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CALIFORNIA THE CORNIAN

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A Foundation Supporting the Study and Preservation of State and Regional History



Regional Literature

California—A Sense of Place

How did you arrive in California? Were you born here? Come with your family as a child? Move to the state as an adult for work or some other reason? Do you think that living here, or being from here, in some way defines who you are?

Answering those questions provides a starting point for a dialog about “what makes California, California?” Why does California mean such different things to so many people, and what makes it so unique in the eyes of the world?

I invite readers of **The Californian** and all members of the CHCF to take part in the dialog by first sending us your responses to several questions about how you perceive the state, positively or negatively and what it means to you to live here.

1. If you are a native, what does having been born here mean to you? What perceptions have you encountered from others when they find out you are from California? Where do you think people get these impressions? Do you see the state as being different from other states or areas? Why? Are you proud to say you are from California? Why or why not?
2. If you are a non-native, what does living in California mean to you? What impressions did you have prior to coming here? Where did your impressions come from, and did you find they were indeed accurate once you arrived? Do you consider yourself a Californian now? Do you want to continue to live here? Why or why not?

The thoughtful exploration of California as a sense of place, a region, a community as defined by the experiences of its residents, is part of our effort to develop a California Studies Learning Community here at the center—part of our efforts to provide an educational setting for dialog and understanding of this state we call home.

The director’s report in the December issue of the magazine asked the question “Why California Studies?” One of the conclusions reached was that sense of place is so powerful here that it transcends race and class boundaries. And *that*, is a good starting point for a discussion about who we are and what we have in common, as well as about those issues which may divide us. California is our home; we have a vested interest in the future of the state, for ourselves and coming generations, and should be willing to enter into such discussions.

In the coming months our plans include inviting various CHC stakeholders to the center—faculty, staff, students, and community—to talk about California as a sense of place. I hope you will join us for that discussion.

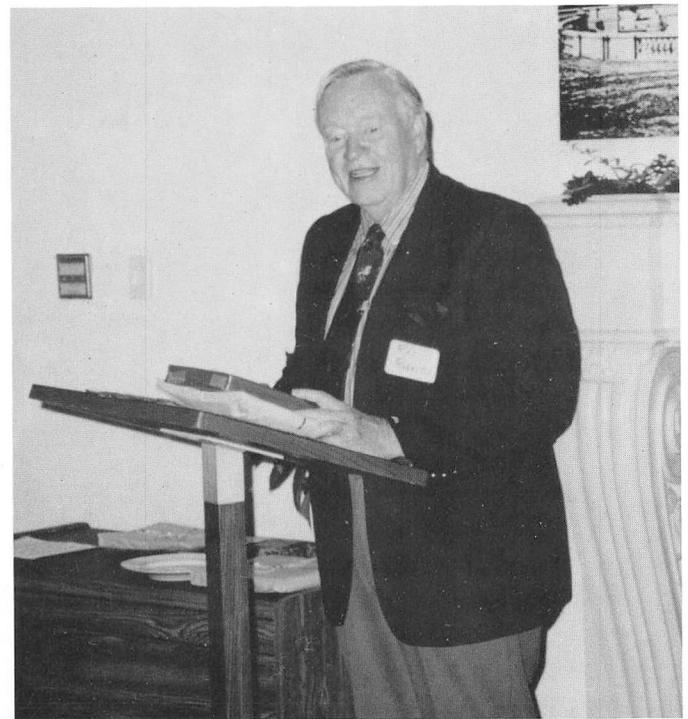
I also want to call your attention to the feature article we are printing in this issue of the magazine. Written by Michael

Kowalewski, a professor of English at Carleton College in Minnesota, and titled “A Sense of Place: The New American Regionalism,” the article focuses on this “heightened awareness of regional identity,” and how important a region is in shaping who we are. While the article goes beyond the scope of California, it should set the stage for your own ruminations about the questions posed above.

In addition, Kowalewski may be on the West Coast in mid-May, and if he is, he has agreed to give the follow-up talk to his article and facilitate a discussion about regional identity. You will receive a separate notice once we have confirmed the speaker.

Enjoy the article and let us hear from you!

Kathleen Peregrin
Director



Past President of the Board of Trustees, Roy Roberts receives recognition at the Holiday Open House, December 1995.

COVER: Eddie Mulligan contemplating San Francisco Bay, 1947. Courtesy San Francisco Chronicle. Feature article author Michael Kowalewski begins by making the point that children are regionalists, identifying with their own neighborhood and environment more than any other setting for stories. The cover photo reveals a child who appears very much at home in this San Francisco setting.

