

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 13

www.emrsociety.com

March 2012

14th Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XIV Annual Conference in beautiful Harrodsburg and Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 21-23, 2012. The conference headquarters—site of the opening banquet, keynote session, and annual business meeting—is the lovely and legendary Beaumont Inn in historic Harrodsburg. Academic paper sessions will be held at Saint Catharine College, just outside of Springfield, Roberts' hometown.

Please direct conference inquiries (registration, lodging, special events, etc.) to the Co-Conference Directors, H. R. Stoneback and Matthew Nickel, at:

English Dept.
SUNY-New Paltz,
New Paltz, NY 12561
or
Stoney_Sparrow@webtv.net
mattcnickel@gmail.com



Prospect & Retrospect

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

William Boyle

Going through the essays over the past few weeks for *Reading Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*, our upcoming volume of Roberts scholarship, I am reminded of everything that makes me love being a member of—and, for the last two years, being president of—the EMR Society. Our organization stresses the importance of discovery *and* recovery, reassessment *and* reclamation, prospect *and* retrospect. We are founded on a principle that I very much admire: not only to acknowledge the work of a forgotten master, but to introduce her work to a new generation of scholars and students. I have said plenty about this in the past, and it continues to amaze me.

Being president has been wonderful, and, of course, I will take any credit that anyone is willing to give me for the advancements the society has made over the past two years. But, and it's a big *but*, the hardest work continues to be done by Dr. H. R. Stoneback. Many of us teach Roberts and talk about Roberts and write about Roberts, but how many of us can say we bring dozens of new people to her work and her home place each year? It is because of Dr. Stoneback's efforts that we are all here, and I continue to be thankful that he convinced me to come to my first Roberts Conference almost ten years ago. We have lost Sparrow Stoneback and Terry Ward along the way and

we mourn those losses, but Dr. Stoneback's decision to create the Sparrow and the Terry Ward memorial scholarships speaks to his dedication to the society, to its members, and to future members: it is vitally important that a new generation knows what has come before.

The EMR Society continues to be well-represented at many literary conferences—ALA and SAMLA chief among them. We will also have presenters at this summer's Hemingway Society Conference and the International Imagism/Aldington Society Conference. Roberts' reputation as a Modernist master continues to grow. Sasmita Sinha of Pearson Education, Ltd., in the UK contacted me in October about using Roberts' poem "Little Rain" in a forthcoming publication, and I have spoken to many graduate students who are focusing on Roberts in their dissertations and master's theses.

It has been a great honor to be president of the EMR Society, and I am glad to continue relationships with many of you that I have known now for the better part of a decade. I am also, as always, happy to see and meet new people from across the world. We have an exciting year ahead of us. As I write this, I am thrilled that *Reading Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect* is on the horizon, and I anxiously await the arrival of Roberts' novel—albeit unfinished—*Flood*, edited by Vicki Barker, as well as another book of Roberts and Kentucky-influenced poetry. Thank you for all you do as members and active participants in the society. I look forward to seeing you in April.

One Roberts Reader Writes: “So Utterly Forsaken?”

H. R. Stoneback

Recently I received an engaging letter from James Franklin Spragens of Lebanon, Kentucky. Mr. Spragens was a friend of the late Terry Ward, our Roberts Society colleague for so many years.

In his letter, Spragens raised several interesting questions. He mentioned that he had just been reading *He Sent Forth a Raven* and noted: “There was something immediately familiar about Stoner Drake’s vow never to step foot on God’s green earth should his 2nd wife be taken. Quite possibly, I had heard about the book before, but another bell rang that this premise came from a real Washington County story. Is this my imagination? Maybe you can shed light on this?”

