She didn't have much and didn't want much. I was living the same way—and still am. Ellen mostly walked everywhere she went, as I had grown up, and even left Kentucky—walking along the interstate with my thumb out. I knew Ellen's isolation and loneliness. She was an "old soul," a term that people began applying to me before I knew what it meant.

Later I understood it meant feeling ancient inside, as if born in the wrong era. It's hard to speculate what being an old soul might have meant to Ellen. I admired her ability to continue under duress, to find solace in the small moments of nature, to accept and endure. She seemed to have an instinctive understanding of such necessity to her life, lessons that for my part, I keep on being compelled to relearn.

I've always objected to the term "regional writer," because it denigrates even as it elevates. All writers, I believe, are regional. And I suspect that Miss Roberts' literary reputation has suffered unfairly due to such a limiting designation. There were other factors as well—timing and the whim of literary trend. She was not part of a literary movement, Southern or otherwise. Though she wrote about farm life and undoubtedly influenced the Agrarians, she is not associated with them. And though she wrote about poor working people, her work is not considered part of the proletarian literature of the 30s. For a reason I cannot fathom, her work has not been whole-heartedly embraced by later women writers.

The work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts is overdue for a fresh resurgence of interest by readers. It is merely a matter of time. I want to personally thank the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society for its sharp interest in a brilliant Kentucky writer.

Have fun in Kentucky. And remember—shake a jar of moonshine and inspect the bubbles before you drink any. If the bubble is perfectly bisected by the surface of the liquid, you have good shine.

Chris Offutt

## News & Notes

### Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect* (Eds. Stoneback, Boyle, and Nickel, 2012); *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008); and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Eds. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as original pieces of writing by her that have never before been published. The books are essential to the ongoing discussion about her life and work, and we hope that they will become available in libraries across the country for current and future readers alike. For more information regarding ordering, please visit <[www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com)>.

### EMR Panels at November 2012 SAMLA Convention in Research Triangle, NC

The Roberts Society was well represented this year at the SAMLA Convention in Research Triangle, North Carolina. **James Stamant** (Texas A&M) chaired the Roberts and Poetry Session with presentations by **Jessica Conti** (SUNY-New Paltz), **Amanda Capelli** (Independent Scholar), and **Matthew Nickel** (SUNY-New Paltz). **Gregg Neikirk** chaired the Roberts and New Works Session with presentations by **Sharon Peelor** (University of Oklahoma), **Adam Neikirk** (University of Mississippi), and **Jared Young** (SUNY-Albany).

### CFP: SAMLA 2013 (Atlanta, GA; November 8-10)

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect

Papers for this session may deal with all aspects of Roberts' work and life. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to, the following: Roberts and new work (particularly her posthumously published unfinished novel *Flood*); Roberts and her manuscripts; Roberts in the context of Southern literature; Roberts and Southern Agrarianism; Roberts' literary and stylistic influences (i.e., Synge, Hardy, Joyce, Homer, Hopkins, Beethoven, Pound); Roberts and religion; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and the novel; Roberts as poet; Roberts as writer of short fiction; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and the politics of literary reputation; Roberts and feminism; and Roberts and Kentucky. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2013 to Jessica Mackenzie Conti (SUNY-New Paltz) at [jesmackenzie@hotmail.com](mailto:jesmackenzie@hotmail.com).

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Other Writers

Papers for this session should deal with Elizabeth Madox Roberts and other writers. Topics may include but are not limited to: Roberts and her contemporaries (Roberts and

Pound, Roberts and Faulkner, Roberts and Hemingway, Roberts and Woolf, Roberts and Wescott, etc); Roberts and her influences; Roberts' literary friendships; Roberts' epistolary relationships; those influenced by Roberts; Roberts as Kentucky writer; Roberts as Southern Writer. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2013 to Matthew Nickel (SUNY-New Paltz) at [mattnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattnickel@gmail.com).

### College English Association

(Baltimore, March 27-29, 2014)

#### Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Past & Present

Papers for this session should deal with Roberts' life and work. Suggested topics include but are not limited to: Roberts' legacy past and present; Roberts and biography; Roberts and influence; Roberts and intertextuality; Roberts and Southern Literature; Roberts, Place and Time; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and Feminism; Roberts and neglect; the Roberts revival; Roberts and other writers (Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, Tate, etc). Please send 250 word abstract to Matthew Nickel at [mattnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattnickel@gmail.com) by 15 August 2013.

### EMR Lectures

**H. R. Stoneback** featured Roberts in his recent visiting lecture (January 2013) at Palm Beach State College ("Spirit of Place . . ."), and his plenary paper at the 20th Anniversary Cormac McCarthy Conference at Berea College (March 2013) dealt with *The Great Meadow* and the probable influence of Roberts on McCarthy's work ("Order and Chaos: Roberts, McCarthy, and the Cumberland Gap"). In addition, he plans to feature Roberts in two major national addresses already booked for 2014 and 2015: his Keynote Address at the national convention of the College English Association in Baltimore (March 27-29, 2014) and his 2015 Presidential Address at the SAMLA Convention (dates and location tba). It is to be hoped that many EMRS members will present papers at these events; if so, we will bury forever the now-dated platitudes regarding the *neglect of Roberts*.

**Vicki Barker**, Professor of English at Carson-Newman University presented a program on Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Flood* on October 4, 2012 at the Carson-Newman Appalachian Center. Barker was introduced by Professor Shawn O'Hare, chair of the Carson-Newman English Department. She introduced the audience to Roberts and explained the history of the 1937 flood in Louisville and the background of the novel. She showed a clip of the newsreel titled, "1937, The Flood: The Story of the Worst Flood in American History" to further highlight the background for Roberts' story. Following the film, Barker read a portion of the novel. A question and answer session followed the reading. At the conclusion of the program, the Appalachian Center hosted

*continued on next page*

### News & Notes from page 7

a reception and book signing. The Appalachian Center provides a showcase for Appalachian visual and performing arts and hosts local, regional, and international writers.

### 2012 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

#### Award Winners:

2012 *Terry Ward Memorial Award* was given to: Jennifer Dellerba (Georgia Southern University).

