

'Prairie Schooner' Prints Works Of Able But Unknown Writers

Nebraskans, longest-lived of all Americans, don't consider 25 a very ripe old age.

But in the magazine publishing business a quarter of a century is quite a respectable life span for any publication.

This is particularly true of the little magazines, which publish chiefly the work of able but unknown writers, and hence cannot compete with "slick" publications like The Saturday Evening Post for advertising revenue or circulation.

In this strange world of little magazines, a Nebraskan now in its 25th year would take a prize for longevity. This is "Prairie Schooner," a literary quarterly published by the University of Nebraska.

But the real prize that Prairie Schooner ought to win, if such things were given, would not be for its age but for the consistently high quality of the stories, poems and essays it contains. Sound writing, whether by a new or experienced author, has been a Schooner requirement since the beginning. And, since the beginning, final judgment as to whether material meets the magazine's high standards has rested with one man.

He is Lowry C. Wimberly, who was chairman of the board of editors for the first issue and who still serves as editor of the magazine. It is Dr. Wimberly's practice to select a piece for its own worth rather than for the name of its author. This policy, although directly opposite to that of many leading magazines, which will buy almost anything from a big-name author, has paid in praises won.

The magazine has earned for itself a reputation as one of the country's foremost literary quarterlies, receiving highly favorable comment from experts like Martha Foley, editor of the annual collection of "Best Short Stories." Miss Foley gave thanks in her 1950 preface that, despite the failure of other little magazines, "Prairie Schooner" continues to flourish and publish distinguished fiction.

While the magazine is strictly amateur in the sense that nothing is paid for manuscripts accepted for publication, it has been the starting place for many a writer who has gone on to literary fame.

And many rising young authors like Jesse Stuart, Marie Sandoz and Eudora Welty have chosen to have their work appear in the Schooner rather than in magazines financially more rewarding.

Strangely enough, recognition has come much more steadily to the magazine from the outside than inside Nebraska. Even now the number of Nebraska subscribers, exclusive of those in Lincoln, is less than one-fifth of the total; 60 per cent of the subscribers are from other states and foreign countries.

Prairie Schooner was born in the fall of 1926, shortly after a group of University students and Dr. Wimberly, who then as now was a member of the English department faculty, had organized Wordsmith chapter of Sigma Upsilon, a national honorary literary fraternity.

Most of the men were interested in writing for publication and, like most Nebraskans, had in them a streak of both the pioneer and the conservative. They felt that the magazines springing up in the East to print amateurs' work were too full of pseudo-sophisticated, "new direction" writing, just as many of the established publications leaned backward too far to the sentimental style of earlier days.

Then, too, they were tired of hearing the Middle West referred to as a literary desert because it was lacking in publications of its own.

As a few other universities, magazines like the Frontier (University of Montana) and the Southwest Review (Southern Methodist University), were printing material bearing chiefly on the region in which they were located.

Why not a regional magazine devoted to material about the Middle West? They asked themselves. With this idea in mind the men gathered some short stories, articles, essays and poetry—chiefly from Nebraskans—got a



DR. L. C. WIMBERLY

small subsidy from the University with the help of Lucius A. Sherman, then head of the English department, and put out the first issue of Prairie Schooner.

In an article in that first issue Bess Streeter Aldrich, well-known now as a novelist, wrote: "I believe there should come from Nebraska a select group of young writers to tell simply and clearly the story of the land that neither east nor west."

The telling of this story has been and still is the goal of the magazine, although the Schooner has lost much of its original emphasis on regionalism. (There has not been enough consistently good material on the Middle West to warrant so limiting the magazine.)

In the early days Dr. Wimberly not only selected material for each issue and prepared a layout, but read proof and addressed mailing envelopes as well. During the Depression he frequently paid the postage out of his own pocket, and personally delivered the magazine to Omaha newspapers in order to build up the circulation.

Dr. Wimberly still reads many of the 3000 manuscripts submitted for publication each year, although he has the help of Frederick L. Christensen on the preliminary weeding out. A thin-faced man with a large mustache, Dr. Wimberly looks more like Sherlock Holmes than a professor of English or a magazine editor.

Unpretentious, as only the great are, he is as Midwestern as a prairie schooner. And, unlike a good many Nebraskans who have migrated to the East or West, he is proud of it.

But to Dr. Wimberly being Midwestern does not mean ignoring the importance and special advantages of other parts of the United States and world. In turning the "Schooner" into a magazine which is particularly eager to print sound writing on Middle Western themes, but which welcomes significant work of all kinds, Dr. Wimberly has made it a regional magazine in the best sense of the term.

He has been at the University since 1912, first as a student and later as instructor, assistant professor, associate professor and professor of English.

He is known for his matter-of-fact way of bringing lofty conversations and egotistic persons back to earth. For probing to the bottom of student's recitation for reading aloud in a dryly humorous way from the dryly humorous writings of Mark Twain for being an authority on ballads and antiques and fishing and people.

One of his stories appeared in a collection of the Best American Short Stories and many have been printed in magazines like Harper's and the Yale Review. The most recently published story is in the May issue of the American Mercury.

He is the author of books on English and Scottish ballads, the co-author of "Using Better English," the co-editor of an anthology of English literature and the editor of "Famous Cats in Fairyland."