CALENDAR

- 3/12 Lecture: "Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote."** Carol O'Hare, local author and editor, presents a talk and slide presentation on the history and legacy of the suffrage movement, 12:30 p.m., CHC, RSVP: (408) 864-8712.
- 3/13 Lecture: "California's Counter-culture Mentality."** Cynthia Kaufman, De Anza College faculty in Philosophy and Women's Studies, talks about how movements like the women's movement develop and thrive in the state, 12:30 p.m., CHC, RSVP: (408) 864-8712.
- 3/14 Performance: "But I often long to talk to Ellen."** Judith Espinola, De Anza faculty member and former dean of the Creative Arts Division in a solo performance of writings about women by Alice Walker, Gertrude Stein, and Grace Paley. 12:30 p.m., CHC, RSVP: (408) 864-8712.
- 3/17 Lecture: "Energy and the making of modern California."** James C. Williams, history faculty member of De Anza college, will give a talk about his upcoming book, at 2:00 p.m., CHC. Refreshments, RSVP: (408) 864-8712.
- 3/28 Winter quarter ends.**
- 4/8 De Anza College spring quarter classes begin.**
- 5/4 Field Trip: "Santa Clara Valley Agriculture."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 5/10 CHCF Board of Trustees annual retreat.**
- 5/11 Field Trip: "Historic Oakland."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 5/18 Field Trip: "Drake in California."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 5/27 Memorial Day Holiday.** Classes do not meet and CHC will be closed.
- 6/1 Field Trip: "San Francisco, Gold Rush City."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 6/8 Field Trip: "Water in Santa Clara Valley."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 6/15 Field Trip: "Threatened California."** (see Education pages 4-5).
- 6/27 CHC closes for summer break.**
- 6/28 Spring quarter ends.**

Please Note: The speaker for the follow-up to the feature article has yet to be confirmed (see page 2). You will receive a special invitation once the date and time have been arranged.



Mill Creek Bridge, Carmel-San Simeon Highway, 18 miles south of Monterey, California.

EDUCATION

State and Regional History

The following courses will be offered spring quarter through the California History Center. Please see the California History Center class listings section of the De Anza College Schedule of Classes for registration information (i.e., course ID #, call #, and units.) For additional course information, call the center at (408) 864-8712.

And don't forget, as a benefit for being a history center member you can register for history center classes (CHC classes only, not other De Anza classes) at the Trianon building.

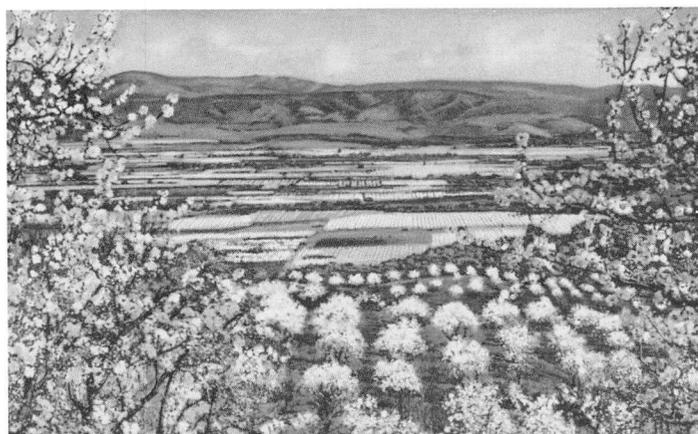
Please note: The differential fee for students with a bachelor's degree is **no longer in effect**. The cost per unit is \$9.

Drake in California: *Hugh Thomas*

Drake in California traces the general background of European exploration and expansion in the 16th century; the development and growth of England during the Tudor period; antagonism between England and Spain; the English privateers and personal career of Drake, who circumnavigated the world, landing in California. Lectures: Wed. May 8, 15, 22. Field trip: Sat. May 18.

Historic Oakland: *Betty Hirsch*

Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, "There's no there there." However Oakland has played a major role in the development of California and the West because of its strategic location. Its history is a fascinating tale of audacious land speculators and bold politicians (such as Nefarious Horace Carpentier and Dr. Samuel Merritt), of mudflats that grew into a major sea port, of the coming of the transcontinental railroad (and the machinations of the Big Four), and the resulting boom in industry and commerce. Contrary to Stein's lament, there is "there there." Lecture: Thurs. April 25. Field trip: Sat. May 11.



"In the Valley of Heart's Delight. Blossom time in the Santa Clara Valley, which produces an average of 100,000,000 pounds of prunes annually. One third of the world's annual production of prunes comes from the thousands of trees in The Valley of Heart's Delight."

Threatened California: *Julie Phillips*

Join De Anza Environmental Studies faculty member Julie Phillips as she explores the wonders of the beautiful state of California. Students will visit and study a variety of California's ecosystems including the coastal redwood forest, marshlands, Pacific tidepools and the rugged and spectacular mountain regions of the Diablo range. Students will discuss the many environmental factors that threaten California's flora and fauna including global warming, overpopulation, pollution, ozone depletion, deforestation and the biodiversity crisis. A major focus of the class will be sustainable use of California's varied resources. Lectures: Tues. June 4, 11, 18. Field trip: Sat. June 15.

Santa Clara Valley Agriculture: *Chatham Forbes*

When the Silicon Valley was "The Valley of Heart's Delight," from the mid-19th century to the post WW II era, American and European farmers developed the Valley into one of the world's most productive agricultural centers. Progressing from wheat and truck farming to viniculture and fruit growing, the growers experienced a strong demand for their products on a national scale. The local development of food processing technology, together with the later invention of refrigeration enroute to markets further expanded and diversified production. The economic and social effects of the rise and decline of this industry will be studied in the classroom and the field. Lecture: Thurs. May 2. Field trip: Sat. May 4.



Devoy Grove, Redwood Highway, California.

