



TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS

Newsletter, June/July 2005

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<http://www.wtamu.edu/til/>

TIL Dues were due in January. If you have not paid, please remit NOW to Jim Hoggard at Department of English, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX 76308. Also do not forget any extra you would like to add to the Paisano fund and to the Fred Whitehead endowment fund.

NEWS OF MEMBERS AND OTHERS

Judy Alter, award-winning writer and director of TCU Press, received the prestigious Owen Wister Award from Western Writers of America for Lifetime Achievement. The award was presented on Saturday, June 18 during the WWA convention in Spokane Valley, Washington. **Judy** joins such previous winners as Mari Sandoz, A.B. Guthrie, Jr., **Robert Utley**, and **Elmer Kelton**.

Jim Hoggard has a new piece in the Feb. 4th issue of *The Texas Observer*, a personal essay titled "Flyfishing." He also had a translation of a poem by Oscar Hahn (b. 1938, Chile) in the new issue of *Harvard Review*, five new poems in the journal *Janus Head*, and a new collection of poems in April from Wings Press: *Wearing The River*.

Kinky Friedman will headline the Friends of the Dallas Public Library fall fund-raiser on Thursday, October 27th at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion. For more information, contact the Friends' office at 214-670-1458

Laura Wilson's photographs will be on display at the Amon Carter Museum with Richard Avedon's whom she assisted in his photographs of the West.

Bryce Milligan announces that Wings Press celebrated 30 years of publishing on March 5, with readings by **Paul Christensen**, E. A. Tony Mares, John Phillip Santos, Carmen Tafolla, Frances Trevino and Pamela Uschuk. The evening MC was Robert Bonazzi. New from Wings Press is *Tracking the Morning*, poems by **Robert A. Fink**.

Janine Turner had her world premier of one of **Annette Sanford's** short stories that Turner made into a short film for festivals. Liz Bennett and **Sanford** attended. **Sanford** also participated in the Victoria Reads 2005 Program at the Victoria Public Library. **Sanford's** novel, *Eleanor & Abel* was the featured book.

Falling from Grace in Texas: A Literary Response to the Demise of Paradise edited by **Rick Bass** and **Paul Christensen** published by Wings Press was reviewed in PW, calling it an appealing but uneven protest anthology of environmentalist writings by associates of the Texas Institute of Letters, pointing out for praise the piece by **Pete A. Y. Gunter**, whose "elegiac retrospective on his family's farm, evoke the land's vanished abundance."

Joyce Roach's *Horned Toad Canyon* was a finalist for the Teddy from the Writers League for children's book.

Jane Roberts Wood's short story "My Mother Had a Maid" was read at the Texas Bound series Arts & Letters Live. Jane reports that she has never had such a response as she has had about the short story, noting the dozens of calls and letters she has received.

In the May 9th PW issue, **Kinky Friedman's** *Texas Hold 'Em: How I Was Born in a Manger, Died in the Saddle, and Came Back as a Horny Toad* was re-

viewed. The review details that **Kinky** has “been busy churning out the pages (three books last year; two so far this year), even as he prepared to run for governor of Texas in 2006. Given the success of Jesse Ventura and Arnold Schwarzenegger, the **Kinkster** figures he could be a governor, too; since governors don’t do any “Heavy Liftin.” He could do “some Spiritual lifting,” perhaps referring to his vow “to fight the wussification of Texas.”

According to *Insider Newsletter*, “It’s a short distance from Erasmus to irascible, and **Bob Flynn** covers the waterfront.” The interview goes on: “He’s the author of novels, including *North to Yesterday* (a *New York Times* Best Book of the Year), *Wandered Springs* (winner of a Spur Award from the Western Writers of America), both from TCU Press, and others. . . . But mostly **Bob Flynn** is a funny, insightful guy. He’s the author of two laugh-out-loud collections of humor, *Growing Up Sullen Baptist and Other Lies* and *Sloughing Towards Zion and More Lies* (both from the University of North Texas Press).”

Novelist, journalist, and playwright (*Confessions of a White Racist, The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*) **Larry L. King**’s biography of his friend and colleague, *Willie: In Search of Willie Morris*, from his rise as Southern golden boy writer and editor to his time at the helm of *Harper’s* magazine and the difficult years that followed, sold to David Patterson at Public Affairs, for publication in spring 2006.