2012 *Sparrow Memorial Awards* were given to: Adam Neikirk (University of Mississippi), Andrew Limbong (Independent Scholar), and Jared Young (SUNY-Albany).

*Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer at [tina.iraca@gmail.com](mailto:tina.iraca@gmail.com), or send a check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant to: Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery Street, Tivoli, NY 12583.*

#### Reading Roberts

Under the General Editorship of H. R. Stoneback, The Roberts Society published several volumes in 2012 including a posthumously never before published work by Roberts, *Flood*, an unfinished novel (ed. by Vicki Barker); a collection of essays by past and present Society members on Roberts, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*, edited by H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel; and an anthology of poetry, *Kentucky: Poets of Place*, with poems by and about well-known Kentucky writers including Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, H. R. Stoneback, Vivian Shipley, Dave Smith, and others. Please also see "Publication Notes" in this newsletter for Society member publications.

#### Inductees into the Roberts Society Hall of Fame

It was announced at the Roberts Society banquet at the Beaumont Inn in April 2012, that our first Honorary Life-

time EMRS Memberships were awarded to the following honorees: Joan Hamilton, owner of Elenores, the Roberts House in Springfield, who graciously hosts our annual tour; Nell Haydon, Director of Springfield Main Street Renaissance, who hosts our annual Springfield supper and labors tirelessly on behalf of the Roberts legacy; and Jeanne Penn Lane, owner of the historic landmark Penn's Store, who coordinates the annual Kentucky Writer's Day celebrations and for many years has welcomed the participation of Roberts Society members.

#### EMR Digital Archive

Past issues of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter* are now available online. Please go to [www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com) to browse the archives.

### Gisèle Sigal Gives Visiting Lectures on Roberts in New York

#### H. R. Stoneback

In April 2012 Professor Gisèle Sigal, Department Chair at the University of Pau/Bayonne, France, and long-time EMRS member came to New York to deliver two Roberts lectures at the State University of New York at New Paltz. In one lecture, delivered to my Poetry Seminar, Sigal discussed "Landscapes of the Mind: Recurrence and Variation in the Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts." My students found her close reading of the poetry of Roberts engaging and compelling and several students wrote about her lecture in papers they submitted. Her second lecture, "How I Discovered Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Southern Literature in France," was delivered to my graduate seminar in Faulkner and Southern Literature. Again my students found this lecture compelling and several students later expressed that they were "enthralled," "filled with a sense of wonder" that Roberts, whom they had never heard of before my class, was being read and written about in France.

*The EMR Traveling Troubadour Band performs "Love Will Come from the Highway" (lyrics by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, tune by H. R. Stoneback) at the Eddie Montgomery Steakhouse in Harrodsburg, April 2012*



## Springfield Resident Finds Two EMR Letters

Jane Eblen Keller

Mr. Wendell Grayson, now living with his wife, Madeleine, in Springfield, Kentucky, has been an accomplished history buff all his life. When he retired a few years ago as an engineer and moved from the Lexington area to Elizabeth Madox Roberts' hometown, he was able to devote more time to researching all kinds of things, including Kentucky history in general and his own and his wife's family stories in particular. Among the documents he recently investigated were papers from the Kentucky Mintons, his wife's relatives, whose many children married into other prominent Springfield families including the Bosleys and Cregors. And there, within the boxes entrusted to the more-than-competent custody of Mr. Grayson, were two original, heretofore unknown letters from Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Mr. Grayson immediately recognized the importance of these letters and took steps to make them public. His discovery can only be described as a significant, historic event, and our gratitude for his initiative is without bounds.

The longer and earlier of the two letters is to Celia Minton Bosley (born 1873), the youngest of eleven children in the Minton family. She was eight years older than EMR, but the two women shared a love of music, literature, weaving, gardening, and fine sewing. Celia and her husband, Charles Fleece Bosley, Jr., lived down the street from the Roberts home on Walnut Street, and in the early years of the twentieth century, the three forged what turned out to be a lifelong friendship.

We have a number of letters EMR wrote to Celia—"Miss Cele" or "Miss Cile" as EMR called her—over the years, but most are handwritten copies. This one is thus among the few originals on record and all the more valuable for that. It is typed on both sides of a sheet of EMR's personal stationery, engraved with her name and all that was necessary in the way of an address, i.e., "Springfield, Kentucky," and signed, simply, "Elizabeth." But it was written from Chicago and gives her temporary address as 4949 Indiana Avenue, "Care of Mrs. Lesemann." It is undated, but it is easy to ascertain that it was written in early 1925, January or February, when EMR was visiting the Lesemann family. They lived at the Chicago Training School, located at the address above, an institution for men and women preparing to be Christian missionaries and other kinds of church workers. The school's president was the Rev. Louis F. W. Lesemann, a Methodist minister and father of Maurice, EMR's friend and fellow poet from their days at the University of Chicago. We know from other sources that during this visit, EMR was finishing *The Time of Man* and in

the evenings entertained Maurice and his younger brother, Wilbur, known as Wib, by reading passages from the completed drafts.

The letter also tells us that EMR was "having a perfectly grand visit" and that she was particularly enjoying the Lesemanns' "large library of records." She and Maurice were doing a kind of informal history-of-music marathon, "beginning with Bach and progressing downward, being at the moment on Bethoven's [*sic*] 7th Symphony."

The purpose of the letter, apart from letting Celia know that she had arrived safely and had recovered from a sore throat, was to ask her friend to send a very special kind of thread. EMR had made a runner for Mrs. Lesemann but had not yet finished it with "the Italian hemstitch." She had asked her own mother to send the thread, but Mrs. Roberts had sent "the wrong kind and I despair of making her understand since she does not know the materials we used as well as we do. And so if you will send me about five or six yards of this stuff I'll be tremendously obliged."

Mr. Grayson enjoys this intimate glimpse into EMR's domestic occupations, her mild, all-too-human exasperation with her mother, and her use of the informal word, *stuff*. I enjoy the sense of how her relationship with Maurice had settled into an easy friendship based on mutual interests and affection. Back at the university, around 1919, EMR had for a time suffered from a non-reciprocated romantic attachment to the much younger man. Whatever awkwardness resulting from that had been resolved.