Water in Santa Clara Valley: *Chatham Forbes*

The American era in California brought steady, sometimes rapid increase in population, and a concurrent increase in the demand for water. The heavy consumption of water by the very intensive agriculture of pre-war days, lowered the water table to the point of salt water intrusion and sinking land elevation near the bay. Reservoirs proved to be only a temporary solution, so that water importation became necessary. The fierce political conflicts that ensued demonstrated that water is California's most precious commodity. The class will study the historic evolution of water supply. Lecture: Thurs. June 6. Field trip: June 8.

San Francisco, Gold Rush City: *Betty Hirsch*

In 1848, the year that gold was discovered, San Francisco was a backwater of 800 people. Within months, its population mushroomed to 30,000. By 1852, after surviving six fires, San Francisco ranked fourth nationally in foreign trade. Although this phenomenal growth resulted in a sophisticated city with all the amenities, there were duels in the streets, gangs of criminals robbed, extorted and terrorized, and there were more saloons per capita than in any other city. This course will probe what life was really like in the instant city of Gold Rush San Francisco. Lecture: Thurs. May 23. Field trip: Sat. June 1.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION

History of a Handmade Kind

by Wallace Stegner

*The following is an excerpt from the foreword to Yvonne Jacobson's *Passing Farms, Enduring Values* (1984) written by prize-winning writer of both fiction and nonfiction, the late Wallace Stegner. The essay highlights Stegner's belief that a good local history, like Jacobson's book, has a strong sense of place, and "casts a shadow longer than itself." It speaks to an audience far beyond the geographical boundaries it describes.*

Local history is the best history, the history with more of ourselves in it than other kinds. It is immediate, intimate, personally apprehended, and at least in America it is by definition recent. It does not have to be split up into categories and kinds, economic, political, military, social. It is the record of human living in its daily complexity, and the sense of place is strong in it. Its actors are our neighbors, our families, ourselves. It is history of a handmade kind, homely and familiar, human lives on their slow way into memory and tradition.

Yvonne Jacobson's *Passing Farms, Enduring Values* is local history that casts a shadow longer than itself. The Santa Clara Valley is a microcosm or representative, it can stand for the once-virgin American continent, and what happened to it can stand for our entire history as a people. The recapture (or more properly, the creation) of the history of this place, even as it is being transformed, is perhaps indulgence of nostalgia, but it is also a move toward a broader understanding of forces peculiarly though not exclusively American.

And as our numbers grow and the complexity of industrial civilization forces changes in our living, we urbanize our living space and turn our fields and orchards and vineyards and gardens into subdivisions, factories, parking lots, shopping centers, freeways and cloverleaf interchanges.

Even if we don't urbanize an area as the Santa Clara Valley has been urbanized, our human activities often bring about profound changes. In pragmatically creating a favorable habitat for ourselves in unknown country, we characteristically damage the country and destroy the habitats of native species, including native peoples. Changes that Nature unaided might produce in hundreds of thousands of years come about under our management in less than a century. Some that Nature would never get around to we bring about in a generation. Life in America is more often a becoming than a being.



*Yvonne Jacobson and Wallace Stegner, booksigning for *Passing Farms, Enduring Values*, 1984.*

And all of this speeding, changing front pulls a spiritual vacuum in its wake. Not only are the places we came from left behind, but the past is left behind with them. History and the sense of history are baggage that the American dream loses in transit, and it takes us a good while to realize the enormity of the loss. Sometimes we don't recognize the loss until it is irreplaceable, sometimes we catch on in time.

Often, we feel the absence of history as a simple inability to participate in the love of place that others seem to feel. We have gnawings and cravings for something we cannot name. We are uncertain where we belong, we have doubts about the adequacy of a present that has neither past nor future attached to it. We may be tempted by causes and cults that involve us in communal activities, including some bizarre ones. We may feel an impulse to revisit the place of our childhood, hungering for revelation about who we truly are. The 'Roots' syndrome afflicts more Americans than black ones.

What we are feeling is the displacement of growing up without history, or at least without history that we can recognize and claim as our own. Not everyone who has the history-deficiency realizes what it is, but most of us feel it in some degree. The lucky ones not only realize it but try to do something about it.

In older parts of America such as New England, well into its fourth century of settlement, the process of de-culturation and re-culturation has come full circle. In New England the Bicentennial was a rich and varied intellectual and emotional sharing. In the West, barely into its second century, it was not. Except among a few enthusiasts, history has not yet been reinvented here, and even where it has, it is likely to be distorted by characteristic myths traceable not to the facts of living but to dime novels and horse opera. In the West, too, change has had a headlong velocity, and that both exacerbates nostalgia and makes retrospection difficult. As fast as a local past is perceived, it has vanished. No sooner is a way of life known and loved than it has to be given up, and may be preserved only in photographs or memory.

And so I understand the feeling, close to desperation, with which Yvonne Jacobson has tried to gather together the available history of the place she was born in, and to evoke, even as it changes into something unrecognizable, the bucolic Santa Clara Valley of her childhood, in the years when it seemed as stable as any American community has ever been, and when it was truly both a Jeffersonian agrarian democracy and the Valley of Heart's Delight.

In the process of recording the valley of her girlhood, Mrs. Jacobson tells us a good deal about what it was before white immigrants discovered that there was no place in the world better adapted to the growing of fruit. Once, when the Costanoan Indians lived in it, it was a park-like oak forest reaching southward from a clean bay and cupping up to the enclosing low mountains. The climate was mild and benevolent, the bay full of shellfish. The creekside tangles grew wild berries and the oaks provided the wherewithal for unlimited acorn flour. At least from the nostalgic viewpoint, Eden.