Some Roberts scholars will remember the ostensible source of the Stoner Drake vow, probably from their reading of the first critical volume to deal with Roberts’ life and work: *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: American Novelist* by Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster. This landmark 1956 study of Roberts is particularly rich in local knowledge of Roberts’ actual Washington County terrain. It is one of those books that you wish had an index, especially when searching for local sources for the character of Stoner Drake. But it doesn’t take much digging to find the “real Washington County story.” Noting Roberts’ close engagement with “the historic past of Washington County,” Campbell and Foster observe that her sources were multiple: “old records and journals . . . memories of her family and relatives . . . occasional articles about historic families of Washington County which ran for several years in the *Springfield Sun*” (64-65).

“Among the bizarre accounts [Roberts] dredged up from this background,” Campbell and Foster write, “was the story of Basil Haydon [sic] (the Stoner Drake of *He Sent Forth a Raven*). Basil Haydon had lived near Woodlawn, a little village in Nelson County just across the Washington County line. He had disliked Abraham Lincoln . . . and he vowed that if Lincoln were elected he, Haydon, would never set foot on God’s green earth again. He was a man of his word and never left his home, though he lived into the twentieth century” (65). Campbell and Foster assert that this local lore “fascinated Miss Roberts with its symbolic possibilities” and she gathered “local color, and background at Woodlawn,” Basil Haydon’s village, and even “stayed there for a good part of the time, soaking up the atmosphere and setting down voluminous notes” (65). This is one of those moments when the Roberts scholar wishes for more preci-

sion from Campbell and Foster: exactly *when* and *where* did Roberts stay in Woodlawn gathering material for *He Sent Forth a Raven*? Maybe we will have to wait for Jane Keller’s forthcoming biography of Roberts to know the answer to these questions. We want to trust the local knowledge that seems to inform the Campbell and Foster volume but our confidence may be shaken somewhat when we read that Woodlawn is in “the region of Fredericksburg.” There is no Fredericksburg in that country, but *Fredericktown* is an important locale in Roberts’ late fiction (e.g., *Black Is My Truelove’s Hair*).

Campbell and Foster often omit the footnotes and sources we would like to see, and include footnotes that do little to illuminate their Roberts narrative—such as this one: “Basil’s brother, R. B. Haydon [sic], attained a degree of fame as the originator of one of Kentucky’s finest whiskeys, Old Granddad [sic]” (65). Perhaps even scholars should not be held to strict orthographical standards when it comes to the names of whiskeys (since bourbon bottles are not standard issue at spelling bees), but we may be given grounds for even greater concern about the matter of scholarly exactitude since even the sober novice among legendary bourbons will know that the proper spelling is “Old Grand-Dad.” Moreover, few would agree with Campbell and Foster’s assertion that Old Grand-Dad is one of Kentucky’s *finest* whiskeys, although it is one of the better inexpensive bourbons. More to the Roberts point may be the fact that Basil Hayden, Sr. is pictured on the iconic Old Grand-Dad label. (Although Campbell and Foster repeatedly spell the name as *Haydon*, it has always been *Hayden*.) It was indeed Raymond B. Hayden—brother of the Basil Hayden who apparently inspired Roberts’ Stoner Drake—who first marketed Old Grand-Dad, evoking his grandfather Basil Hayden, Sr. who seems to have been established as a master distiller in Nelson County in the 1790s. And it is also a matter of historical record that Basil Hayden, Sr. was the leader of the Catholic emigration from Maryland to Kentucky, that he led the first Catholic settlers in 1785 to what became Nelson County, and he donated the land for the first Catholic church in Kentucky. So maybe Roberts was also interested in Basil Hayden *Senior*.

To return to James Spragens’ letter, one wonders if indeed he heard the Stoner Drake background story as a matter of local lore. I *think*—but I cannot be sure—I heard it when I was a truck-driving delivery man for Sears and Roebuck in Nelson and Washington Counties in the early 1960s. And thus one wonders if Campbell and Foster—or, more exactly, Ruel Foster, native of Springfield—heard and reported the story as local lore heard in passing, not as the outcome of research interests. A friend from Fredericktown, who has an ancestor who married a Hayden, tells me she will check on

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current versions of that local lore. Although there is not sufficient space to report it here, there is more to say about all this.