The second letter is addressed to "Dear Mr. Bosley," Celia's husband, a banker who helped EMR with financial matters. Her formal salutation is matched by her signature as "Elizabeth Roberts." Like the first, this letter is undated but is easily placed in the chronology. Its two typed paragraphs are on a single sheet of an early (pre-1929) version of the letterhead of the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, so we know it was written in late October 1927 when EMR was in the city to prepare for the publication of *My Heart and My Flesh*. She reports in the second paragraph that "the new book, not yet out for five days, has already sold out the first edition of six thousand." Alas, initial sales and enthusiastic reviews did not prove to yield the long-term "quite generous sales" she and her publishers hoped for.

These letters add to our knowledge of EMR's close relationship with the Bosleys and their extended network of kin in central Kentucky. One of Celia's sisters, for example, Mary Elizabeth Minton ("Miss Minnie") Cregor, was also a supportive friend. EMR's letters include frequent and affectionate references to "Mrs. Cregor," a fine musician, as was

*continued on page 11*

## Conference Report 2012

### Jessica Mackenzie Conti

The XIV annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 21-23, 2012. Our conference began with a gracious reception at KentuckyLit, hosted by Chad Horn and with a performance by Sarah Elizabeth. William Boyle, President of the Society, welcomed us at the Beaumont Inn, and then H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Roberts Society followed with his keynote address: "Elizabeth Madox Roberts in the WPA Literary Landscape of Kentucky." We enjoyed a wonderful meal with our honorary guest Joan Hamilton, topped off with the presentations of the Terry Ward and Sparrow Memorial Awards and a conference book give-a-way. Later in the evening, the Roberts Society and members performed at Eddie Montgomery's Steakhouse in Harrodsburg.

On Sunday, attendees traveled to Roncevaux Farm, followed by Kentucky Writers Day. In the afternoon, the society was honored at the Springfield Opera House by Mayor John W. Ceconi, The Springfield City Council, Nell Haydon and Main Street Renaissance, and the Ladies of Springfield, and we were entertained by the fabulous Wheeler Family. Conference participants were then given a tour of Elenores, Roberts' house, hosted by Joan Hamilton.

Monday morning the Society was greeted by President William D. Huston and Leo Hamelin at Saint Catharine College. Academic papers were presented throughout the day by many new and veteran Roberts scholars. The conference ended with a poetry reading at Roberts' grave.

**Session 1: Jane Eblen Keller** (U of Baltimore): "All My Songs: Chapter One of the Biography of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Vicki Barker** (Carson-Newman C): "'Honor my Resting Muse': Editing Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Flood Manuscript*"; **William Slavick** (U of Southern Maine): "Roberts, the Poetry Club, and *Poetry*"; **Chad Horn** (Independent Scholar): "Capturing Bigfoot on the Sacred Stomping Grounds of Thomas Merton: How a Blind Squirrel Named Rovit Stumbled over a Magical Acorn Whilst Scampering Frantically Under the Tree"

**Session 2: Gisele Sigal** (U de Pau): "Drama and Trauma in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *My Heart and My Flesh*"; **Jessica Conti** (SUNY-NP): "'The lamb had bleated softly . . . like the cry of a small child': Roberts' Morality Play, 'The Children of the Earth'"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State U): "'The Life of Elizabeth Madox Roberts': On the Springfield Central Community Theatre Stage"; **Adam Neikirk** (U of Mississippi): "Between the Meadow and the Mouth: *Song in the Meadow* and the Romantic Chronotope"

**Session 3a: Jerry Salyer** (Jefferson CCC): "Envisioning Origins: Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and the American Frontier"; **Shawn Rubinfeld** (U of Idaho): "Discovering Place: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Carol Ryrie Brink"; **Amanda Capelli** (SUNY-NP): "The Points Where Poetry Touches Life: Conceptions of Beauty and Pleasure in *The Great Meadow*"; **Chris Paolini** (SUNY-NP): "'White Light in the Ewe-Itide': The Mysteries of Man and Beast in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'Holy Morning'"

**Session 3b: Lyndsey Brown** (Georgia Southern U): "The Mysterious Complexities of Home in Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Jenny Bugna Lambeth** (Georgia Southern U): "If These Walls Could Talk: The Roles of Domestic Space and Hostess in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Virginia Woolf"; **Melissa Hay** (Georgia Southern U): "Romantic Overtones in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Zora Neale Hurston"; **Alex Shakespeare** (Boston C): "Marianne Moore in Brooklyn, Elizabeth Madox Roberts in Kentucky"

**Session 4a: Matthew Nickel** (SUNY-NP): "'Time flowed tightly . . . Outside, singing': Yearning Toward Vision in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Robert Penn Warren"; **Brad McDuffie** (Nyack C): "'My Love Will Come From the Highway': Not By Strange Gods of the Road in Roberts' 'Love by the Highway'"; **Jared Young** (SUNY-Albany): "Roberts and Faulkner: Consequences of Found Fortune within *A Buried Treasure* and 'The Bear'"; **Andrew Limbong** (SUNY-NP): "Growth Spurts and Pains: The Realization of Mortality in Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Roberts' *Song in the Meadow*"

**Session 4b: Chris Lawrence** (SUNY-NP): "Intimations of Eco-Socialism in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Megan Morris** (Georgia Southern U): "Feminine Individualism and Sexuality in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* and Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*"; **Jennifer Dellerba** (Georgia Southern U): "The Passionate Human Spirit in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"

*Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society 2012*



### Two EMR Letters from page 9

her daughter, Lillian “Dolly” Cregor, some ten years younger than EMR but also a valued friend. (This same Dolly Cregor married a Roy Bateman, and her descendants—cousins of Mr. Grayson’s wife—are the ones who saved and passed on the parcels of documents discussed here.)

EMR counted all these people among Springfield’s intellectual and artistic elite, her natural allies, and they returned her fondness with constant faith in her abilities and substantial help in many concrete ways.