Original sin came with the Spaniards, who forced the hunters and gatherers of the valley tribes into the Santa Clara Mission and co-opted them for farm labor. Spanish cattle and horses increasingly grazed and trampled the grasses of the oak openings, their weeds invaded and took hold, they began to cut the oaks—for lumber, for firewood, for planting space.

The processes begun by the Mission and the adjoining Pueblo of San Jose accelerated swiftly with the first Americans. Within a generation after 1846 the valley was mostly wheat fields. And hardly had wheat begun to form a special pattern of valley life than orchards began to replace it—pear, peach, cherry, prune, forerunners of the golden age.

The valley was never California agriculture as we have historically known it, not the factories in the fields that in the Central Valley and elsewhere have proved so economically potent and so humanly arid. This was down-home farming, three generations of tranquility, beauty, health, and productivity based on family farms of small acreage but bountiful production. The Santa Clara Valley, even when I arrived here in 1945, provided the fresh, canned, and especially dried fruit for half the world. The dried peach pies that my mother baked in Saskatchewan during World War I almost certainly came from here. The smoked prunes that we had for breakfast in Norway in the 1950s probably did. This was *par excellence* a fruit bowl, and it spread its fragrant bounty world-wide.

What has happened to that Eden is made plain in Mrs. Jacobson's text. Change marked time during the Twenties, during the Depression, during the war. But with the end of the war, when enormous new influxes of people began, change speeded up. We heard how many thousands of acres annually were going out of orchards and into subdivisions and shopping centers, we watched the electronics factories spring up like mushrooms from Redwood City to San Jose, and we did not in the least realize or understand the magnitude of the transformation. Then one spring we drove through and the endless froth of blossoms was no more than local patches. One summer we found that there were no longer any orchards where we could pick our own apricots at a pittance a pailful. The valley was cut by tangles of freeways, we no longer knew the way to anywhere, we got lost going to Saratoga.

Silicon Valley is probably a good, in many ways. The Valley of Heart's Delight was a glory. We should have found ways of keeping the one from destroying the other. We did not, and so the drama of change in this brief Eden could appropriately end with the final direction in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*:

A distant sound is heard, coming as if out of the sky, like the sound of a string snapping, slowly and sadly dying away. Silence ensues, broken only by the sound of an ax striking a tree in the orchard far away.

A Sense of Place: The New American Regionalism

by Michael Kowalewski

The following is an excerpt from Michael Kowalewski's article Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism, which appeared in the Spring of 1994 issue of American Literary History. Kowalewski, who teaches "Visions of California" at Carleton College in Minnesota and leads his students on ten-week field studies in California, claims that current literary critics see regional literature and local settings as parochial, and therefore not deserving of serious attention. He suggests that regional studies, historical or literary, can enhance "regional identity without reverting to mere localism."

Kowalewski and his students visit as many as forty sites ranging from the Huntington Gardens and Library to Domaine Carneros Winery and from the Crystal Cathedral to Yosemite National Park. Their guest speakers have included Gerald Haslam, Kevin Starr, James Houston, and Mary Holmes, among many others. He has authored books and articles, and Cambridge University Press is in the process of publishing a collection of edited essays entitled Reading the West: New Essays on the Literature of the American West. He is currently working on a study of California literature, painting, photography, film and history: an examination of how artists and writers have imagined the state over time.

Post cards have been chosen to illustrate this article because they are regional almost by definition. Even though post cards have often been vehicles of boosterism, they allow us a glimpse at what is held dear by this region called California.

Children, Mary Austin declared in 1932, are "at heart the most confirmed regionalists. What they like as background for a story is an explicit, well mapped strip of country, as intensively lived into as any healthy child lives into his own neighborhood." The occasion was an article entitled "Regionalism in American Fiction," hardly a peripheral topic by Austin's lights. For her, "the source of all art" was "deeper than political posture" and it arose "as people truly and rudely say, in our 'guts,' the seat of life and breath and heartbeat, of loving and hating and fearing." The "guts" of art arose not only from physiology and emotion but from the local environmental factors that had already molded them:

No sort of experience . . . works so constantly and subtly upon man as his regional environment. It orders and determines all the direct, practical ways of his getting up and lying down, of staying in and going out, of housing and clothing and food-getting; it arranges by its progressions of seed times and harvest, its rain and wind and burning suns, the rhythms of his work and amusements. It is the thing always before his eye, always at his ear, always underfoot.

Austin's emphasis upon "regional environment" was proportional to her concern that Americans did not care about it. Opposing the rhythms of seed times and harvest and loving evocations of the land was the American reading public's preference for "something less than the proverbial bird's-eye view of the American scene, what you might call an automobile eye view, something slithering and blurred, nothing so sharply discriminated that it arrests the speed-numbered mind to understand, characters like garish gas stations picked out with electric lights."