Texas Hill Country, essay by **John Graves**, photographs by Wyman Meizner, University of Texas Press, was reviewed in *The Southwestern Quarterly* of the Texas State Historical Association. “Graves discusses rampant growth, destruction of land and water resources, disappearing local culture . . . and Meizner captures perfectly the stark haunting loveliness of the Hill Country at its best.” Also reviewed was **Gary M. Lavergne**’s *Worse Than Death: The Dallas Nightclub Murders and the Texas Multiple Murder Law*, University of North Texas Press, calling it, “an engaging and informative look into the fields of criminal justice and law enforcement [that] provides excellent analysis, research, and writing about one of the most significant mass murders in Texas History.”

Gary Lavergne will also be a featured presenter at the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest on July 22–24 at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center at Grapevine. Other presenters include Susan Orlean, whose narrative *The Orchid Thief* was made into the Academy Award-winning movie *Adaptation* in 2002, Norman Pearlstine, editor-in-chief of Time Inc., *Wall Street Journal* writers Ken Wells and Barry Newman. See mayborninstitute.unt.edu for more information.

A perusal of the Texas State Historical Association meeting program, held March 3–5 in Fort Worth, yields the following TIL members participating: **Donald Chipman** presiding at Sanctuaries in the Borderlands; **Robert Utley** presiding at The Law Works in Mysterious Ways Its Wonders to Perform; **Steven L. Davis** presiding in The Texas Literary Scene in the Late Twentieth Century, discussing **J. Frank Dobie** and **Mark Busby** expounding on Who Took His Place? with **Don Graham** as the commentator; **Joyce Roach** presiding over Route 66 across the Texas Panhandle; **David Weber** presiding over Teaching the Spanish Borderlands through Maps; **James L. Haley** presiding over Whose Revolution Was It, Anyway?, with **Jack Jackson** on Land Speculators and Their Role in Causing the Revolution with Concerns of Ordinary People Caught Up in the Runaway Scrape by **H. W. Brands**; **Arnoldo De Leon** presiding over Homage to **Felix D. Almaraz Jr.**: Texas Scholar, Teacher, and Gentleman; **Mike Cox** presiding over Texas Routes to the Goldfields with **Paula Marks** commentating; **Billy Porterfield** joining in the session The Newspaper Reporter’s View of Texas History.

Elmer Kelton’s new novel, *Sons of Texas*, was reviewed in PW April 25. “A veteran writer of more than 40 western novels, seven-time Spur Award-winner Kelton again delivers careful plotting, colorful characters and vibrant action in this tale set largely in Mexican-ruled Texas. . . . The second and third installments will cover the Alamo, Sam Houston and Texas independence.”

Lou Rodenberger has been appointed by Governor Perry to the Texas Woman’s University Board of Regents. In between regent duties, Lou has man-

aged to produce *Quotable Texas Women* and *Writing on the Wind: A West Texas Anthology of Women Writers*.

Jerome Weeks writes in the May 30th *Dallas Morning News* that **Rick Bass** traveled to Dallas for Arts & Letters Live to promote his novel, *The Diezmo*. Bass says that the novel about the Mier expedition couldn't work until the invasion of Iraq. "Troops misled about their purpose, an invasion with no exit strategy, grim struggles in a foreign land, incidents of torture: The analogy is plain." The novel received praise from *Publisher's Weekly* and *Plainsong* novelist Kent Haruf.

Robert Miller writes in the May 19th *Dallas Morning News* that Dallas historian **Darwin Payne** recently received a Chautauqua Award for Historical Preservation from Old City Park: The Historical Village of Dallas. The award is presented annually to a person or persons, an institution or corporation, either for a lifetime achievement in preserving history or for a single action in preserving the architectural heritage of North Central Texas. **Darwin** received the award for lifetime achievement, having written six books about Dallas history and is working on a biography of Texas Instruments co-founder and former Dallas Mayor J. Erik Jonsson.

Rick Riordan's *Mission Road* was reviewed in the July *Texas Monthly*, calling it the "most fully realized of his six Tres Navarre novels to date. . . . Well worth the price of admission just for its array of bad cops, good crooks, and swell characters. . . throw in **Riordan's** clever twist at the end, and you're getting top value for your entertainment dollar."

Pat Mora's *The Song of Francis and the Animals* was reviewed in June 27 PW as: "Mora praises in poetry Saint Francis' calming way of communing with creatures great and small in this celebratory picture, made all the more joyous by David Frampton's handsome colored woodcuts."