There are other engaging things in Mr. Spragens' letter to me, such as his observation that he loves *A Buried Treasure* and has read it *three* times. He notes "the image of the two pearls . . . hidden in a pouch around [the husband's] loins" and writes: "Wow! The fertility imagery must have been somewhat sensational." Finally, he asks: "Are you aware of another American writer so prominent, revered, and anthologized in her time who has later become so utterly forsaken? It is a shame that she is hardly mentioned now, in or out of Kentucky." In reply, I would suggest that while it may be difficult to name another truly excellent writer who fell so quickly into neglect, actually it has been just mild and intermittent neglect. (Except perhaps in those academic circles where canonical status is legislated, in those publishing realms where canonical identity is conferred through anthology and other textbook publications.) Yet, as I wrote Mr. Spragens, that period of even mild neglect is over, and with the current Roberts Renaissance EMR is anything but "utterly forsaken." The work of the Roberts Society proves that. Roberts is back, and more than merely mentioned, she is indeed studied regularly now from New York to California to France at major literary conventions and conferences, in classrooms, and she is once again celebrated in Kentucky—at least every April at our annual Roberts Conferences.

James Spragens also reminded me in his letter that we had met when he had dropped in at a Roberts Conference some years ago. I remembered our meeting and I told him I hoped we'd see him again at this year's conference. He is exactly the kind of Roberts aficionado that the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society exists to serve and to cultivate, to be in touch with, and to cherish. And he is living proof that Roberts is not *utterly forsaken*.

The Poetry of Robert Louis Stevenson & Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Notes from the South Pacific

H. R. Stoneback

I was in the South Pacific this past December, doing some Robert Louis Stevenson research in Samoa. On that far tropical island, Elizabeth Madox Roberts was the last thing on my mind, and her poetry was at least 8,000 miles away from my thoughts. I visited Stevenson's spectacular home, Vailima, on the hillside above Apia. I listened to young people recite poems from Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, poems that were vaguely familiar to me. One of the Vailima tour guides said many Samoan children still memorized Stevenson's poems in the early grades of school and even sang them, in both English and Samoan, since they had been set to music long ago. "After we memorized Ste-

Elizabeth Hardwick's Reply—1981

Bill Slavick

This letter, along with several others (Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, Ford Madox Ford), was read with early praise of Roberts' work at the Centenary conference luncheon in the old chapel, which provided the setting for "The Sacrifice of the Maidens."

Barnard College English Department
[undated, probably October, 1981]

I have had since my youth every reason to feel a special admiration for Elizabeth Madox Roberts. She was a woman and a Kentuckian and these two conditions which I shared with her by chance, as it were, captured my imagination. Yet, far more important to me was the quality of her work with its masterful, pure style and the aesthetic vision to which she remained faithful throughout her creative life.

My sense of her career is that she was successful with that part of the reading public who cared about literature and that she has to some degree been forgotten. But all is forgotten and all lives on in true art. Elizabeth Madox Roberts was an artist and she endures.

The present conference is a happy occasion because it honors a genuine and unique American talent. Its object, Mrs. [sic] Roberts, happened to be born in the town of Springfield—nice for the town and, as I think of it, very useful for this special writer.

[signed]
Elizabeth Hardwick

venson in the early grades," the tour guide said, "we studied Stevenson's poems all through school and even into college. The *Child's Garden* poems were once among the best-known poems in the world. The world may have forgotten them, but we haven't here in Samoa. Some call them children's poems but they are really for adults too."

Suddenly, 8,000 miles from Kentucky, I found myself thinking of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and her "children's" poems. I thought of the Springfield school kids I had recently heard recite poems by Roberts. And then I thought of Sparrow, who had memorized Stevenson poems by the time she was six years old when she was a girl in a mountain village in eastern Kentucky—so Stevenson's *Child's Garden* verses were once popular in Kentucky as they still are in Samoa. Then I remembered the offhand remark that Sparrow—my late wife Jane Arden Stone-

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Roberts on the Map

James Stamant

Last year, Elizabeth Madox Roberts' presence persisted and enlarged in our literary geography. This might be particularly true in regards to the academic world, considering the ongoing work being done on Roberts' life and the steady emergence of books that concern Roberts' work. Creative work, too, continues to proliferate, holding Roberts steady in the minds of literary people who favor various genres of writing.

