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# The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter

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Newsletter No. 6  
February, 2005

## Enduring "Great Meadow" Has 75th Anniversary

Gregg Neikirk

When Elizabeth Madox Roberts aficionados gather in Springfield for this year's Annual Conference, there is much cause for celebration: 2005 is the 75th anniversary of the publication of Roberts' powerful and enduring novel, *The Great Meadow*, which depicts the early settlers of Fort Harrod and nearby parts of Kentucky, some of whom are based on Roberts' real ancestors. The novel traces the move from Virginia to Fort Harrod in Kentucky that Diony Hall, her husband Berk Jarvis, and other settlers make in 1774, just after Daniel Boone blazed the Wilderness Trail through the Cumberland Gap and on into Kentucky.

Ballantine Book's publishing arrangement with The Viking Press in 1975 bills the novel as "A Bold & Sweeping Romance . . . Set In The Kentucky Frontier!", but even stronger enduring qualities of the work still make it a powerful read 75 years after Elizabeth Madox Roberts penned it: its treatment of the inner life of the mind, the power of description in dealing with Kentucky's nature, and its attention to the place of women in frontier Kentucky. *The Great Meadow* relates not only a journey to the center of Kentucky, but as well to the center of Diony Hall's mind. Diony's fascination with Berkeleian philosophy allows Roberts to ponder the universal while still grounding the action of the novel firmly in the meadows of early frontier Kentucky.

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## Andrew Lytle on Roberts and Warren

H. R. Stoneback

Andrew Lytle (1902-1995) was one of the principal Vanderbilt Agrarians (with John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren); contributor to *I'll Take My Stand*, novelist and short-story writer, essayist, editor of *The Sewanee Review*, he was an important literary figure of the Southern Renaissance. I first met Lytle in 1966 when I began my Ph.D. studies at Vanderbilt. Our contact over the years included conversations at Vanderbilt, at Sewanee and Monteagle, and intermittent correspondence in the late 1960s and after. In the 1970s he moved to a farm near Sadieville, Kentucky, not far from my farm in the knob-country of Kentucky, where I was a part-time resident. I visited him in Sadieville several times; our topics of conversation included, among other things, gardening, sang (ginseng)-hunting, the biography of Lytle that he hoped I would write, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Robert Penn Warren. In a letter dated July 8, 1977, he wrote to thank me for some ginseng I'd given him, along with detailed instructions of how to quest the elusive "sang"—he said he was ready to start his "own private search for the sang," and assured me that I was "in no need for restoration" through sang. As for him: "There are enough reasons to chasten my vanity, but the 18<sup>th</sup> century has undone the South, along with other places; so I may just chew a little." Regarding the biography project he wrote: "I hope these people will respond to your intention of the biography. I would like to see some of my books in print again. . ."

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## President's Report

Steven Florczyk

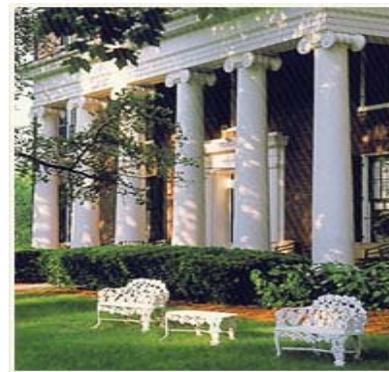
Last year's meeting proved to be another successful gathering of Roberts scholars and devotees from around the country. Our Sixth Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference was held April 25-26, 2005. The conference was preceded by the events of Kentucky Writer's Day at Penn's Store in Gravel Switch, KY. Thanks to the efforts of Jeanne Lane, it was a well attended and highly enjoyable

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## Conference Announcement

The VII Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference will take place at St. Catharine College and the Beaumont Inn (St. Catharine – Springfield and Harrodsburg, Kentucky), April 23-25, 2005.