Dobie Paisano Writing Fellowships for 2005-2006

The winners of the Dobie Paisano writing fellowships for 2005–2006 are David Wright, an Associate Professor in the MFA program at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and Timothy Westmoreland, also a teacher of creative writing, who is currently at the University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale. Both plan to write novels at Paisano although they also write short stories and works of non-fiction.

The fellowships, sponsored by The University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Institute of Letters, allow writers to spend six months at Paisano, the late author J. Frank Dobie's 254-acre retreat west of Austin, now owned and maintained by The University of Texas at Austin.

The runners-up for the fellowships are Steve Moore, a Playwriting Fellow at the Michener Center for Writers at UT Austin and author of *Nightswim*, a recently produced play about J. Frank Dobie, Walter P. Webb, and Roy Bedichek; and Jeffrey Greene, who writes both poetry and non-fiction. Greene, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Houston, resides in Paris.

Information and an application for the next Dobie Paisano Fellowships may be found on line after June 1. Or a hard copy may be obtained after October 1 from Dr. Audrey N. Slate, Director, Dobie Paisano Fellowship Project, J. Frank Dobie House, 702 East Dean Keeton St., Austin, Texas 78705. The deadline for the 2006–2007 competition will be January 27, 2006. www.utexas.edu/ogs/Paisano

OTHER NEWS

New Prize Pays Handsomely for History

The new George Washington Book Prize provides a \$50,000 award for a nonfiction book about the Revolutionary era. Ron Chernow was the first winner for *Alexander Hamilton*.

Analysis Says MacArthur Doesn't Yield Much from Writers

Crain's *Chicago Business* has concluded that when it comes to authors, the MacArthur Foundation grants honor established literary prize-winners rather than adhering to the organization's stated mission: "The fellowship is not a reward for past accomplishment, but rather an investment in a person's originality, insight, and potential."

By their assessment, "most of the 31 writers chosen since 1981 as MacArthur Fellows had already hit their artistic peak." Stated another way, "Crain's determined that 88% of the MacArthur recipients wrote their greatest works before being recognized by the Chicago-based foundation. The sheer number of books produced by the writers declined, too, after their MacArthur awards."

But Daniel Socolow, director of the MacArthur Fellows program, isn't perturbed: "I haven't seen anything from anyone that has led me to be disappointed," he says, "primarily because I haven't followed (the recipients) too closely."

—from *Chicago Business*

Quill Lands TV Deal

The Quill Awards being launched by Reed Business Information have been formally announced, with the most notable feature being the presentation of the prizes in 15 to 18 different categories in a televised ceremony this October to be carried on NBC's owned and operated affiliates. Most awards are by subject category, but there are a few quirky ones, including Rookie of the Year.

Nominations in most categories will come from 6,000 booksellers and librarians who subscribe to Reed-owned *Publishers Weekly* (drawing from a pool of books reviewed by *Publishers Weekly*). A committee will select nominees for the Book Club, Best Book to Film, and Design awards. Consumers will then vote, online and at retail, between August 15 and September 15.

The broadcast is characterized as a "celebrity-energized presentation in the fashion of the Golden Globes awards." The program is being run by former *Variety* publisher Gerry Byrne, who underscores that

"good television is based upon celebrity," and notes their plan to tap the intersection between books and the culture at large to recruit top celebrities as presenters (and potentially nominees/attendees). A production team is likely to be named within the next month or so.

Byrne also notes the awards are meant to "complement the other literary awards—it will not usurp any of them." In addition to being carried by the NBC-owned stations, which include 14 of the top markets, Byrne says the program will be offered to other NBC affiliates, and "potentially could be offered to other stations outside the network."

The awards themselves are a Reed-owned, for-profit venture, with revenue coming from sponsorships and table and event sales (and presumably some advertising in Reed's magazines). But at least some proceeds from the event will fund the Quills Literacy Foundation, also run by Byrne, supporting new and existing literacy efforts. For the first year, Reed will "guarantee a certain amount of dollars" to the foundation.

An advisory executive council includes top publishing executives (Peter Olson, Jane Friedman, Larry Kirshbaum, Greg Josefowicz, Bob Miller, Jim Chandler, Avin Mark Domnitz, and Robert Gottlieb) alongside other "literacy-minded professionals from finance, media, entertainment, and education."