It should also be noted, though, that Roberts' presence has not been constrained by national boundaries, and the evidence of this can be found—ironically, perhaps—on a literary map of the United States that originates in the United Kingdom. The Literary Gift Company, a British group, is currently offering a “USA Literary Map” as one of its five best-selling items on the company's website: theliterarygiftcompany.com. The map is sold as a large, hand-lettered poster (approximately 33 by 23.5 inches) that is original and exclusive to the Literary Gift Company. It contains the names of American authors, geographically connected on a map of the United States, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts name is prominently placed with Robert Penn Warren's in the geographic area of Kentucky. She is well represented on the map, a conversation piece, which sells for \$18.92 before shipping from the U.K.

Additionally, and closer to home, Roberts was found in *Discover Art in Kentucky*, a guide to Kentucky art that was published by the Kentucky Arts Council. This book is mostly divided into sections through geographic regions: Western, South Central, Eastern, and North Central Kentucky. Roberts receives a mention in the Eastern Region section through a reference in the entry on James Still. Roberts is among the names of authors whose work is recorded as “part of the literary flowering in the American South during the late 1920s and early 1930s.” Moreover, Roberts occupies her own two-page territory in the North Central Kentucky section of the book. She is referred to as “one of America's most original novelists and poets.” It should be noted that the source for the entry was our own Jane Keller. Certainly, Roberts continues to prove her propinquity to our literary minds and hearts; her recent residence on these maps is simply evidence of the fact.

Robert Louis Stevenson & EMR from page 3

back—made when she first read Roberts' *Under the Tree*: “Sounds like she'd been reading *A Child's Garden of Verses*. Everybody used to know Stevenson—wasn't that one of the most popular, the most reprinted, books of poems ever?” And then I wondered if Elizabeth Madox Roberts had also memorized Stevenson's poems.

I returned to my ship and right after the dramatic sunset sailaway from Apia harbor, I went to the ship's library to see if Stevenson's poems might be there on the shelves. I knew Roberts' poems would not be there. But I found no poetry at all on the shelves full of travel books and best-selling recent novels. So I sat in a comfortable wing-chair in the elegant library of the *Ocean Princess* and dozed off trying to remember lines and images from Roberts and Stevenson poems, and in my sleep they were interchangeable, resonantly so, and I woke up knowing that Stevenson was the ghostly presence behind *Under the Tree* and *Song in the Meadow*.

But the certainty and surreal absolutism of dreams is hardly the same thing as research and scholarly investigation, so that night, before my mind turned completely to the next island, to Pago Pago and my planned pilgrimage there to Sadie Thompson's Inn, my much-anticipated research on the legendary Sadie and Rain and Somerset Maugham—the *famous Mogg-um*, as one of my European ship-mates called him—I made a few notes in my Trip Log about Roberts and Stevenson before I went to bed. By the next morning as we sailed into Pago Pago, one of the most spectacular harbors in the world, I had forgotten all about Stevenson and Roberts. Landfall in Pago Pago and all the adventures of that day completely erased the last literary island. But on the plane on the way home, on the long flight from Tahiti to New York, I saw the notes in my Trip Log: “Roberts *must have been* deeply indebted to Stevenson. When home, check my Library of Congress files & check Campbell and Foster for evidence. Ask Jane Keller and Bill Slavick if they have any Stevenson-Roberts evidence. Stevenson the last undiscovered Roberts influence?—more important than Poetry Club U-Chicago, etc.?” And so, all the literary landfalls in the fabled islands of the South Pacific far behind me now, I am asking.