An abiding mystery (one of many) in EMR’s story is what happened to the other letters we know she wrote to these faithful Springfield friends. As I mentioned above, most of her letters to Celia Bosley survive only via copies, and these in the sometimes illegible handwriting of Woodridge Spears who wrote his dissertation on EMR in the early 1950s, the days before the Xerox machine. He evidently returned the originals to the family, but for whatever reason, or so far as we know, these have vanished.

This does not in any way diminish our delight in the discovery of these two new letters—or our huge gratitude to those who saved them. Miracles do happen, helped along by Springfield’s indispensable Nell R. Haydon, Director of the City of Springfield Main Street/Renaissance, who put Mr. Grayson in touch with us. We can always hope that other boxes in other attics might turn up more treasures. Meanwhile, I hereby recommend that we appoint Wendell and Madeleine Grayson and their relatives as the EMR heroes of the decade.

We formally acknowledge Madeleine and Wendell Grayson and Mary Minton Bateman Angel (Dolly Cregor Bateman’s granddaughter and Mrs. Grayson’s cousin) as the owners of the two Roberts letters, and we heartily thank them, again, for making these available. We also thank Rebecca Roberts Owens, EMR’s literary executor, for permission to quote from them.

### The New Edition of *The Great Meadow*

#### H. R. Stoneback

As some readers of this note will know, the Hesperus Press of London brought out a new edition of *The Great Meadow* in 2012. Hesperus announces itself as “committed to bringing out . . . works written by the greatest authors, and unjustly neglected.” The selection of *The Great Meadow* resulted from the Hesperus “Uncover a Classic” competition in 2012, in which readers “were invited to nominate one out-of-print book they considered worthy of reprinting, and to write an introduction of no more than 500 words explaining why.” Michael Wynne, the Irish writer, selected the winning novel, *The Great Meadow*, and his brief essay introduces the volume.

Wynne’s brief but perspicacious introduction praises the “astounding ease and immediacy” of the prose, and the way “the reader experiences the pain and the beauty of the inevitability of life’s purposive push and momentum, as well as that ever-pressing sense of the mysterious that we all carry within us.” In conclusion, he writes that *The Great Meadow* is “permeated by a fierce, natural courage that issues from the unshowy lyricism with which it communicates virtually incommunicable inner truths.”

And this is more than just another paperback reprint of the novel. It is one of the most handsomely produced so-called paperbacks I have ever held in my hands, with its semi-hard or cardboard covers with folded-in flaps that produce a dust-jacket effect. The front cover, with its apt and evocative illustration of Diony gazing out over the fields of Kentucky, is emblazoned with the tag “Short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction,” and underneath the title and Roberts’ name we read this:

‘That rare thing, a true artist’

Robert Penn Warren, author of *All the King’s Men*

On the back cover is a quote from the *New York Times*: “Lucid and arresting, rhythmical, fresh in phrasing and construction, giving always the effect of effortless arrangement.” And this from the *Chicago Tribune*: “A noble piece of work.”

All in all, this is a fine edition, worthy of our finest novel of settlement and the Kentucky frontier, a true American epic. Buy this book, hold it in your hands, and you will see. And if you haven’t yet read *The Great Meadow*, read it now and consider yourself lucky to be reading this edition. Better yet, do as I plan to do very soon—teach it in your classes. Let’s help keep this edition in print! (For information and ordering: <[www.hesperuspress.com](http://www.hesperuspress.com)>; also available at Amazon and Abebooks.)

**Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings** *from page 5*

*nan Rawlings* (UP Florida, 2007). If any reader of this newsletter needs a topic for the EMR Conference in 2014, take it and run with it.

I often go to Florida on my winter break to do visiting lectures and poetry readings, and while there I meet many of the literary and scholarly luminaries of Florida. Roberts always enters the conversation and I am not always the first person to mention her. Some years ago, when I spoke on Hemingway and Florida in a visiting lecture at the University of Central Florida, Lillios led me on a tour of Hurston's hometown Eatonville, very close to where EMR wintered, and we talked about possible connections, direct or indirect, between Hurston and Roberts. This past January, my winter speaking tour took me to Palm Beach State College, where Steve Brahlele hosted my visit to his campus. Professor Brahlele, who is a Trustee of the Rawlings Society, informed me that Roberts is mentioned in the Rawlings letters. We hope to have a Brahlele article on Rawlings and Roberts in the next issue of the newsletter.

Professors Brahlele and Lillios have expressed interest in participating in our EMR conferences. I hope they will come bearing news of Roberts and Rawlings and Hurston. Rawlings and Hurston are sometimes characterized as *two of America's most beloved southern female writers*. Add Roberts to that list. Beyond possible meetings of these writers, literary connections or influences or resonant intertextualities might be explored at future Roberts conferences and for that matter, at future Rawlings conferences. The Rawlings Society (website <rawlingssociety.org>) will hold its 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in late April 2013.

By the way, Rawlings knew and admired Hemingway and they corresponded: all the more reason to have a conference sometime soon on Florida writers. I know just the place and just the time (in the interest of northerners)—January. Maybe Jane Keller will soon share some information on Roberts in Florida from her forthcoming biography—exactly where EMR stayed in the Orlando area (and anywhere else) and how long, what she wrote there, who she met—and deepen our sense of the Florida connection.

**Publication Notes**

In this occasional newsletter column we will report recent *books* by Society members. Although Society members also publish numerous essays on writers other than Roberts, these articles will not be recorded here. But please send us your citations for any essays published on Roberts that are not included in EMRS publications. *Reminder:* The Reading Roberts Series, under the general editorship of H. R. Stoneback—as reported in the 2012 Newsletter, is a thriving concern. The Series published three books in 2012 and more volumes are in progress. Stay tuned.