But he is better known for "Prairie Schooner Caravan," a selection of outstanding material from the magazine, which he edited in 1944. Critics all over

the country were unusually high in their praises, hailing it as "excellent" and "attractively presented," and "an informative cross-section of typical work being done by contemporary regionalists."

Dr. Wimberly is less likely to talk about his own achievements, however, than those of his associates on the magazine. He points with pride to the success of the students who formed the board of editors of the first issue.

Volta Torrey is now editor of Popular Science magazine; Jacob H. Gable, Jr., is editor of Writer's Markets and Methods, a trade magazine in Hollywood; Marion Edward Stanley, formerly head of the Associated Press London bureau and executive editor of Exquire-Coronet magazines, is the author of several published novels; Roscoe Schaupp has been professor of English at Ohio State University; Royce West, who actually suggested the first issue and was a business manager, edited the Nebraska Alumnus and was publicity director for the University of Omaha before becoming public relations director for Pillsbury Mills in Minneapolis.

Dr. Wimberly is proud, too, that the first story in the first issue of the "Schooner" was written by Marie Macumber, a Nebraskan who is now widely known as Marie Sandoz, distinguished author of "Old Jules," "Crazy Horse" and other books.

Other authors who first received the recognition in the "Schooner" include Jesse Stuart, author of "Taps for Private Tussie"; Jessamyn West, author of "The Friendly Persuasion"; Peter Viereck, Pulitzer prize winning poet; William March, who has been called the best short story writer in America; Eudora Welty, winner of the O. Henry prize for the best short story of 1943; and John Henry Reese of Louisville, Neb., a popular writer for slick magazines.

Bess Streeter Aldrich and John G. Neihardt, Nebraska's "poet laureate," have had work published in the "Schooner," as have many University of Nebraska faculty members like Louise Pound, Wilbur Gaffney and Bernice Slotte. "Confessions of a Clergyman," the experiences of Bishop Gerald Kennedy, formerly of St. Paul Methodist church in Lincoln, were first published in the "Schooner" and later published in Reader's Digest. Rudolph Umland, Lincoln, is the most frequent contributor, having had over 20 pieces published.

That the magazine was a success from the beginning is evident in a clipping which reports that the "Schooner," in its second year of existence was given the highest rating in an anthology prepared by Edward J. O'Brien, then probably the best known authority on the short story.

From its beginning the magazine has steered away from stories which were too vaguely "modern"

—experimental purely for the sake of being experimental—yet it has encouraged the development of new techniques.

As Wimberly says, "We aim at neither the high brow nor the low brow. Selections are chosen because we feel the authors have something to say which is of general interest."

Nearly every year since its birth the "Schooner" has had one or more short stories included among the 15 or 20 works in the anthology "Best American Short Stories." In 1950, 19 Prairie Schooner stories were listed on the volume's roll of distinctive short stories in American magazines.

More of the 250 stories thus recognized were from the "Schooner" than from any of 100 other magazines, including The Saturday Evening Post, Harper's, Atlantic, Esquire, Good Housekeeping and the New Yorker.

Another honor came to the magazine in 1948 when it was one of a limited number of American magazines selected for the UNESCO Literary Pool, and sent abroad to further understanding of this country and its people.

Not only has the magazine helped the people of other nations to understand this country. It has also gone a long way toward giving an accurate picture of the Middle West and its literary capabilities to the often skeptical Americans of other regions.

Former Student Promoted; Is Research Head

Dr. Clement W. Theobald, former student and a native Nebraskan, was recently promoted to research supervisor of the Du Pont chemical department.

The promotion took place after the resignation of the former department head, Dr. Elmer K. Bolton. Dr. Cole Coolidge became director of the department.

Thirty-three years old, Dr. Theobald has been with Du Pont eight years, starting at the experimental station soon after he had received his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry from the University of Illinois.

In 1940 he received the master of science degree in chemistry from the University of Nebraska. He is a native of Lincoln.

New Student Week Plans Nearly Done

Plans for the newly organized New Student Week are nearly completed, according to Dr. Arthur A. Hitchcock, director of the Junior Division and counselling service.

The week, September 10 to 16, will include activities such as picnics, convocations, open houses, new student orientation and more advisor-student contact.

In a few weeks, incoming students will receive bulletins from the Junior Division including an explanation of the general program of activities. Later in the summer each graduated high school student will receive the summer edition newspaper introducing the University and activities.

New Student Week will begin September 9 when each student will receive a freshman handbook and other information.

Activities during the day will include physical examinations, pre-registration testing, two orientation sessions, and college assemblies.

Advisor - advisee relationships will include group meetings on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday of the week, individual educational planning conferences on Tuesday and Wednesday, and registration on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

The general schedule for the evening programs is as follows:

Monday, September 10, at 7:30

New Student Convocation.
Address to New Students by Chancellor R. G. Gustavson.

Tuesday, September 11, at 5:30

Cornhusker Night.
Barbecue and an evening of Cornhusker Traditions on the College of Agriculture.

Wednesday, September 12, at 7:30

Open Houses-Student Religious Houses.
All of the Religious houses on campus to hold student parties.

Thursday, September 13, at 7:30

GIRLS: Co-ed Counselors party in the Union.

MEN: Men's Smoker with address by Regent Dwight Griswold.

Friday, September 14, at 7:30

Chancellor's Reception for new students followed by Open house at Union.

Saturday, September 15, at 8:30

Freshman Hop and Activities Mart at the Union.

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