(See p. 3 for registration form and p. 4 for Program Overview)



## President's Report (continued)

afternoon steeped in excellent Kentucky literature and song. Emceed by Terry Ward, members of the Roberts' society were cordially welcomed into the celebration of poetry, song, and fiction and were treated to a special performance of H.R. Stoneback's "public poem," "A Song for Penn's Store," which he dedicated to Haskell Penn and Jeanne Lane. After an enjoyable afternoon at Penn's Store, the annual conference banquet was held Sunday evening, where President Steven Florczyk officially opened the conference and introduced a triumvirate of key notes on Roberts' work. H.R. Stoneback delivered his paper, "Unearthing the 'Buried Treasure': Revisiting a Roberts Discovery & Epiphany in the Sacred 'Time of Man'—AD 1968, followed by Jane Keller's first part of a three part paper series entitled, "Where oh Where—and Why oh Why—Did Elizabeth Madox Roberts Go?" Finally, the society was delighted to welcome Roberts' great niece, Rebecca Roberts Owens, as she delivered her presentation, "A Roberts Family History: Past and Present Life in the Pigeon River Country and Beyond."

On Monday, conferees attended a full schedule of papers and presentations, well-organized by co-Program Directors Nicole Camastra and Sparrow Stoneback and site coordinator, Terry Ward. The paper presentations were followed by the annual graveside poetry reading and business meeting at the Beaumont Inn. After much enthusiasm over the upcoming 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Roberts' *The Great Meadow*, the events of the sixth conference, well-directed by Co-Conference Directors H.R. Stoneback and Matthew Nickel, came to a close on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>. Please see opposite column for the 2004 program.

## The Earliest Version of a Roberts-Warren Anecdote

### H. R. Stoneback

In recent years I have mentioned in several Roberts Conference Keynote Addresses, and in all of my class discussions of Roberts for decades, my discovery in the late 1960s of the Vanderbilt Library copy of *The Time of Man* in which Robert Penn Warren had scrawled marginal annotations. I had forgotten until recently that I had written, but not published, my original telling of this anecdote in a long, unpublished poem from 1973 entitled "Homage: A Letter to RPW." Recently, I discovered the manuscript of this poem in my Warren archive, mixed in with my Warren correspondence and memorabilia. Plans are afoot to publish the complete poem during the 2005 Warren Centennial Year but it seems apt to record here the pertinent passage of that old poem: (excerpt from) "Homage: A Letter to RPW"

This has nothing to do with what James Still or Jesse Stuart told me about your wilted tomato plants in what one of them called your "pseudo-agrarian backyard" (and my Big Boys fared poorly on Belmont Boulevard), for I knew, as Donald Davidson told me, "Agrarianism has nothing to do with tomatoes." Not in Nashville. It does have something to do with Elizabeth Madox Roberts whose novels you were teaching then (in *all* classes they said)—and how I met her in the midnight library stacks (I had my own key; my duties included Vandy departmental bibliography) and I held and read all night that old edition I found with all the marginal annotations by the magical incantations of place, earth, and land scrawled in what I knew to be your eccentric hand—and I knew that dawn, walking home through Centennial Park past the concrete Parthenon in the West End dark, what we had both learned from *The Time of Man*.

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## 2004 Program

Session 1 (chaired by **Nicole Camastra**—SUNY New Paltz):

**Bill Boyle** (SUNY New Paltz), "'My Love For You Will Never Die': The Songs of 'I Love My Bonny Bride'"; **Rachael Price** (SUNY New Paltz), "'I'm Still A-Livin': Representations of Life and Death in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State College) "Mystery and History in Kentucky: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and 'A Buried Treasure'"; **William Slavick** (University of Southern Maine) "Another Irish Connection: *The Time of Man* and John McGahern's *The Barracks*"; **Stefan Spezio** (SUNY New Paltz), "The Place of Being and The Being of Place: Interior and Exterior Frontiers in Roberts' *The Time of Man*"

Session 2 (chaired by **Steven Florczyk**—Independent Scholar):

**Brad McDuffie** (Independent Scholar), "The Short Cinematics of the Soul: or Looking Through the Glass Darkly; Haunting Folk Rhythms, 'Last Rights' and Cinematic Splicelings of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'Death at Bearwallow'"; Matthew **Nickel** (SUNY New Paltz), "The Tale and What It Can Tell"; **Terry Ward**, (Saint Catharine College) "In the Graveyard: Welty and Roberts Affirming Life"

