

Texas Institute of Letters



April/May/June 2010
Newsletter

President's Message

Probably all of our long-time TIL members know that we have our own history--William H. Vann's, *The Texas Institute of Letters: 1936-1966*. It's truly a handsome book, beautifully designed by Bill Wittliff and published in 1967 by his own Encino Press.

I'm sure the book, long since out of print, appeared as a commemoration of TIL's thirtieth year of existence. As the publisher noted on the back page, only 1,250 copies were printed "*con mucho gusto*."

For many years I had glimpsed copies of the book at various places, and had always intended to have one. I figured that such a lovely book, printed in limited numbers, would be difficult to locate, and if so, it would bring a high price. As I assumed the presidency of this organization, I figured that at last I should find one and pay whatever it cost.

I went straight to Abebooks.com to see what was available. What a surprise. There were a couple of dozen copies available from various booksellers, and their descriptions indicated that they were in good shape. And a greater surprise. They were inexpensive. I ordered one for about \$25, and it arrived in fine shape in the original glassine dust jacket.

I checked the other day again and found that Abebooks still has seventeen copies available, ranging in price from as little as \$10 to as much as \$53.10.

The author, William H. Vann—I have heard him referred to as Billy Vann—was the one who conceived of the organization. He was an English professor at Mary Hardin-Baylor College. He included in the back of the book award winners and names of members.

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Our story has some drama. J. Frank Dobie's initial reluctance to join was overcome, and then he became a dominant figure in the organization. And then there was the controversy surrounding TIL declaring that the organization's first award for the best Texas book of the year went to Dobie's *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver* rather than Katherine Anne Porter's acclaimed *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

And there others who pass through the pages such as Walter Prescott Webb, who thought that such an organization should be informal and open to all those interested in writing. Lon Tinkle was a long-time member, and this SMU professor wrote a prefatory note for Vann's volume.

There has been talk of having another history of TIL published. After all, the organization now is seventy-four years old. It was only thirty years old when Vann wrote his history. Maybe it's time.

Darwin Payne
TIL President

Member News

John Graves' masterpiece *Goodbye to a River* was published 50 years ago this autumn by Knopf. To mark the book's golden anniversary, the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University will feature a special Graves exhibit, opening August 23. The exhibit will be on display until December 12. Also this fall, the Wittliff Collections will host the **Cormac McCarthy Society's** annual meeting in October. The event will tie in to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Blood Meridian*. A McCarthy exhibit will run concurrently with the Graves exhibit. ★★★ The Texas Review Press, established at Sam Houston State University by **Paul Ruffin**, made *The Huffington Post's* list of "15 Small Presses and The Books You're Going To Want From Them." **Bryce Milligan's** San Antonio-based Wings Press was not on the list per se, but Anis Shivani, who wrote the article, included Wings among the presses that "easily deserve inclusion." Shivani's article lauded independent presses for taking risks, publishing books turned down by major publishers, and "pushing literary trends." Meanwhile Ruffin, 2009 Texas State Poet Laureate, has recently had two new books published: *Ruffin-It*, a collection of essays from Louisiana Literature Press; and *Paul Ruffin: New and Selected Poems* from TCU Press. In 2011, a French publisher will be publishing his fourth book of stories, *Living in a Christ Haunted Land*, and the University of South Carolina Press will release his fourth book of essays, *Travels with George in Search of Ben Hur and Other Meanderings*. ★★★ Multi-genre author **Neal Barrett Jr.** has been named Author Emeritus by the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America. The announcement was made at the Nebula Awards Weekend in Cocoa Beach, Florida, in June. Barrett has written more than fifty novels. ★★★ In 2011, 13e Note Editions, a French publisher that specializes in Beat and noir literature, will publish *If I Stop Singing My Head Will Explode*, an anthology consisting of excerpts of **Jesse Sublett's** three Martin Fender crime novels and an excerpt from his memoir, *Never the Same Again*, as well as a selection of his short stories, murder ballads, and drawings. Sublett is also co-writing, with attorney Broadus Spivey, a book about Homer Maxey, a Lubbock businessman, civic leader and father of sculptor Glenna Goodacre. A book about the Waco State Homer, *Stories from the Waco State Home*, which Sublett edited with author Sherry Matthews, will be published by the University of Texas Press in spring 2011, with a foreword by **Robert Draper**. ★★★ **Jeff Guinn's** *Go Down Together: The*