USA Literary Map
Elizabeth Madox
Roberts' name shares
Kentucky with
Robert Penn Warren



Where She Lived: The Roberts Houses in Springfield

Jane Eblen Keller

Elizabeth Eleanor Madox Roberts' childhood home—the “our house” of the poems in *Under the Tree*—stood at the eastern end of Main Street in Springfield, Kentucky, beside and to the east of the Presbyterian Church. The church, much altered, still stands. The Roberts house does not. We do not know when exactly the family moved to Springfield, probably in 1883. We do know they were living in the Main Street house by 1885 when Bessie, as Elizabeth was known throughout her youth, was three or four years old. It was, as she recalled it, a “drab little house” with two stories, a central front door, small-paned windows, and a fenced-in garden on the side opposite the church. In back, a one-story kitchen wing projected into the yard where a huge silver leaf poplar tree supported a rope swing.

It has often been written that Bessie's father, Simpson Roberts, operated a store of some kind on the ground floor while the family lived upstairs. Elizabeth Roberts herself, who left detailed descriptions of the house—to say nothing of the vividly autobiographical poems—never once suggested any such thing, nor do the records support the claim. The living-above-the-store arrangement, at least during Bessie's growing-up years, seems to be yet another misstatement about her. What is indisputable is that the Main Street house would have been plenty crowded, with or without a shop. By late 1895, ten people lived there: Simpson and his wife, Mary Elizabeth, and their eight children, ranging in age from sixteen to six months.

By 1902, the Roberts family had moved around the corner and a few blocks north to a rented house, a gabled bungalow, on Walnut Street. At this point, the Main Street house was indeed serving as Simpson Roberts' grocery and/or dry goods store. But not for long. He sold the building in 1904 and moved his shop to a much better location downtown, on the ground floor of the new Opera House.

During the next decade or so, several increasingly humble businesses tried to make a go of it in the Main Street building, which became more and more decrepit and was finally torn down around 1916. Elizabeth Roberts was glad to see it go. She had hated to see the indignities inflicted upon her old home and preferred her memories to the decaying realities.

We know little, and can be sure of nothing, about what Elizabeth Roberts was doing between 1900, when she graduated from high school, and 1904, when she taught briefly at the Pleasant Grove school up in the country north of

Springfield. We do know that in 1904, the year Simpson Roberts moved his store to the Opera House, he bought a one-story frame Victorian cottage on a lot at the far end of Walnut Street. The property, with many great trees, was more rural than suburban and included a smokehouse and a cow barn. (As late as 1930, the Robertses still kept a cow in that barn.)

The house was small, probably no more than six or so rooms that opened into each other in a complicated, intertwining layout. In the summer, the family enjoyed the wraparound porch on the front and south sides. In the winter, however, the place was difficult and expensive to heat. The frugal proprietors burned the least possible fuel, in wood and coal stoves, in the fewest possible rooms and never with more than minimal warmth. Heating would prove to be one of the never-resolved problems with the place.

The original white, wood-framed cottage is now invisible, having been absorbed into the stately brick house we know as Elenores. The first and relatively modest phase of its evolution took place in 1928 when Elizabeth built a two-room addition on the north side. She had been dreaming about this since 1921 when she returned home from the University of Chicago and ran up against the many hazards of living at home as an adult with one's parents in a too-small house affording no privacy. Within two months of coming back to Springfield, she was driven nearly wild by constant intrusions and interruptions.

So, the first moment she had some spare cash, in the spring of 1928, she set about creating a private suite for herself. She connected her old room, at the front, to the two many-windowed new ones on the north. From this semi-private refuge, she could see out into her garden from three directions.

The little suite quickly proved to be unsatisfactory—too cramped, nowhere nearly private enough, and never, ever warm enough. By the summer of 1930, her “house problem,” as she called it, was desperate. She had to do something, soon. One idea was to buy and move into the house next door. For whatever reason, that plan fell through, but it perhaps gave her the idea to build an entirely new house for herself on the south side of her parents' cottage.