This image of urban anonymity and anesthesia (a bird's eye is unsuitably organic here to describe it) invokes a phantom opposite that has historically helped define regional experience, especially as regionalism has been associated with rural culture. But to locate this as merely a historical trend is to miss the urgency of its present manifestations. Increasing numbers of Americans in recent years, whether in preservation commissions, nature conservancies, fish and game organizations, environmental groups, or local "save the park" alliances, seem to be verifying the concerns Austin aired. More and more frequently, unforgettable experiences of American places now consist less of lovely memories of snowfalls and sunsets than of disturbingly congested, poisoned, or threatening places, and this fact has created a strong counterresponse. As Tony Hiss notes, attempts to restore or preserve historic districts, greenways, or wetlands tend to be motivated by actual direct experiences of a place. The people involved refer not simply to architectural beauty but to "the character of a place, or its essential spirit, or the quality of life there, or of its livability, genius, flavor, feeling, ambience, essence, resonance, presence, aura, harmony, grace, charm, or seamliness," all descriptions that attempt "to convey some specific component of an experience." The intellectual ferment now effervescing around the notion of place seems a formalized version of the same impulse, and it can be found not only in literature but in ecology, architecture, urban planning, cognitive studies, public health policy, cultural geography, and elsewhere.



UCLA, circa 1948.

This new cross-disciplinary interest in the idea of place has arisen along with fairly prominent signs of revitalized regional culture. Every major region of the country now has its own center for regional studies, membership in local and state historical societies continues to increase, new regional book awards honor local talent, regional theaters, literary journals, bookstores, and publishers hold on (and often flourish) despite a sluggish economy, and recent cultural events (like the Cowboy Poet Festival in Elko, Nevada) gain increasing national attention.

A heightened awareness of regional identity and local environments seems to have come into his own for a variety of reasons, not all of them altruistic. It may spring from the tightening economic constraints that keeps states, cities, and communities scrambling for local funding as much as it does from a new understanding of ecology or a preservationist ethic. The environmental movement has certainly played a crucial role in sparking a new concern with place and region; but so too has a deepening disaffection with the desirability or necessity of a national identity—a concept whose utility at home (as opposed to abroad) sometimes seems restricted to recruiting for war or conducting a medal count at the Olympics.

A lively new interest in recent years in the analytical categories of class, race, ethnicity, and gender has provided insight into the past lives and imaginations of Americans, especially those of blacks, women, and blue-collar workers. But this new diversity has not been quite diverse enough. Why has region been neglected as a critical category? The critical assumption seems to be that region or a sense of place is not an imaginative factor that can be internalized and struggled with in the same literarily rewarding ways that writers struggle with issues of race, class, and gender—this despite such recent self-definitions as that of

activist playwright, director, and filmmaker Luis Valdez as he considers his home state of California:

We must know our position . . . "Give me a place to stand and I shall move California. Give me a place to stand and I shall move America." My entree into America is not so much as an Hispanic, not anymore, not as a Chicano, not even as a farmworker. Forget it. It is as a CALIFORNIAN, as one of the native Californians who possesses part of the vision that we have all shared for centuries.

Though less charitable explanations are possible, region may be condescended to by critics or simply ignored as a category because many of them simply lack a vocabulary with which to ask engaging philosophical, psychological, or aesthetic questions about what it means to dwell in a place, whether actually or imaginatively. "We have the terms *enculturation* and *acculturation*," Gary Snyder notes, "but nothing to describe the process of becoming placed or re-placed." Somehow environment and place are not seen as shaping identity and defining consciousness in the way other factors purportedly do—regardless of the fact that cognitive scientists are now suggesting that memory itself cannot function without place, that we can have no awareness of past events in our lives "without a sense of the place in which they happened"; and despite the fact that one of the central impulses in American literature—one shared by H. D. Thoreau and Willa Cather, William Faulkner and Leslie Marmon Silko, Wallace Stevens and Joan Didion, Zora Neale Hurston and Arturo Islas—has been to evoke what Frederick Turner (echoing D. H. Lawrence) calls a "spirit of place."

If critics cannot ask rewarding questions about the impalpable, subtly defined properties of place, they often simply imply that

such features are not actually influences at all. Many critics still seem to feel that landscape and nonhuman environments do not crucially influence writers or their characters. Writers can write, the implication seems to be, wherever they set their typewriters or their laptops. Their primary struggle in writing is not with landscape but with words. "I did not choose to be born in Lowell": the painter James Whistler's arch rejoinder might serve as an epigraph for much contemporary criticism, though perhaps some might prefer a line by Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) in *On the Waterfront*. "I don't like the country," he says on the docks of Hoboken, "the crickets make me nervous."

An intimate connection between landscape and writing can sometimes, it is true, be more a wished-for condition than an actuality, and it is not always clear what kind of causal relationship can be established between the two. The novelist Marilynne Robinson once said she did not feel as strong a sense of connectedness with the land as she wished she did. But, she added, that is often the case: "You imagine what it would be like if you felt the way you wished you did feel, and that becomes a sort of feeling in itself." "Place is one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction," Eudora Welty contends in her well-known essay "Place in Fiction," an aspect of fiction relegated into the shade by character, plot, symbolic meaning, and emotion. Yet when she asks what about place is transferable to the pages of a novel, she answers unequivocally: "The best things—the explicit things: physical texture . . . Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course." Not knowing what kind of link can be established between self and environment is clearly not the same as denying that there is nothing there to be known. Having doubts about the possibility of adequately defining regional identity is not the same as asserting that it does not exist.