Session 3 (chaired by **Jane Keller**—University of Baltimore): **Nicole Camastra** (SUNY New Paltz), "'Hold[ing] The Very Key to Her Life and Breath in His Hand': Modernism, Mystery and the Risk of Love in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Carol Talmage** (SUNY New Paltz) "Ellen's Book"; **Goretti Vianney-Benca** (SUNY New Paltz), "Language and Folksong in Roberts' *The Time of Man*"

Session 4 (chaired by **Matthew Nickel**—SUNY New Paltz), **Jane Keller** (University of Baltimore), "Rocky Mountain Hideaway: Roberts' 'Lost' Years in Colorado: 1910 to 1916"; **James Stamant** (SUNY New Paltz), "Soil Filament of the Life Bulb: The Land as the 'Slender Thread' Conductor in *The Time of Man*"; **Adam Romano** (Highland Library), "The Goose That Might Have Laid the Golden Thimble: Images of Archetypes in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Black Is My True Love's Hair*"; **Steven Florczyk** (Independent Scholar), "'Of A Kind Older Than Kings': Understanding Frontier Law in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Great Meadow*"; **Joshua Gran** (SUNY New Paltz), "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Existentialism, and the Search for Roots"

# *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society*

## Conference Registration and Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Detach this form and mail with check  
(payable to Tina Iraca Green, Treasurer, EMR Society) to:**

**Tina Iraca  
46 Montgomery St.  
Tivoli, NY 12583**

1) Enclosed please find \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ registration (s) for the VII National Roberts Conference.

2) Enclosed please find \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ annual membership (s) in the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society.

Note:

- A) All Conference participants must pay annual dues of \$10.00 per person.
- B) The Conference registration fee is \$45.00. It includes the Saturday night banquet at the Beaumont Inn and all conference sessions and activities.

### Conference Lodging Information:

Reserve your conference lodging at the Beaumont Inn (1-800-352-3992). Ask for the Roberts Conference room rate, which is guaranteed for April 23, 24, and 25. Questions about lodging, as well as other non-academic program events such as Kentucky Writer's Day, should be addressed to: Professor H. R. Stoneback ([Stoney Sparrow@webtv.net](mailto:Stoney_Sparrow@webtv.net)) or Bill Boyle ([boyle711@newpaltz.edu](mailto:boyle711@newpaltz.edu)).

Please direct all program questions to the Program Chair: Steven Florczyk – [sflorczyk@msn.com](mailto:sflorczyk@msn.com)

**Important Reminder: Even if you cannot attend this year's conference, please continue to support your society by sending in this form with your dues payment—thank you.**

## New Encyclopedia Includes Essay on TGM

Jane Keller

An important new encyclopedia of American fiction, soon to be published in print and electronic versions, will feature an entry on *The Great Meadow*. Facts on File, publisher of reference and related works, is now preparing a two-volume *Companion to the American Novel* as a sequel to the much-praised and award-winning *Companion to the American Short Story*, issued in 2000. The editor of both is Abby H.P.

Werlock, Associate Professor of American Literature Emerita at St. Olaf College, who solicited the entry. With the help and support of Steve Florczyk and Gregg Neikirk, Jane Keller (who did not have classes to teach, papers to grade, or academic committee meetings to attend) wrote the 1,000-word essay.

Those of us seeking to bring new attention to Elizabeth Madox Roberts are pleased that at least one of her novels will be showcased in a highly visible reference work directed to college and high school instructors and students. (At this writing, we do not know if other Roberts novels will be included.)

Information about the *Companion to the American Short Story* is available at <[www.factsonfile.com](http://www.factsonfile.com)>. We will pass on further information, including the exact publication date of the *Companion to the American Novel*, as we receive it.

## Enduring "Great Meadow" (continued)

Dionys's strong voice in the work allows Roberts to present a woman writer's perspective on topics from weaving to the composition of the universe--and the novel's setting allows Roberts to demonstrate her deep love for her native Kentucky.