She knew what she wanted, from basement to rafters, including, for starters, a modern furnace. She would also have two floors. On the first, with her own front door, would be an entry hall and two large rooms, both well-lit by windows and sparsely but comfortably furnished. The room facing the street would be the large, almost square library/drawing

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Roberts Houses *from page 5*

room, its fireplace faced with Alabama marble. A slightly smaller room behind this would serve for weaving and, when she had guests, for dining. Her own tiny kitchen, separate from her mother's in the old house, would connect to the dining/weaving room. Upstairs she would have rooms for sleeping and working. A remodeled porch would create a gentle transition from new to old, red brick to white wood, high to low, large to small. The combined house would thus have fourteen rooms, three baths, and two porches, the altered front one and another in back. (The back porch seems to have disappeared.)

She made sketches and consulted an architect and builders. Construction began in August 1931, as did manifold problems. For the better part of the next year, delays followed delays, frustrations followed frustrations. She had to watch over every step of every workman, and still things went wrong. The fancy furnace turned out to be the wrong size and had to be replaced. (Even this broke down occasionally and never put out enough heat to allow Elizabeth to spend many winters there.) In the midst of the project, the bank with her building money failed, forcing her to borrow, and she hated—*hated*—being in debt. It was one thing after an-

other. Had she foreseen all the anxieties involved, she wondered if she would have embarked on the project at all.

But when she was finally able to settle in, by the late spring or early summer of 1932, she was pleased. Building a house, she confessed, was every bit as demanding as writing a novel and nearly as satisfying. She wanted this one, christened Elenores, to be counted among her finest achievements.

And why Elenores, a plural without an “a”? I believe, but cannot cite a confirming source, that Elizabeth Eleanor Madox Roberts wished to honor her paternal grandmother whose name seems to have been spelled (in some documents at least) Elenor. She was Elenor Harris Roberts, born in 1817 and dead at age thirty-five, in 1853, when her second son, Simpson (Elizabeth's father), was about eight. Family lore held that the second Eleanor got her blond hair, blue eyes, patrician bearing, and love of learning from the first Elenor, so long buried on a windswept hill up in Henry County where the original Kentucky Robertses settled around 1800.

The new house, tall, graceful, and proud, would connect two dwellings, combine two names, and complete an ancestral circle.

Song in the Meadow:
An EMR *Hymnagiste* Quiz (with Prize)

H. R. Stoneback

The last volume of Roberts poems, *Song in the Meadow*, rides on the rhythms and images of songs and hymns. In its intricately interwoven deployment of folksong and hymnody, this book is one of the most extraordinary *songs* in American literature: “The truth of a song is the truth of another thing” (*Song in the Meadow* 79). Roberts may be the least acknowledged *Imagiste*, unknown as the Kentucky exemplar of Ezra Pound's “Imagist School,” but more than that she is an unacknowledged *Hymnagiste*.

History may record that the recent and perhaps still current *Hymnagiste* movement had its origins in New York or New Orleans around the time of Hurricane Katrina, and the *Hymnagiste* poets may have had their finest hours at Brunnenburg Castle in Italy, Ezra Pound's old home, where among the descendants of original *Imagistes* they read their various poetic tributes to the old *Imagistes*. But history should also record that the *Hymnagiste* movement had one of its signal hours in Springfield, Kentucky. Lunch-hour, to be precise. There in downtown Springfield, around the long table in the mayor's restaurant on Main Street, some *Hymnagiste* poets

launched the plan to bring out their landmark 2010 volume, *Des Hymnagistes*, a book that would echo Pound's *Des Imagistes* in various ways. Yet I don't think any of us, even though we were on a lunch break from the annual Roberts Conference, had Elizabeth Madox Roberts anywhere even in the back of our minds as an honorary *Hymnagiste*. But atonement is available for sins of omission, and perhaps Roberts will be included in the next volume, *Some Hymnagist Poets*.