Yet you would never know this from contemporary criticism, for finding region an important factor in literary studies is now usually seen as the equivalent of being an overenthusiastic salesman with a special marketing territory. Regionalism, it seems, is often next to boosterism, a fatuous puffing of merely local talent—a kind of literary chamber of commerce juxtaposed to the three national congressional houses of race, class, and gender. (Criticism in this regard seems to take its cue from the



"Little Miss California," circa 1911.

literary marketplace, where being identified as a "regional writer" usually represents a kind of literary kiss of death, one that usually denotes small-press status and the chance for only local recognition. "Regional fiction at its best" is a blurb emblazoned on any number of remaindered novels.) When works of regional writing are taken seriously in the academy, they tend to be thought of in nonregional terms; they tend to be legitimated under the aegis of, say, Latino studies, Native American studies, or, more broadly, environmental studies. My purpose is not to impugn the value or legitimacy of such areas of critical study. I would suggest, however, that one can fruitfully teach, think, and



"Lone Cypress—World Famous 17 Mile Drive, Del Monte, California."

write about regional expression and the literature of place without reverting to these particular zoning restrictions. At a time when critical diversity has been vigorously championed, regional writing has been relegated to the periphery not because it is not diverse enough, but because it is not diverse in the proper ways—that is, in the terms most critics now feel comfortable invoking.

When Philip Fisher describes the sectional culture of 150 years ago as "split along geographical lines," he speaks of "the New England mind, the Southern way of life, the West of the pioneer with his energy and his violence" and contends that "each section had its own voices and themes, its own philosophies and religions, its unique spirit and humor." His implied notion of "geography" here seems indigent; learned, not lived. The actual interactions whereby, say, "humor" or "philosophies" might spring from, and be sustained by, local environments are ignored by being too insubstantially assumed. Likewise, complexities of regional definition are ironed out into something far less supple: don't ask about the Southern mind or New England violence, just look for signs of pioneer energy in the West. In other words, the actual *where* of these regions, in all their alloyed particularity, seems conspicuously absent. Fisher says the "new" American studies locates "a set of underlying but permanently open national facts around which all identities are shaped. . . . [a] troubled utopian core of enterprise, freedom, and democratic culture." But whence does the new American studies draw its "core" samples? And how might individual samples—from Sheridan, Wyoming, say, or Burlington, Vermont—affect larger speculations about the condition of the national topsoil? Fisher's

definition of "national facts" coercively implies that local facts are somehow inherently less deserving of our attention. "National facts" here equate with large, important constellations; regional identity, with parochial limits. Local facts have already been deemed subsidiary, already rendered evidence for "national facts" they cannot challenge or redefine but merely embody. It does not take a die-hard regionalist to see that what is limited here is Fisher's notion of limitation.

Definitional difficulties like these pop up even with critics who are genuinely interested in exploring regional artistry. David Wyatt, for instance, in his study of California writers, *The Fall into Eden* (the most ambitious study of California writing to date), attempts to defend the value of their work by stressing what he calls "traditions of national self-characterization." He puts John Steinbeck's or Mary Austin's or Frank Norris's work in the context not only of other contemporary California writers but, more noticeably, within the context of an established Anglo-American literary tradition, one that includes Milton and Wordsworth, Yeats and Emerson. Wyatt's readings are generally shrewd and illuminating, yet in trying to defend California writers, he argues that they transcend their settings in some significant way. These writers exemplify universal themes that go beyond their immediate settings and thus Wyatt wishes his study to be "a nonprovincial account of a profoundly provincial experience."

Like it or not, however, Wyatt's terms establish a somewhat invidious distinction, for it is clear that provincial experience, whether profound or not, still makes less searching claims on our attention than something national or "non-provincial." (How might our thinking change if the word "national" were replaced by the term "antiregional"?) To argue that California writers are valuable only insofar as they transcend their locale is to argue, in a sense, that they are not (nor should be thought of primarily as) *California* writers. If Robinson Jeffers, as Wyatt says, is "the California Milton" or—a bit more implausibly—Kenneth Rexroth is "the California Marvell," the tradition that precedes and absorbs these writers' work obviously seems more important than its distinctive features. This seems to be a one-way street. Nobody is going to offer, retrospectively, to call Andrew Marvell "the English Rexroth." The problem with this kind of criticism is that we may end up with what Wendell Berry calls "a regionalism of the mind," "a map without a territory," a literature of place without a place to evoke.



Angel's Flight—Los Angeles, California circa 1968. "Built by Colonel J. W. Eddy, personal friend of President Lincoln, Angel's Flight is the world's shortest railway. It travels a 33% grade for 315 feet and has carried more passengers per mile than any other railroad in the world—100 million in its first 50 years."

To read Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's introduction to *American Women Regionalists, 1850-1910* (an anthology that balances well-known authors like Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather, and Kate Chopin with lesser known figures like Mary Noialles Murfree, Sui Sin Far, and Zitkala-Sa) is to watch the term *regionalism* crumble and disintegrate in similar ways. The editors assert that they have "tried to reconstruct a regionalist women's tradition in American literature" that is identifiably distinct from work done by their "local colorist" contemporaries (who were predominantly male). The difference they point to consists primarily of the desire on the part of these writers "not to hold up regional characters to potential ridicule by eastern urban readers but rather to present regional experience from within, so as to engage the reader's sympathy and identification." "Potential ridicule" seems a serviceably slippery phrase here, one marked more by interpretive convenience than accuracy. Bret Harte, George Washington Cable, Hamlin Garland, and Mark Twain (against whom the editors set apart the women writers in this anthology) all display a variety of narrative perspectives in their work—some sympathetic, some satiric—and they are as likely to poke gentle fun at their readers as at their characters. But such complexities seem to weigh little against the dark threat of "potential ridicule."