—from *NBC page*



TIL has lost a stalwart member in **James Early**, former councilor of TIL and along with **Marshall Terry**, funder of the Lon Tinkle Award for lifetime achievement in letters.

James Early was a professor emeritus at SMU and died of a cerebral hemorrhage that occurred while he was mowing the yard at his Dallas home.

Dr. Early was a professor in the English department and its former chairman, with a broad academic interest in literature, history, art and architecture. He also served as associate dean and dean of the faculty for the school of humanities and sciences. He authored several books, including *Presidio, Mission, and Pueblo: Spanish Architecture and Urban-*

ism (Southern Methodist University Press), which expands on ideas introduced in his 1994 volume on *The Colonial Architecture of Mexico* (University of New Mexico Press).

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, **Dr. Early** earned a bachelor's degree from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, completing his studies after serving as a medic with the Army Air Forces during World War II.

After the war he continued his education at Harvard University, earning both a master's and doctorate there. He began his teaching career at Yale University and then at Vassar College and Stanford University before joining the SMU faculty in 1964.

He was a founder of both the Colophon and Godbey lecture series at SMU.

His daughter said, "The people who knew him best appreciated his character and integrity. In a world of sellouts, he never sold out."



Publishing has suffered a great loss with the death of artist/illustrator Charles Shaw. Shaw illustrated many award winning books for publishers, and has produced his own books such as the beautifully illustrated and produced *Indian Life in Texas*. A sampling of his illustrations for other publishers include James Michener's *Texas* and *The Eagle and the Raven*; **Jane Roberts Wood's** trilogy: *The Train to Estelline, A Place Called Sweet Shrub* and *Dance a Little Longer*—the originals of which hang in the living room of Jane's new home; *The History of the Texas Folklore Society* by **F. E. Abernethy**, all from UNT Press; **Joyce Roach's** *This Place of Memory: A Texas Perspective* and *Horned Toad Canyon*; **Angela Meadaris's**, *Picking Peas for a Penny*; *Texas and Its History*, edited by **Joe Frantz**. Other books include *Baxter Barrett Brown's Bass Fiddle*; *Assault: The Crippled Champion, the King Ranch Racehorse* from Bright Sky Press. From Disney's American Frontier: *Sacajawea and the Journey to the Pacific: A Historical Novel*; *Annie Oakley in the Wild West Extravaganza!: A Historical Novel*; *If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon*; *Red Badge of Courage*; *Wild Bill Hickok and the Rebel Raiders: A Historical Novel*. For TCU Press *You're an Orphan, Mollie*

Brown: A Novel, Stay Put, Robbie McAmis: A Novel. From Texas A&M: *Plains Farmer: The Diary of William G. DeLoach, 1914-1964*; from State House Press *Life of "Big Foot" Wallace: The Great Ranger Captain*; **Bryce Milligan's** *Comanche Captive: You Are There* and *Battle of the Alamo: You Are There*, and there are dozens more from this talented man. One of my treasured Shaw pieces is a copy of a portrait of my ancestor Martin Parmer, the Ringtailed Panther, the original of which hangs in the East Texas Collection at Stephen F. Austin. In addition to his talent, Charles was always good for a laugh, no matter what traumas were going on his life. He will be missed.



Lorenzo Thomas, a much-respected fixture on Houston's literary scene and a poet who married bluesy lyricism with a social conscience, died July 4th. He was 60. **Thomas** died at the Texas Medical Center Hospice. Cause of death was emphysema, according to his companion, Karen Luik.

Thomas's poetry collections included *Chances Are Few* (1979, expanded second edition in 2003), *The Bathers* (1981) and most recently *Dancing on Main Street* (2004). About the last, the *Chronicle* wrote: "Taken together, the poems in this collection exhibit that equipoise that comes with age and experience. Sorrow and joy find their balance." Poetry, **Thomas** once wrote, "attempts to knock the mind out of the rut of commonplace thinking."

For more than two decades a professor of English at the University of Houston-Downtown, **Thomas** also made important contributions to the study of African-American literature. In 2000, the University of Alabama Press published *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and 20th-Century American Poetry*, his overview of the work of James Fenton, Amiri Baraka and other important black writers. It was named a *Choice Outstanding Academic Book* for the year.

A longtime contributor to the *Chronicle's* book review pages, he was a generous and thoughtful critic.