About the *Hymnagiste* quiz announced in the title above: holding the center of Roberts' *Song in the Meadow* is the poem “Conversations beside a Stream.” This poem has a remarkable number of allusions, direct and indirect, to folksongs and hymns. The reader who identifies the names of all the folksongs and hymns in “Conversations beside a Stream” gets the prize. (Judging will be generous, however; thus the reader who identifies the greatest number of the songs and hymns will be the winner.) Send your list of song-and-hymn titles to me at Stoney_Sparrow@webtv.net or mail them to me (Professor H. R. Stoneback, Department of English, SUNY-New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561) by April 1, 2012. The winner will be announced and the prize awarded at the annual Roberts Conference April 21-23. (The prize will be a signed copy of the *Des Hymnagistes* volume, a rare collector's item.)

Clare Leighton Wood Engraving Illustrations Exhibit

Steven Florczyk

Longtime Roberts Society members will recall Jane Dionne's presentation at the second annual Roberts conference at Saint Catharine College in April of 2000: "Clare Leighton's Wood Engravings for Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*." The Georgia Museum of Art in Athens recently announced a temporary exhibit (on loan from the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte) dealing with Leighton's life and work: *Quiet Spirit, Skillful Hand: The Graphic Work of Clare Leighton*.

Leighton was born in Great Britain in 1898, moved to North America in 1939, and died in 1989. As an artist, she worked in watercolor, pen and ink, and sepia wash, but her "preferred medium," according to the exhibit, was wood engraving. Over her lifetime, she completed more than 800 prints, and her art appeared in over 65 books. Other than the wood engravings for Roberts' *The Time of Man*, Leighton illustrated volumes for authors including Thomas Hardy, Thornton Wilder, and Emily Brontë. She also wrote and illustrated her own books, which often dealt with rural activities in the South and the rituals of agricultural life. Her art even appeared on a series of Wedgwood dinner plates depicting traditional industries associated with New England. The travelling *Quiet Spirit, Skillful Hand* exhibit includes 2 wood blocks on loan from Duke University Libraries, but everything else (drawings, prints, books with illustrations, etc.) originally came from Gabby Pratt, a resident of Charlotte, who donated her collection to the Mint Museum in 2004. Although the works chosen for display are impressive, Roberts scholars might be disappointed (perhaps not surprised) to learn that they do not include any illustrations from *The Time of Man*. Even so, it might be helpful to know that Leighton wrote and made prints for books with themes and subject matter similar to Roberts' fiction and poetry. Leighton's *The Farmer's Year* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), *Country Matters* (Macmillan, 1937), and *Southern Harvest* (Macmillan, 1942), for example, might be worth examining for additional parallels.

Indeed, as mentioned in the exhibit, much of Leighton's work "draws upon the history and traditions of the South for its subject matter." A catalogue with images from the show (also titled *Quiet Spirit, Skillful Hand: The Graphic Work of Clare Leighton*), published by the Mint Museum, has since gone out of print, but used copies might be available online. Even more, although the images Leighton completed for *The Time of Man* are not included in the exhibit, maybe the illustrations, woodblocks, and notes by the artist are stored away somewhere in the archives of the Mint Museum or elsewhere, waiting to be unearthed by a Roberts/Leighton scholar. At the very least, perhaps *Quiet Spirit, Skillful Hand* will soon make its way to a museum near you. For those of us who associate Leighton's images so strongly with Roberts' characters and settings, the collection is certainly inspiring and worth a visit.

A Cigar and a Book: Kentucky Lit

Matthew Nickel

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society found a new *place to come to* in 2011 in downtown Harrodsburg. Chad Horn, owner of Kentucky Lit, Book & Cigar Store, 129 South Main, Harrodsburg, KY, invited the Roberts Society to a reception of "Sonnets, Song, and Smoke." It was a wonderful opportunity to sample some fine cigars and to peruse a great collection of Kentucky's best writers. Roberts Society members purchased several nice cigars and books, and Chad donated all the proceeds to the Sparrow Memorial Fund.