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True, Untold Story of Bonnie & Clyde was a finalist for the Mystery Writers of America's Best Fact Crime Edgar Award last April. Now comes word from the British Crime Writers Association that Guinn and his book are finalists for the CWA Gold Dagger for Non-Fiction. The CWA Gold Dagger Awards are the oldest established literary awards in the UK. Winners will be announced July 23. ★★★ **Jan Reid's** long-awaited Quanah Parker novel, *Comanche Sundown*, is set to hit bookstore shelves on September 1. The novel, with cover design by **Barbara Whitehead**, is being publishing by TCU Press. ★★★ **Gary Lavergne** published a review of Charles F. Eagles's *Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* in the Spring/Summer issue of *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*. Lavergne writes, "Eagles gives us a valuable writing lesson by maintaining control. The result is a memorable and unambiguous portrait of insufferably ignorant hatemongers." ★★★ **Kimberly Willis Holt** has achieved a rare honor: She received "starred reviews" from both *Kirkus Reviews* and *Publishers Weekly* for her new young adults novel, *The Water Seeker*. *PW's* review noted, "Holt creates a moving, palpable sense of pioneer life in graceful prose that occasionally reads like poetry." *The Water Seeker* was published in May by Henry Holt and Company. ★★★ **Tom Curtis** has returned to freelance writing – and he's recently revisited a *Texas Monthly* article he published in 1990, "The Old Man and the Secret." It concerned a Texas inventor's discovery of a microbe-enhancing process that the inventor believed could repair much of the damage human beings have inflicted on the earth. *Texas Monthly* has republished that piece on its Website (www.texasmonthly.com) and also on the magazine's Facebook page, with a new introduction by Curtis. "Perhaps now these mysterious microbe-energizing enzymes that the inventor produced will finally get the scientific lab and field testing that this process deserves," Curtis said. "With luck, it may be employed to help clean up BP's horrendous Deepwater Horizon oil spill." ★★★ TIL members continue to bring national honors home to Texas. **Skip Hollandsworth** won the National Magazine Award for Feature Writing in April for his *Texas Monthly* article about paralyzed football player John McClamrock. The NMA is the equivalent of the Pulitzer prize in the world of magazine writers. Meanwhile **Rico Ainslie** has been awarded the prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for General Nonfiction in the Creative Arts category. Ainslie is at work on a book about violence-stricken Ciudad Juarez. **Robert Flynn** won this year's Western Writers of America Spur Award for Long Western Novel for his book *Echoes of Glory*. **Naomi Shihab Nye** has received the Arab American Book Award (Young Readers Division) for her book *Honeybee*, published by Greenwillow in 2008. **Abraham Verghese** was a finalist for the 2010 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for his book, *Cutting for Stone*. And speaking of honors, one of the most prestigious awards an author can receive is that of the National Book Critics Circle, and TIL member **Steven G. Kellman** was recently elected NBCC vice president for membership. ★★★ Two new books are out from poet **David Lee**: *Stone Wind Water* (Black Rock Press) and *A House Made of Time* (Logan House Press). Lee currently is teaching at Southern Utah University. ★★★ **Bill Minutaglio** is the author of a new book, *Search for the Blues: A Journey to the Soul of Black Texas*, which collects his journalism chronicling the lives and culture of African Americans. The book is a part of the Southwestern Writers Collection Series from the University of Texas Press. ★★★ The works of **Rolando Hinojosa-Smith** were the topic of a two-day symposium at Texas A&M University earlier this year. He has been signed by Graz University in Austria to conduct a two-week seminar on Mexican-American literature for the conference, "One America Is Not Enough," beginning in July. ★★★ And, finally, the ever-busy **Joe Lansdale** continues his industrious ways. Last year, the University of Texas Press published his short story collection, *Sanctified and Chicken Fried* while Knopf published his novel, *Vanilla Ride*. Tachyon Press has just released *The Best of Joe Lansdale*, while Underland Press will bring out *The Complete Drive In* later this year. And if that weren't enough, he's just turned in a new novel to Knopf and he's been tapped to write the screenplay for his earlier novel, *Savage Season*. Whew!

Dobie Paisano Update

By Michael Adams

Director, Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program

During an inspection of the Dobie ranch house in the spring of 2008, UT Facilities informed us that the barn behind the house was in such bad shape that it had to be condemned and torn down. Moreover, the house itself was facing similar fate if we didn't make necessary repairs. The infrastructure to the roof (and the roof itself) was in immediate need of repair. All the electrical wiring was old and dangerous. The floors throughout were riddled with termites, as were the walls. The foundation, wooden piers only inches off the ground, was precarious. And the list seemed endless. This led to seeking an official estimate that would also include preventative maintenance needed. After all, we already knew there were problems with the well pump, the filtration system, and windows that wouldn't open, a septic system that might fail at any moment, a chimney that couldn't be used unless it was repaired. To our dismay, the estimate came out to be much more than we could ever hope to raise. Some of this was because of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements that mandated a complete reconfiguring of the kitchen and bathroom. Some of this was the result of reaching the new standards set by codes that didn't exist at the time of the original construction. And some of this came from many water-control requirements with a house so close to Barton Creek. And then there were required things like asbestos and lead paint abatement.