Early in *The Great Meadow* a character quotes Daniel Boone directly concerning the land of Harrodsburg and Springfield: "He told about a promise land. I never before in all my time heard tell of a land so smooth and good, a well-nigh sort of Eden." A few pages later, another character adds the perspective that has made *The Great Meadow* an epic work for generations of readers: "Such a country would breed up a race of heroes, men built and knitted together to endure . . . A new race for the earth." The stylistic richness and mythic sweep of this compelling story of the Edenic American Frontier, the literary craft and vision that made the novel a best-seller and Literary Guild selection in 1930, will continue to appeal to readers for another 75 years.



## VII Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference: Program Overview

Saturday April 23rd: Arrival & check-in; Afternoon—Kentucky Writers Day (see below); Evening: Opening Banquet Beaumont Inn 7 PM (included in registration fee – except for alcoholic beverages). Keynote Speakers & Paper Session (if necessary).

Sunday April 24th: Tour (on your own) "Roberts country"; Kentucky Writers Day afternoon events.

Monday April 25th: 8:30-4:30 – Paper sessions at St. Catharine College/Springfield; 5:00 PM – Annual Graveside Reading (at EMR grave in Springfield, poetry or selections from her work – open to all); 8:00 PM – Annual business meeting of the Roberts Society at the Beaumont Inn

--A Note on Kentucky Writers Day: 2005 marks the sixth year of the Roberts Society's affiliation with and participation in the Kentucky Writers Day festivities at the Historic Landmark Penn's Store. This year, events will occur on both Saturday and Sunday. The final schedule of poetry readings, musical performances, literary presentations, etc. will be available in March. As usual, the Roberts Society will have a designated segment of the afternoon program at c.3:00 PM (Saturday & Sunday). If you wish to sign-up for a 5-minute slot in the Saturday or Sunday EMRS segment (indicate which day) – for a reading from Roberts, or some other Kentucky writer, or an original poem or song with appropriate "Kentucky-theme" – you may do so by informing the Conference Co-Directors William Boyle & H.R. Stoneback by March 1st (indicate whether you prefer Saturday or Sunday). Or you can take your chances for stage-time and sign up for "Open Mike" when you arrive at Penn's Store.

## Roberts-Warren Anecdote (continued)

Through the intervention of John Palmer, editor of *The Yale Review*, Warren received a copy of this poem. Then, Warren and I discussed (and corresponded about) this poem, but I do not recall that he ever had anything to say about the substance of the anecdote—i.e., the fact that he had annotated a library copy of *The Time of Man*. We did, of course, mutually acknowledge our admiration (and frequent teaching) of the book. As for the annotated library copy: I reported this fact to the Vanderbilt J.U.L. Special Collections in 1968, and suggested it should be removed from circulation and transferred to Special Collections. For some time, I treated the existence of that copy as classified information and held it secret. I intended to copy all of Warren's annotations but with the pressures of completing a degree and going on the job market I never did. When I was back at Vanderbilt a few years later the annotated copy was not in Special Collections, nor was it in the general circulation stacks. As far as I know, although I have not checked the Vanderbilt collections for some time, it has gone missing. Perhaps, in this Warren Centennial Year, someone should keep an eye on the autograph market, on e-bay.

## Notes & Queries

### "A Song for Penn's Store"

At the Kentucky Writers Day celebration at Penn's Store, for the fifth consecutive year, numerous Roberts Society members recited poems, read passages from Roberts, and sang folksongs. H. R. Stoneback unveiled a new work, "A Song for Penn's Store," which he characterized as a "public poem," a celebratory ode dedicated to Haskell Penn & Jeanne Penn Lane. Limited edition, signed and numbered broadside copies of the poem were nearly sold out at the event, with proceeds going to the preservation of Penn's Store. (A few copies are still available--\$5. includes s & h—from the Newsletter, or at Penn's Store, or directly from the author.)