The editors' inability to offer a useful definition of a distinct regionalist women's tradition may stem from the fact that regionalism itself has an essentially decorative status in their anthology. Fetterley and Pryse admit that "characters in regional fiction are rooted," that they "gain their identity from the regions they inhabit," and that "living for a long time in the same place affects character." But it is clear that the editors have already decided that place and environment cannot affect authors or characters as significantly as gender does. One can certainly find the alternative domestic values the editors identify in these anthologized stories, along with important mother-daughter relationships, and displays of narrative empathy and tact. But all of those qualities could



Union Square, San Francisco, circa 1905.

easily be found in contemporary writing by nonregional American women writers, as they could (though less easily perhaps) in contemporary regional writing by men. The editors conclude their introduction by saying that they actually visited many of the places recognized by their writers as sources of inspiration—Beersheba Springs, Tennessee; South Berwick, Maine; Walnut Canyon, Arizona. Yet this acknowledgement of the importance of place and local identity for these writers seems merely an obeisance, an afterthought rather than the structuring principle for the anthology. An attention to place, in Fetterley and Pryse's hands, becomes a form of literary tourism, a scenic postcard from the Gender Front. Region is absorbed by gender as a critical category rather than granted a mutually interactive status. Carol Bly, Linda Hasselstrom, Annette Kolodny, and Carolyn Merchant have all written perceptively about the formative role gender plays (and has played) in women's conceptions of landscape and home. Yet gender is only one of a multitude of factors shaping and molding individual identity and perception, and too insistent an emphasis upon it can be restrictive rather than liberating.

This multifaceted imagination of particular American places is perhaps the most remarkable feature of much contemporary writing about place. The impulse or habit of mind exemplified is hardly unique in American writing (think of Thoreau's fishing for perch at midnight on Walden Pond, James Agee's multilayered descriptions of sharecropper life in Hale County, Alabama, or Faulkner's braided genealogies in Yoknapatawpha County), but it has surfaced recently with a new energy and complexity. William Least Heat-Moon has subtitled his new book *PrairyErth*, a 600--page exploration of a single county of tall-grass prairie in Kansas, "A Deep Map." That phrase sounds just the right note. Literary "mappings" of American places have increasingly involved an interest in metaphors of depth, resonance, root systems, habitats, and interconnectedness—factors that together put places into motion, making them move within their own history, both human and nonhuman. The effect, as Patricia

HAMPL puts it in *Spillville*, is to pitch us harder into the landscape: “There is no forest, but there is the sensation that now we’re going deeper. The *deeper* of characters in fairy tales who set off from home and, sooner or later, must enter a deep wood.”

A new place-based American criticism that takes its cue from such writing could offer a multidimensional vision of regional identity that might rectify many critics’ absenteeism in regard to physical environments. No longer can place be adequately thought of as merely a conceptual index of social attitudes and representational practice. It must be reimagined as a texture, a metabolism, a temperament, an etiquette. The growing seasons, elevation readings, storm systems, and history of ecological compromise in such newly imagined areas will seem inextricably intertwined with their political life, folklore, speech rhythms, and ethnic zones. Replacing larger, more homogenous entities (whether states or regions) with flexibly defined mosaic of pluralistic, multiracial microregions, each with its own landscapes, local economies, weather patterns, histories of settlement and expatriation, and so on, will inevitably seem a form of critical Balkanization to some—a final form of fashionable fragmentation in imagining the self. Strangely enough, the opposite seems to be the case, at least so far as the contemporary literature of place implicitly testifies. Imagining “deep maps” of smaller, more specific places actually offers what W. J. Keith calls “a welcome limitation of possibility,” one that allows for a richer understanding of individual wholeness—one, in Hampl’s words, that feels like sanity.

American society, as Snyder puts it, “operates under the delusion that we are each a kind of ‘solitary knower’—that we exist as rootless intelligences without layers of localized contexts. Just a ‘self’ and the ‘world.’ In this there is no real recognition that grandparents, place, grammar, pets, friends, lovers, children, tools, the poems and songs we remember, are what we *think with*. Such a solitary mind—if it could exist—would be a boring prisoner of abstractions.” A “new regionalism” in literacy criticism, if it takes its lead from the literature it proposes to study, will involve a reimagination of the “layers of localized contexts” in physical and cultural environments as fresh as the reimagination of history that energized New Historicism.

A new attention to place in literary studies might do more than simply add another molecule to a model of identity now defined in terms of race, class, and gender. It might help alter the model itself, perhaps by way of a few new metaphors, like photosynthesis or an

ecology of the self, in place of omnipresent notions of “constructed” identity. Yet the force of such a new emphasis will only be successful if the “ecology” turns out to be something challengingly new and not simply a rubric under which to smuggle in thoughtlessly familiar terminology. The new regional studies must be capable of exploring regional identity without reverting to mere localism. It will need to establish a new critical equilibrium, one as wary of redemptive pseudoteology or appeals to environmental determinism as it is of geographical ignorance and representational melodrama. It is hard work, but it is already well underway. The “grounding” of literary criticism will be welcome news to anyone who feels the truth of Berry’s contention that “unless you know *where* you are, you don’t know *who* you are.”