- Barker, Vicki. *Flood* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {An unfinished novel by Roberts}
- Florczyk, Steven. *Hemingway, the Red Cross, and the Great War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, forthcoming. {Critical monograph}
- Nickel, Matthew. *Hemingway's Dark Night: Catholic Influences and Intertextualities in the Work of Ernest Hemingway*. Wickford, RI: New Street Communications, 2013. {Critical monograph}
- Nickel, Matthew, ed. *Kentucky: Poets of Place*. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {Collection of poems by and for Kentucky and Kentucky writers}
- Stoneback, H. R. *Voices of Women Singing*. New York: Codhill Press, 2011. {Poems}
- . *Voices from Venice*. New York: Des Hymnagistes, 2013. {Poems: Bilingual Edition with translations of Stoneback's poetry by various Italian writers}
- & Daniel Kempton, eds. *Aldington, Pound and the Imagists at Brunnenburg*. France: Gregau Press, 2012. {Collection of critical essays}
- , William Boyle, & Matthew Nickel, eds. *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect. The Reading Roberts Series*. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. {Collection of critical essays}

**Wendell Berry & Elizabeth Madox Roberts:  
Common Ground**

**Matthew Nickel**

In 2012, the Berry Center of New Castle, Kentucky (formed by Wendell Berry and his family) created a partnership with St. Catharine College to provide an interdisciplinary degree program in ecological agrarianism and farming. The program includes academic coursework, fieldwork, awareness of community, local economy, sustain-

*continued on next page*

## Earl Hamner Receives First Society Award

### H. R. Stoneback

This winter the EMR Society's Honorary President H. R. Stoneback proposed and the EMR Executive Committee unanimously approved the creation of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Award for Southern and Appalachian Writing*. The award carries with it Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Roberts Society and an invitation to be the Society's guest of honor at the Annual Beaumont Banquet. Hamner—a novelist and screenwriter from Virginia now living in California, creator of *The Waltons*, one of the most popular series in television history—has written in very compelling terms about how *The Time of Man* is the one book that had the greatest influence on his life and work. Delighted when I relayed the news of the EMR Award, Hamner wrote me that he much regretted his inability to attend this year's conference to receive the honor in person. Citing reasons of distance, health, and age ("now approaching 90"), Hamner will attempt only one trip East this year, to his native state of Virginia to be present for a proclamation by the state legislature that Hamner is in the company of the most "notable Virginians" together with a reception at the Governor's Mansion. In 2011 he received the Literary Lifetime Achievement Award from the Library of Virginia, where his papers will be deposited in the same archive that houses the papers of Edgar Allan Poe and William Styron. The EMR Society is pleased and proud to honor Hamner for his distinguished achievements and to count him among the many long-time admirers who report the transformational effects of reading Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

## *The Time of Man on the NBC Radio Theater*

### H. R. Stoneback

Before Earl Hamner became a celebrated novelist and Hollywood screenwriter, before he wrote television scripts for such shows as *The Twilight Zone*, before he received even more acclaim as the creator of the immensely popular TV series *The Waltons* (and *Falcon Crest*), he wrote dramatizations for the *NBC Radio Theater* in the 1950s. In the volume entitled *You've Got to Read This Book!* numerous famous people report on the single most important life-changing book they have ever read. Hamner writes about *The Time of Man*.

Sometime in the 1950s, the exact date still to be determined, NBC assigned Hamner the task of dramatizing *The Time of Man* for their popular *Radio Theater* program. He read the book, his life was changed, and he wrote the script. First, I would say here that the fact that *The Time of Man* was presented on the most celebrated literary/dramatic radio program of its day amounts to yet another nail in the coffin of the much overstated Myth of Roberts Neglect. And then I would add that as of this writing, I am awaiting the arrival in the mail of a package from Earl Hamner containing the sole surviving copy of the Roberts broadcast, along with his script. Maybe at some future EMR event, we will have a chance to listen to Roberts on the radio.

Finally, this thought: since I listened to the *NBC Radio Theater* as a boy in the 1950s, maybe that's where I first encountered Ellen Chesser and *The Time of Man*, a discovery unaware that pre-dated the oft-told tale of my epiphanic discovery of the novel in the stacks of the Vanderbilt Library in the late 1960s. If I heard that broadcast, I now have no accessible memory of it. But memory is very tricky and, as the French say, *très très très compliqué*. Maybe when I hear this broadcast—and if it arrives in time we may all have a chance to hear it at the conference—memory will speak. If I did hear it in the 1950s, I will remember it, the *sound* will tell, for in the 1950s we still *listened*. Stay tuned.

### Berry & Roberts *from previous page*

ability, local knowledge, and stewardship. The new Berry Farming Program at St. Catharine College is headed by Dr. Leah Bayens. The cross-disciplinary nature of the program utilizes both the sciences and the arts, focusing on the humanities (literature, sociology, cultural geography) as well as farming and marketing, scientific research, community leadership, and environmental arts.

The Roberts Society has enjoyed St. Catharine College (the site of our annual academic presentations) and the surrounding Springfield landscape for fifteen years now. It is

fitting that both Roberts and Berry find common ground, for many of us believe it is writing like Roberts' that offers local knowledge and the love of place central to sustainable farming and agrarian concerns. Many of us believe *The Time of Man* is the quintessential agrarian novel, and several Roberts Scholars have presented papers on Roberts and Berry at past conferences. We look forward to making new connections that will support the Berry Farming Program and continue to bridge the gap between literature and place.

**Earl Hamner—**  
**From *The Time of Man* to *The Waltons***

**H. R. Stoneback**

Brief notes on Hamner and Roberts elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter* provide an outline sketch of his distinguished career as writer and his Roberts connection. Here I will fill in the details—with quotations from his published commentary on EMR as well as his unpublished observations in a manuscript he sent me and from our correspondence—of the story behind his selection of *The Time of Man* as the book that changed his life and led him ever more deeply into his writerly sense of vocation. It seems to me a very difficult matter, this business of choosing the *one* most important “life-changing” book, especially for someone with a long career as writer and *reader*. For example, an editor of a major journal has been asking me for years to write an essay on the most important “sea change” novel in my life and I have been unable to decide which novel holds the number one position on my personal Hit Parade. It’s relatively easy to name the top five, but *one*? For decades now, these novels have been more or less tied for my first place: *The Time of Man*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, and Warren’s *All the King’s Men*. The fifth book on my list is always subject to change: some years it might be a certain French or Russian novel and once, long, long ago, a Thomas Wolfe novel would have been in my top five. In a recent letter to me, Hamner noted that along with Roberts he “revered Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner and your Mr. Hemingway.” But he has no hesitation in declaring that *The Time of Man* is the most profoundly epiphanic novel, indeed the most important *book* he has read in his life.