H. R. Stoneback

### Arts Across Kentucky Includes EMR Essay

The Summer 2004 issue of *Arts Across Kentucky* includes a piece titled, "Once Upon a Solstice: In Praise of Elizabeth Maddox Roberts (1881-1941)." The author of this epistolary essay, Charles Semones, resides in Harrodsburg, KY, and is a member of the EMR Society.

Steven Florczyk

### In Memoriam: William Roberts

William Ralph Roberts, nephew of EMR, passed away in Lexington, KY on Dec 14, 2004. The son of Clarence Brent and Lottie Berry Roberts, he was born in Louisville, KY Sept. 30, 1920. Mr. Roberts was a veteran of WW II and Korea, where he attained the rank of technical sergeant. He graduated from the University of KY with a BS in Commerce and held a variety of finance and administrative positions with Realty Mortgage, Kissell Co., and State Dept of Highways. He retired from Silver's Enterprises, Inc. where he was Treasurer and CFO. He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Luella Smith Roberts, daughter, Rebecca Roberts Owens, and grandson Michael Brent Stacy, all of Lexington.

Rebecca Roberts Owens

### Mission Statement

The Elizabeth Maddox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, to encourage its teaching, and to pursue the goal of returning such classic novels as *The Great Meadow* and *The Time of Man* to print and keeping them there. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but are particularly interested in encouraging Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area. Anyone interested in membership, serving on the Advisory Council, or acting as a Kentucky/Springfield liaison, please contact Steven Florczyk at [sflorczyk@msn.com](mailto:sflorczyk@msn.com) or 111 Milledge Cr. #1, Athens, GA 30606.

### Lytle on Roberts and Warren (continued)

We had an ongoing conversation about Roberts. In this same 1977 letter he wrote:

"You asked about Elizabeth Maddox\* Roberts. I think *The Time of Man* is one of the great books. I intend to read others, but so far have been diverted. I know the Tates \*\* admire her. I was with them once in Kentucky when they drove by her house and went in for a short visit. I staid in the car, which means they were meeting for the first time."

This is news, unreported elsewhere, of an important Tate-Roberts connection. Unfortunately, Lytle could not remember the exact year of this visit though he said it was in the mid-to-late 1930s. It is worth noting here that it was Tate who, as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1943, oversaw the acquisition and cataloging of the Roberts Papers at the Library of Congress. (Warren succeeded Tate in this position in 1944.) Lytle continues, giving his explanation of the neglect of Roberts' work, a subject that many readers of this *Newsletter* have grappled with:

"It's curious, so many good writers have a limited reading public and variable reputations. It's partly or mainly due to New York as the center of publishing, which means that its own hinterland is favored, which finally is the wrong kind of sectionalism. The middlewesterners go there and become New Yorkers; the Southerners, the worst of them, become professional Southerners; those who remain do the best they can, but they remain outsiders; or they make their living at it by being in the publishing end or eccentrics or journalists. Now I don't know what it is. As Allen Tate has said so many times, the South at home will not recognize its own until it has been told to by the eastern reception. This was almost universally true. The publishing confusion now (chewing gum owners of old pub. houses etc.) leads to no sure understanding, except there are fewer readers in a growing age of illiteracy, especially the higher illiteracy."

Finally, in this letter Lytle responded to my mentioning in an earlier letter that Robert Penn Warren taught *The Time of Man* in most of his classes at Vanderbilt (a fact reported to me by Allen Tate, Jesse Stuart and others). Lytle wrote: "Red Warren was at Vanderbilt only for one year. Mims did not rehire him. If he taught *Time of Man* regularly it would have been Southwestern and L.S.U." This sounds authoritative, but it is incorrect. Warren taught at Vanderbilt for *three* years (1931-34, after *one* year at Southwestern in Memphis). Lytle was not at Vanderbilt and did not live in Nashville during these years; thus it seems unlikely that he would know (or recall accurately forty-some years later) what Warren was teaching then. (See Joseph Blotner, *Robert Penn Warren: A Biography* 119-142). See also "The Earliest Version of a Roberts-Warren Anecdote" elsewhere in this issue.

All quotations are from Andrew Lytle-to-H. R. Stoneback July 8, 1977: unpublished letter in private collection.