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FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

“For Further Inquiry” suggests additional reading on the subject of the feature article and poses questions for thought and debate.

Michael Kowalewski cites many sources in his article. Here are full references for a few.

Austin, Mary. “Regionalism in American Fiction.” *English Journal* 21 (1932): 97-107.

Valdez, Luis. “Envisioning California.” *California History* 68 (1989): 162-71.

Wyatt, David. *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Can you think of examples of regional fiction that speak to an audience far beyond California? One suggestion is Wallace Stegner’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angle of Repose* (1971).

Some works are categorized as “California classics.” Is it because they were written by Californians or that their setting demands such a category? Or is it a complex combination of both? Some possibilities to think about are:

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (1881).

John Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* (1933).

Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (1927).

Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903).

FOUNDATION NOTES

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees of the CHCF welcomes a new member, Mary Mason. She is the new liaison for the history center with the Foothill-De Anza Community College District Board of Trustees. She takes the place of Jay Jackman who is now serving as president of the district board. Mason told the board members that she sought out the assignment because she wanted to get to know the center and its activities and she looks forward to working with the board to achieve the goals of the foundation. A special thank you to Jay Jackman for his participation in history center activities.

The Board Connection

The CHCF Board of Trustees has contracted with the Board Connection of Santa Clara County whose mission “. . . to serve nonprofit organizations through the successful placement of exceptional men and women from diverse communities trained to serve on governing boards.” The Board Connection evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the current board and acts as a “finder” to place new board members who might have needed expertise in a given area. Hopefully, the Board Connection will help to place new board members who might not otherwise come to the attention of the CHCF.



Library

Book Donation

Forty boxes of books that were part of the collection to the late Austen Warburton have been donated to the Stocklmeir Library and Archive. The books are a welcome and valuable addition to the library collection. Librarian Lisa Christiansen is examining ways that they can be processed and ready for use by students and the public.

Leaky Adobes

If you have visited the center lately, you may have noticed that the exhibit room has dozens of foot-tall stacks of “stuff.” A December rain storm resulted in roof leaks in the “adobes,” the building adjacent to the center where Stocklmeir Library archival material is stored. Quick work on the part of Librarian Lisa Christiansen, armed only with a hand-truck and the will to save precious goods, kept the damage to a minimum. Volunteers Elizabeth Archambeault, Trudy Frank and Nancy Bratman labeled boxes as Lisa delivered them to the door. The roof has not been repaired and the building is unsuitable for storage so the disaster set in motion a search for temporary space to accommodate the priceless material to keep them safe from moisture and mildew. Lisa said there is a silver lining, however. While the material was spread across the exhibit room, she had students inventory materials that have not been inventoried before. Leave it to Lisa to turn a crisis into an opportunity!

Newsletter

By this publication, you will have already received the first issue of *T-Mail*, newsletter of the CHCF. It will keep you updated on the happenings of the foundation.

Events

The Calendar on page 3 has an extensive list of upcoming programs and events. Please take note of the dates, and it really helps if you R.S.V.P. 864-8712. Thank you!

Librarian Lisa Christiansen and CHC staff member Tom Izu hosting Holiday Open House, December 1995.

In Memory

Two special friends to the CHCF, Sam Jones and Margaret Jenkins, died this past January.

Sam Jones and his wife Beez have been longtime members of the California History Center and over the years participated in many events, classes and field trips. Sam was a combination of military man (Navy), fruit farmer (Cupertino) and a fun-loving individual. He is fondly remembered by history center members of years gone by and will be missed.

Margaret Jenkins, a Santa Clara native and the first woman in Santa Clara County to compete in the Olympics, took part in the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam and the 1932 games in Los Angeles. For a time, Jenkins held the world record in the javelin throw: 129 feet, 1½ inches. There was no javelin event for women in 1928, so she competed as a discus thrower, placing eighth.

Jenkins suffered ridicule for her competitive spirit and she "had to train in back alleys." She noted, "You were frowned on if you took part in sports anything heavier than croquet." Even female athletic directors at San Jose State disapproved of women in competition. However, Jenkins convinced Stanford's men's track coach, Dink Templeton, to be her trainer.

During the 1920s, Jenkins also won numerous tennis competitions, holding the Santa Clara County single, doubles, and mixed doubles title from 1924 through 1926. During World War II, Jenkins served in the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), and she was a school teacher in Santa Clara for thirty years. She spent summers enjoying her passion for fishing at Lake Tahoe where she had a small cottage.

Jenkins participated in history center events, and a photo of her throwing the javelin in the 1920s was featured on the cover of the December 1986 issue of *The Californian*. She was fond of the history center, and it was the recipient of memorial donations when she died.

Jenkins Memorial

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Faculty members Greg Knittle and David Howard-Pitney (also member of CHCF Board of Trustees) provide music for Holiday Open House, December 1995. It had a special focus, honoring longtime CHCF volunteers.

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