In the recent volume—*You’ve Got to Read This Book!*—in which “55 people tell the story of the book that changed their life,” Hamner writes about his arrival in New York City as a young man and how he “joined the writing staff at NBC” in the days of radio:

One day, the editor of the show [*The NBC Radio Theater*] assigned me a book to dramatize: *The Time of Man* . . . The first thing that caught my attention was that Elizabeth Madox Roberts had moved to New York from Kentucky and had written the book in a basement apartment on West 96<sup>th</sup> Street. I, too, was a transplanted Southerner, living on 87<sup>th</sup> Street, practically in a basement, so I felt an immediate kinship with her. (Canfield and Hendricks, eds. Collins, 2006: 158-59)

We might well wonder what the source was—perhaps Viking Press publicity?—for Hamner’s account of Roberts in New York. More importantly, he continues:

When I began reading the novel, I discovered some-

thing wondrous and, for me, completely life-changing. Roberts’s characters spoke in a way that, while totally unique, was exactly what I had heard as a boy in Virginia . . . The novel’s language resonated with me and inspired me to later use the same linguistic style in my own work. I was also fascinated by the characters themselves . . . I was immediately struck by Ellen’s marvelous imagination and sense of wonder. Ellen’s mother is a character of great strength and perseverance . . . *The Time of Man* simply delighted me. It embodies the nobility I had always perceived in so-called common, ordinary people. I was elated by this newfound style and deep connection with another Southern writer. Roberts gave me permission to write in my own vernacular. Finally, I had found my voice—and my subject matter. Not long after reading her book, I wrote and published my first novel, *Fifty Roads to Town*. (159-60)

Hamner then skips over his novels (*Spencer’s Mountain* and *The Homecoming*) to *The Waltons*, the Emmy-award winning television series he created and narrated, long-running and immensely popular and beloved worldwide:

If I hadn’t come upon Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s novel, *The Waltons* would probably never have happened. Her work helped me portray the hill people, not as thick-browed, shaggy rednecks and hillbillies, but as the courageous, self-reliant, and honorable people I knew so well. (160)

It is an occasion of wonder to me, and should be to all Roberts aficionados, that *The Time of Man* inspired one of the most successful and admired programs in TV history.

In closing, Hamner notes the universal appeal of the Walton family and how people all over the world “claim them as their own” and find compelling values and “messages” (that he says he never intended as messages—*messages* are for telegrams) in the story of the Waltons. And he concludes: “I suppose, like Ellen Chesser in *The Time of Man*, the Waltons simply appeal to the best in all of us” (160).

Hamner recently sent me a copy of an unpublished typescript of a talk he gave at Berea College “a few years ago.” In this document he writes many of the same things he said in the published essay cited above. But he also says this: “Miss Roberts’s characters spoke a language that was familiar to me. The sound of it was in my ears. But it was language that had been elevated from the everyday spoken word to the level of literature.” And this, about writing his first novel: “The words came in a rush. It was as if they had been there all along and Elizabeth Madox Roberts had opened a flood gate.” He quotes a long passage from his first novel *Fifty Roads to Town* then writes: “If you have read Elizabeth Madox Roberts you will recognize how heavily influenced I was by her work.” And he concludes his Berea speech: “Isn’t it a fine thing that inspiration can be like a river that flows from one generation to another! I was given my voice by Elizabeth Madox Roberts from Springfield, Kentucky.”

As far as I have been able to determine, nobody was aware of the overwhelming influence of Roberts on Hamner until he began to talk and write about it in the last decade. Who would have guessed that John-Boy, the aspiring writer of the Walton clan—*John-Boy was me*, Hamner says—was the progeny of Roberts? My initial response, after reading Hamner on Roberts, was this: *Nobody*. Yet, upon reflection, I recognized certain inklings and divinations from long ago. I recently reread the last chapter of my PhD dissertation written at Vanderbilt in the 1960s. It was a wide-ranging work of great length that aspired to survey what I then called the *Hillfolk Tradition* as it existed in American and English literature for two centuries. I set out to read *everything* that had ever been written about hill people, particularly but not exclusively Southern hill people. It was a daunting task because so much had been written, but along the way I discovered Roberts and *The Time of Man* and she became my exemplar of the tradition, for reasons of style, story, character, and the stunning, stabbing actuality of her writing.

In my closing chapter I wanted to survey the hillfolk terrain as it appeared in the 1960s, considering all contemporary works germane to the matter. I needed a gatekeeper, someone to cull the vast body of hillfolk material. My gatekeeper was Jane Arden Hillman—known to the world as my late wife Sparrow—herself a Kentucky hill-woman who was very much engaged by and involved in my study of hillfolk writing. She rejected some writers as not worth my time—I think she was anxious for me to finish the dissertation and get shed of the project so we could sing again—and one day she handed me three books and said: *You might consider these*. The books were *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark* by Cormac McCarthy, and *Spencer's Mountain* by Earl Hamner. Hamner was better known than McCarthy then, but until my gatekeeper handed me those books I had not read a word by either writer. I decided to include them in the epilogue to my study of the *Hillfolk Tradition*. I wrote several pages on both authors but when my mentor and dissertation director T. D. Young saw those pages he said: “You’re starting another book. You’d better stop now.” I had already written more than 400 pages approved by my committee. What I wrote on McCarthy has not survived and all that is left of what I wrote about Hamner are two sentences near the end of my dissertation, which note that the Spencers (later to become the Waltons) exemplify “traditional ways, and the hill man’s clinging love of the land” and “represent the hill man’s last stand, perhaps, in a modernized mountain setting.” Finding in 2013 these words I had written 44 years ago, I was somewhat surprised

Fast forward a few years into the 1970s—we have moved to the Hudson Valley and occasionally we watch with our

New York village neighbors the most popular new television show: *The Waltons*. Since we swiftly established our Kentucky-identity in that New York village, through singing and story-telling and our love of country ways, some of our New York neighbors, the urban transplants, probably thought *we were* the Waltons. And since it was well-known that I was an aspiring writer at least one neighbor sometimes called me John-Boy when he could get away with it.