Thomas was born in Panama in 1944. Four years later the family immigrated to New York City,

where Thomas grew up. Spanish was his first language, and he strove to master English to escape getting beaten up by other kids for “talking funny.”

“Never forgot it,” he once said. “Went way, way, way away out of my way to become extra fluent in English.”

His study of English fed an early interest in creative writing. Further nurturing his literary ambitions was “the whole business of being black and from a home full of race-conscious people and the idea that if you are black you had to be more qualified than necessary,” he said.

During his years at Queens College, **Thomas** joined the Umbra Workshop, a collective that met on the Lower East Side and served as a crucible for emerging black poets, among them Ishmael Reed, David Henderson and Calvin Hernton. The workshop was one of the currents that fed the Black Arts Movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s, the first major African-American artistic movement after the Harlem Renaissance.

Predictably, the civil rights struggle and the rise of cultural black nationalism had a big influence on Thomas and many of his generation.

“He is not, however, a racial protest poet but a critic of the Western world writing from the perspective of Afro-America, with inherited and acquired attitudes of an Afro-Caribbean,” poet and playwright, Tom Dent wrote of **Thomas** .

“His sympathies are with ‘the people,’ the folk, the poor, the dispossessed, of which people of African descent happen to be card-carrying members in the Western world.”

After graduating from college **Thomas** joined the Navy, serving as a military adviser in Vietnam in 1971. In 1973 he moved to Houston as writer-in-residence at Texas Southern University. At TSU he helped edit the journal *Roots*. Later he conducted writing workshops at the newly formed Black Arts Center. He joined UH-Downtown in 1984.

References to American popular culture—music especially—abound in **Thomas**’ work. He cited as influences such blues legends as Robert Johnson, Houston native Lightnin’ Hopkins and the Houston poet-singer Juke Boy Bonner, whom Thomas eulogized in the journal *Callaloo*. **Thomas** helped orga-

nize Juneteenth Blues Festivals in Houston and other Texas cities.

“I write poems because I can’t sing,” he once said.

Charles Rowell, professor of English at Texas A&M University and editor of *Callaloo*, cited **Thomas**’ role as a cultural critic as his most important achievement, in particular the essays on writers and musicians. Through writing workshops **Thomas** influenced young black writers not only in Houston but elsewhere. “His passing will be a major loss to African-American letters and to writing in Texas, period,” Rowell said.

Harryette Mullen, a poet who got to know **Thomas** in the late 1970s when both worked in the Writers in the Schools program in Houston, said he showed her how to be a Texas poet without being parochial.

“It is poetry that is humorous but that makes serious points about our culture,” she said of his work.

“There’s a critical aspect to it. It’s not just entertaining but it also can be entertaining.”

The poet Anne Waldman, who published one of **Thomas**’ early chapbooks in 1972, said his poetry “could be quiet, fierce, public, scholarly, sometimes within one poem.”

He was also “one of the most well-read people I know in poetry,” Waldman said. “He had a real grasp of the English literary tradition as well as the African-American tradition, the African court tradition, what is so exciting here in the last century.”

Thomas contributed his time to cultural organizations in Houston. He served on the boards of Cultural Arts Council of Houston and the literary journal *Gulf Coast*, and on the advisory board of *Inprint Inc*.

Affable, even self-effacing, he nonetheless was the type of man who commanded attention when he spoke in public forums.

—by Fritz Lanham from *The Houston Chronicle*



Dear Member:

For those of you who have not done so, the TIL would like to compile a membership list that offers more than names and addresses of members, something that would be more useful to all of us and serve as a better means of extended identification and communication between us. It will also help us with information for press releases about you and the organization. We do get inquiries about you and us. With your cooperation, we'd like to put such a list together.

Here is the information we would like from you, which requires only a few moments of your time and filling in the blanks:

Name: _____

Year in which you became a member: _____

Brief biographical information, your profession, notable books or other writings, literary productions: _____

(Use extra pages if needed)

Address (Business and/or home): _____

E-mail: _____ (IMPORTANT TO GET NEWS AS FAST AS POSSIBLE)

Web Page _____

Phone: (home and/or office): _____

The entries, we expect, would look something like this:

Opus, Austin Crockett (1989)

Novelist, historian, poet, short story writer, book designer, essayist,
book editor, press director, professor of ancient history, Pan
Texas University, San Houstonlas. Gone With the Alamo (1950)
TIL Jones Award. President, Texas Historical Association.

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