The University of Texas and the Dean of the Graduate School (the academic umbrella under which Dobie Paisano resides) raised a little over half of what we needed. This meant that we could do only part of the needed repair and renovation. The first priority, of course, was to make sure the house was safe and that it was now in compliance with all city, county, and state codes. The work was begun in October 2009 and was completed the first of May 2010. We are now working to raise the rest of the money we need to complete the renovation.

In the summer of 2009, concerned and conscientious members of TIL, led by Carolyn Osborn, created the Friends of Paisano committee, whose sole purpose was to help us raise the additional funds. They have worked diligently to help me finish the project. TIL also contributed \$5000 directly to the Director's fund to help with needs beyond structural and renovation. This generous gift helped me buy a host of much-needed supplies for the house—two mattresses and bed frames, a bedroom lamp, new pillows and sheets, an end table, a hallway rug, a vacuum cleaner, glasses and dishes (fellows are no longer drinking out of old jelly jars and eating off cracked plates), and an endless list of small items for the kitchen and

bathroom. TIL's gift will make the day-to-day life of the fellow much easier and more pleasant. And I am deeply grateful.

[Editor's Note: Carolyn Osborn reports two foundations, Still Water and Clayton Research, have committed to grants of \$7,500 (to match) and \$5,000 respectively, to the Paisano cause. The Friends of Paisano Committee is on hiatus for the summer, with plans to discuss a change in focus at the TIL Council meeting in September.]

First Book of Poetry Award Funded

Wanda Baker Bush of Sherman has agreed to fund the First Book of Poetry Award in honor of her late husband, Robert (Bob) Bush. Bob Bush served in the Texas House of Representatives and was well known for his support of cultural matters around the state.

In a letter to TIL Treasurer Jim Hoggard, Wanda Baker Bush said she would commit to fund a \$1,000 annual award for five years. Financial arrangements are expected to be concluded in August.

"I am grateful for this opportunity and know that my late husband, though in life a modest man, would be pleased to have his name associated with this good cause," Wanda Baker Bush said.

TIL Councilor Frances Neidhardt was instrumental in securing Wanda Baker Bush's commitment to fund the award.

2009 Award Winners, New Members Announced

Winners of the 2009 awards were announced May 1 at the annual banquet held this year in Austin. Also announced were new members inducted prior to the banquet. The new members are: Susan Wittig Albert, Joseph E. Chance, Light T. Cummins, George Getschow, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Rich Levy, Ann McCutchan, James McWilliams, Debbie Nathan, and James S. Olson. Award winners were as follows:

JESSE JONES AWARD FOR FICTION (\$6,000)

Scott Blackwood, *We Agreed to Meet Just Here* (New Issues)

CARR P. COLLINS AWARD FOR NONFICTION (\$5,000)

Bryan Burrough, *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes* (Penguin Press)

STEVEN TURNER AWARD FOR FIRST FICTION (\$1,000)

John Pipkin, *Woodburner* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday)

TIL AWARD FOR SCHOLARLY BOOK (\$2,500)

Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics During World War II* (Texas A&M Press)

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HELEN C. SMITH MEMORIAL AWARD FOR POETRY (\$1,200)

William Virgil Davis, *Landscape and Journey* (Ivan R. Dee)

O. HENRY AWARD FOR MAGAZINE JOURNALISM (\$1,000)

John Spong, "Holding Garmsir," *Texas Monthly*, January 2009

AUSTIN PUBLIC LIBRARY FRIENDS FOUNDATION AWARD, CHILDREN'S BOOK (\$500)

Gwendolyn Zepeda, *Sunflowers/Girasoles* (Piñata Books)

KAY CATTARULLA AWARD FOR SHORT STORY (\$1,000)

Marjorie Kemper, "Discovered America," *Southwest Review*, Fall 2009

FRED WHITEHEAD AWARD FOR DESIGN OF A TRADE BOOK (\$750)

Lindsay Starr, designer for "*I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter*": *The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965*, (Texas Tech Press)

TIL OFFICERS

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TIL COUNCILORS

T. Lindsay Baker, Rio Vista, first term ends April 2011

Ty Cashion, Huntsville, second term ends April 2012

Robert Compton, Garland, first term ends April 2012

Emily Fox Gordon, Houston, first term ends April 2011

Kate Lehrer, Washington, D.C., first term ends April 2013

Frances Neidhardt, Sherman, second term ends April 2012

Jan Seale, McAllen, second term ends April 2011

Andrés Tijerina, Austin, second term ends in April 2012

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