After one episode of the show a neighbor said it was “too sentimental” for him. Sparrow said: “Sentiment’s a good thing and it’s not the same as sentimentality.” I said something like *there’s a fine line between sentiment and sentimentality and the best writers always walk that line*. Our resident skeptic or cynic said he didn’t buy the Waltons and their values, *they’re not real*. “Oh they’re real, all right,” Sparrow said. He laughed sarcastically. Skeptic or cynic, he was always a little too sarcastic.

“Skepticism as a settled habit of mind is a form of sentimentality,” I said. And Sparrow added: “Knee-jerk cynicism is the lowest form of sentimentality.” Sparrow was, aside from being a legendary Kentucky mountain singer, an acute literary critic. After our neighbors left that evening, Sparrow said: “This guy Hamner must have read Roberts, he knows *The Time of Man*.” When I told Hamner this in a letter a few weeks ago he was delighted and wrote back: “It is a pleasure to learn that you and your late wife have read *Spencer’s Mountain* . . . and that she recognized the Madox Roberts influence.” So now, four decades later, the inklings and divinations have been confirmed. I wish I had watched *The Waltons* more than I did. It was shown on a night when I taught my evening graduate Seminar in Southern Lit—Faulkner, Roberts, Tate and Warren (the latter two writers, of course, great admirers of Roberts). The other day I had lunch with the recently retired Director of *New Directions*, that press which has long been a bastion of High Modernism and publisher of radically avant-garde works. When Hamner came up in our conversation I asked her if she knew *The Waltons*, if she thought the show was *sentimental*, she said: “Oh no—I loved *The Waltons*. Never missed it.”

I wonder if there is a *Waltons* aficionado out there who might have caught John-Boy mentioning Roberts in some episode, or noticed a copy of *The Time of Man* in John-Boy’s hands or visible on a shelf in the background. Maybe someone will research the matter on the currently available DVD of the complete *Waltons* episodes and we will have a session at a future conference on *The Waltons* and EMR. We should.

## God's Great Flood: Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Robert Penn Warren Revisited

Matthew Nickel

During the XIV Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference in 2012 society members celebrated the Reading Roberts Series. Under the General Editorship of H. R. Stoneback, our inaugural volume for the series was Elizabeth Madox Roberts' unfinished (and never before published) novel *Flood*, organized, edited, and introduced by Vicki Barker, Professor of English at Carson-Newman University. Barker's diligence has created a valuable work for the society, for Roberts scholars, and for the general reader. Though the novel was never completed by Roberts, it still offers a vivid image of Kentucky, of character and landscape, of a major historical moment during the 1937 Louisville flood, and of Roberts' lyrical prose.

The narrative focuses on Joel Marsh, a complex young man forced to reconcile his relationships and traumatic events in his life against the backdrop of the 1937 flood. The novel opens in media res with Joel trying to understand how he became "the village bad man" (6). Shortly thereafter, Joel encounters several teenage girls—one of whom, Claudia Burkhead, Joel had been fantasizing about—and he is scorned by them. In his anger Joel gallops his horse directly at the girls in the road, scattering them into briars and thorns. Later, as he justifies his rage, Roberts offers us one of her classic and allusive modernist passages. Joel explains:

There was a Beatrice, . . . Well, it's the same as if Dante had ridden over the girl in a madness. Is what I did . . . Gazed at her in church to console myself for Katha Flemming and all her darkness. Said my prayers with the preacher, when he prayed for us, and always had Claudia in mind somehow and her face in my eyes somewhere . . . And then what did I do but ride her down on the road? (20)

As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Joel's wife, Kath Flemming, has died, and his infant daughter Emily has been taken by his late-wife's parents. He had fought against marrying the woman, but the child itself had been, as Roberts writes, "the fatal tie that had brought about his marriage to this person whom he hated even before the law bound him and the magistrate said of them 'man and wife'" (33). And his life with Kath was troubled, defined by her anger, violence, never relenting, always apathy, and eventually indifference as her demands increased and he became "a generator or finisher of her sinister desires" (36). The reader learns about all of this as the narrative unfolds in glimpses of memory interspersed with scenes in Joel's house, the comings and goings of his parents, and amid the din of news and predictions about the weather, the ever-falling rain, and the impending flood. Roberts' form exemplifies the struggle

of Joel's life: the past is never past, always informing and dramatizing the facts of the present.

Thematically, Roberts' story is driven by the ominous nature of the flood and all its biblical implications, evident especially in the exchanges between Joel and his father Gabriel. Joel believes their age is defined as the "Age of Electricity. Age of Oil. Mechanical Power out of oil," and his father argues that it is more ruled by the social instinct, "Social Power" (37). Then Gabriel, assuming the posture of an Old Testament prophet, explains: "It's the group instinct, if you can call it so, is what makes him want the oil so bad that he mighty near busts a hamstring to get it. Wars over oil. Finds God in *himself*, in mankind. He leaves Jehovah out then. When he makes himself a God he breaks the first commandment. . . . he breaks all the balance" (37).

Joel's approach to Louisville is filled with imaginings of his sister Tansy and his compulsion to rescue her from the flood. His determination to get to Tansy is at heart an attempt at expiation, to atone for his past conduct and the memories of his life with his late-wife. In his insistence to rescue Tansy and her children, Joel may also atone for the abandonment of his own child. Barker, in her introduction, explains, "Joel can find no peace from the memories of his very public failures, and thus the trip through the flood becomes a kind of penance for him, one that he willingly assumes" (xv).