\*Lytle's spelling is retained in all quoted passages.

\*\*Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon.

### ***Kentucky Reflections:***

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference is about recognizing and celebrating the work of one of America's most neglected and most important writers. Aside from that, our meetings in Harrodsburg and Springfield are memorable because of the fine group of people that have come together for this conference over the years. I have now attended the conference twice -- along with those that I traveled down from NY with -- and I have met people that I feel I've known for years. It's a hell of a thing, as comfortable and intimate a conference that exists. I've been to other conferences and, truth be told, they pale in comparison. My fondest memories of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference all center around sitting out on the porch at the Beaumont Inn and talking and singing with friends and family. Such times make me realize that the lives we live truly are blessed.

--Bill Boyle

This year will be my third in the annual pilgrimage to the blue hills of Kentucky. Unlike some, I've seen the blue hue of the grass in the distance. I'm a believer. I feel the call every spring. Even now in my third year there's a life waiting at the end of the 3 day blows which haunt the long winters of upstate New York. The first year I attended the Elizabeth Madox Roberts conference I was just finishing my class work in the M.A. program at New Paltz. I remember feeling the death of that season and the firm resolution that there was a life to be loved in the academic world that existed outside of the classroom. Everything that I've come to love about that life can be found in the rhythms of the Robert's conference: history's songs and words. We always travel the road in a caravan, feeling the merger of history with the mountains, whose songs seemed to drift down from the cracks and crawls of the road that rambles through their wind. On the radio I always hear Jason Molina singing, "I've got my window open at the southern cross hotel . . .," as I think of walking the grounds at the Beaumont Inn, and hearing the conversations, familiar voices outside my window, of psalmers and poets; I want to know more of them, hearing the same old story one more time; I want to listen to the multitude of their ghosts in the night as I hear it coming on like one of H.R. Stoneback's freight trains, somewhere out in the blue moon of our old Kentucky home.

--Brad McDuffie

Last year, I made my first trip to Kentucky, but I am no pioneer. Unlike the first settlers in Kentucky, such as Diony and Berk in *The Great Meadow*, my journey was made in the comfort and safety of a large American car. Even so, my trip was full of expectations; I wanted to see the bluegrass, to share Kentucky bourbon with new friends, and to listen to those people who revel in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. I was dismayed when I looked over the fields and did not see the bluegrass. I was assured that the bluegrass was there and that I would see it if I had an opportunity to relax for awhile and look out over the fields swaying in the gentle breeze. I was patient. I waited. I drank in the hospitality of the Beaumont Inn and the new people I was meeting. At Penn's Store I listened to music and poetry while the dogs ran in the gentle rain of the bottomland. After a day of papers dedicated to Elizabeth Madox Roberts, I visited her final resting place. More and more, as these events unfolded before me, the grass began to gather a bluish hue. It was always there, but it had not shown itself to me until my eyes were readied by a mixture of music and poetry, old and new friends, food and drink, and contemplation of Roberts' literature. My time in Kentucky has strengthened my vision. Just as Roberts' work has helped me to see her land in my mind, her literature has focused my vision of the human spirit. While I am not a pioneer in the most traditional sense, perhaps I can become one by showing others the road that was shown to me. The road leads to Kentucky and to Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and it leads us to a special place that is filled with more than just bluegrass. Now that I have seen the land of Kentucky, I will most certainly return.

--Jamie Stamtant

## ***The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society***

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

*President: Steven Florczyk, University of Georgia*

*Vice President: Gregg Neikirk, Westfield State College*

*Vice President: Jane Keller, University of Baltimore*

*Secretary/Treasurer: Tina Iraca, University of Connecticut*

EMRS Newsletter Editors: Steven Florczyk/Tina Iraca

The EMRS Newsletter welcomes contributions including Roberts-related notes and queries and brief excerpts from papers presented at EMRS conferences. Please send submissions to Steven Florczyk ([sflorczyk@msn.com](mailto:sflorczyk@msn.com)) or Tina Iraca ([tinair@hotmail.com](mailto:tinair@hotmail.com)).