In Louisville, amid the flood waters, Joel finds a rowboat and he makes his way through the city into the night. The rowing is ominous as he enters deeper into the darkness and he hears almost like a chant, voices warning flood refugees, *eastward, go on eastward*. His journey into the flood moves "forward in a limitless blackness," and he becomes simply himself: "Beyond that there was nothing that he claimed for his own, either as past experience or as making a present" (70). In one scene a big gasoline tank, leaking gasoline on the water, pins him against a wall, and he realizes it is a. He sees then the danger of someone throwing a match out a window, imagines flames engulfing him in the heart of the flood, and thinks to himself that it might be better to light a flame and "make an end swiftly," to bring about his own doom. It is one of Roberts' most explicit *dark night of the soul* scenes, a struggle through failure, the "terror and death into which he had gone to find himself" (73). In the midst of darkness, in the gloom, he sees one candle light flicker. Roberts writes: "he died three times in the violent leap and lap of death when flame ran as a monster tongue" (73), but the flames are only impending, are symbolic, and beyond this epiphanic death of the self, he finds his sister's house.

The narrative ends in the empty house, but Barker adds that Roberts' notes were extensive indicating the direction of the story after the last scene. Indeed, I suspect Roberts would

have revisited many of her chapters, some obviously left unfinished. Regardless, what she has left us is valuable, and her notes about the novel confirm the profoundly symbolic nature of Joel's journey. Barker surveys important passages from the manuscripts wherein Roberts writes: "Relate to the great and profound past of all human learning . . . The original deluge . . . The flood"; "One could never escape from God's great flood of Life and Death"; "Here the great sour flood pours back, the backward flow of life and time, the dark flood/Joel . . . tragic figure . . . some grandeur in his struggle, some universal significance" (xiv).

Her fragments about the story are revealing, and her thematic approach to the flood events indicates possible influence and important resonances with another novel published two decades after Roberts' death: Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*. Though the subjects of Roberts' and Warren's novels differ sharply, Roberts' manuscript notes suggest a deeper thematic resemblance between the two works. In her sketch of Joel as a "tragic figure," Roberts suggests there is "some knowledge far back in his mind that he had destroyed the mother of his child. *Some knowledge that he was not free of his act and that he could in the nature of his psychology not be free. As if he were blind*" (my emphasis, xiv). The leap from Joel to Brad Tolliver does not seem difficult, both imprisoned by the nature of psychology, the mistakes of the past, and knowledge. Nor does it seem difficult to connect Joel's struggle to Warren's other famous novel, *All the King's Men*, and to Jack Burden, also in desperate need to reconcile with knowledge—that *the end of man is to know*—and his own acts, imprisoned in the complicity of time present, time past.

We should all be familiar with the confluence of events after Roberts' death, written about extensively in numerous places by H. R. Stoneback. A brief summary should suffice here to

see how the pieces fit nicely together. Roberts dies in 1941 and by 1943 Allen Tate gets her papers into the Library of Congress, papers he declares, according to Stoneback, "one of the two most important literary sources for textual and critical study" (viii). Then Tate takes leave of the office and gives Warren oversight of the papers in 1944. Within two years of seeing the Roberts' papers, Warren publishes *All the King's Men* (deeper echoes than merely the one above resonate; see Stoneback, "'Strange Caterwauling': Singing in the Wilderness with Boone & Audubon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Robert Penn Warren" for further discussion).

Then in 1962-63, Warren is again deep in Roberts' country, finishing his famous essay on *The Time of Man*, "Life is from Within." He writes to Tate about having finished the EMR piece, 25 Nov 1962, and in that same letter mentions being "toward the end of a first draft, a novel I've been working at for two and a half years and thinking about for a lot longer" (*Selected Letters: 1953-1968* 360). By March 1963, the same month his Roberts essay is published in the *Saturday Review*, Warren has finished the first draft of what will be called *Flood: A Romance of Our Time*. The possible influence and the profound resonance is striking. The fact that two of Warren's masterpieces—arguably his two best novels—were written within periods of time he was steeped in Roberts is not coincidental: the aura of Roberts is all over Warren. Many of us have felt this resonance, and now with the hard work of Vicki Barker in organizing this volume and with the ceaseless effort of H. R. Stoneback in encouraging production of the *Flood* novel and in creating and overseeing the Reading Roberts Series, we have another document revealing deeper connections. Perhaps if Roberts had finished her novel, Joel too would have found solace in yearning toward a special forgiveness, or can we call it blessedness, as he sought to rescue his sister beyond darkness in the country of the heart.

### Kentucky Writers Day 2012

*The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society participated in Kentucky Writers Day 2012 at Penn's Store, Gravel Switch, KY. Repairs to the flood damaged store were coming along. The audience was lively and full in the field just in front of the porch-stage (pictured here).*

*H. R. Stoneback and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society read poems for and from Roberts and Kentucky writers. We thank Jeanne Penn Lane for her gracious hospitality and we wish her and the store good luck.*



## Sunday Supper Includes Act I of *Coming Home*

**Gregg Neikirk**

A play I have been working on for a long time about Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *Coming Home: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Story*, is complete and ready for production. At this year's fifteenth annual conference, the Central Kentucky Theatre group will present a selected excerpt from the play and "perform" it for Roberts Society members who attend the traditional Sunday afternoon supper at the Springfield Opera House. According to Erika Campbell, the theatre's interim director, and Springfield Renaissance Director Nell Haydon, Act I of the 5-Act play will be demonstrated, and a brief synopsis of the entire play will be available. While the group had hoped to be able to produce the full play in Springfield on the weekend of the conference, a change of directors meant that major alterations in the theatre group schedule were required. The play will go on, however, as best as possible. "We are very happy to be able to give the Society members a rendition of Act I for the conference," said Ms. Haydon. "And bigger and brighter things are coming for Professor Neikirk's play, as we think a little time will tell." The play begins in Orlando in 1940 near the end of Roberts' life. As she thinks back through her career, the scenes present various tableaux of her life, including her early days as a young poet and teacher in Springfield, her time at the University of Chicago, and the successes—and disappointments—she experienced as an author and daughter of her Little Country for the remainder of her life. Since the time that Roberts was inducted into the first Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in January, other theatre directors have expressed interest in possible options for the play.

The first Act of *Coming Home: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Story* is planned for Sunday, April 21, at approximately 5 p.m. (please check conference schedule).

## *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society*

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### **Mission Statement**

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and to encourage the teaching of her literature. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but we are always interested in Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Matthew Nickel at <[mattcnickel@gmail.com](mailto:mattcnickel@gmail.com)>.