Kentucky Lit is the kind of place anyone who loves books would want in their own small town. Chad is always collecting books, and his archive of literary artifacts is ever-expanding. Some of these range from first-editions, collected works and personal writings of Hollis Summers and Madison Cawein, to signed books by Robert Penn Warren and Jesse Stuart. Of particular interest to Roberts scholars is his extensive archive of Elizabeth Madox Roberts letters, first-editions, and late-signings of limited editions. He is generous with his holdings, and many of us were afforded a view of several rare Roberts pieces.

Chad also seeks to establish a significant tobacco collection within his unique eclectic book store. On the Kentucky Lit website, Chad explains: "I wanted a 'stick of tobacco' to honor my dad, Don Horn, and the Horn family name that depended upon tobacco production and distribution for generations." Anyone with even a general knowledge of the decline of independent tobacco growers in lieu of the corporate intervention will find Chad's attempt to preserve the legacy of independent tobacco farmers profoundly moving. He currently sells several cigar varieties: Black Patch Cigar Company, H. P. Becker and Son, F. D. Grave and Son, Battleground Cigars, Avanti, and the Papadon.

Roberts Society members know Chad well as he graces the Beaumont evenings with his presence, his wit, his cigars, and his stories. He is an accomplished poet himself, and we are delighted that he makes a special place for the Roberts Society to come home to in Harrodsburg.

The Gospel of Roberts According to the WPA

H. R. Stoneback

The WPA Guide to Kentucky, first published in 1939, has important things to tell us about Roberts. The volume is part of the celebrated Federal Writers' Project American Guide Series produced under the auspices of the Work Projects Administration, a kind of shovel-ready stimulus project of the Great Depression that put many writers and academics to work. (Maybe it's time for another such project, though it is doubtful that these days the results would be as good as the 1930s series of state guidebooks.)

This volume gives ample attention to Roberts, while it does not even mention three already well-published and well-established Kentucky writers, Caroline Gordon, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. The only writers who are given more space than Roberts are the once immensely popular Kentucky writers, John Fox Jr. and James Lane Allen, both of whom died just as Roberts was beginning her career. A graph of their waning reputations since 1925 gives new meaning to the word *neglect*, all too often misapplied to Roberts.

In the town-guide section of the book, the four things listed as must-see places are the old Washington County Court-

house (with its Abraham Lincoln records), the General John Pope House, Cemetery Hill, the old 1797 burying ground where Roberts was buried two years after the volume appeared, and "The ROBERTS HOUSE, N. Walnut St. . . . home of Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, author of the *Great Meadow*, the *Time of Man*, and other novels and poems (*see Literature*)" (379).

In the Literature section we find these observations about Roberts: "perhaps no living American writer has more truthfully explored the consciousness of the adolescent girl, of the lonely and poetic woman." And this: "No well-read person will be unacquainted with her first novel, *The Time of Man* (1926), which in its universality has the earmark of a classic" (123). Thus the WPA Guide will help to temper and correct all the inaccurate commentary about the neglect of Roberts. She was anything but neglected in her time, but there have been later brief intervals when the words *mild neglect* might appropriately be applied to Roberts (not, certainly, the years from the mid-50s to the mid-60s when there was a flurry of attention to and new editions of her work, nor the early 80s with the attention generated by the Roberts Centenary Conference, and not, most certainly, the years 2000-2012, the era of the current Roberts Renaissance). But she has never been subject to the kind of total neglect that her once fabulously popular and critically praised—at a national level—fellow Kentuckians John Fox Jr. and James Lane Allen have been subject to for nearly a century now.

The WPA Again: The Kentucky Work Projects Administration Document No. 65-1-43-130 on the "Famous Novelist" EMR

H. R. Stoneback

A very curious WPA typescript document entitled *BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS PERTAINING TO KENTUCKY AUTHORS*, produced by the Louisville Free Public Library and dated 1941, praises Roberts but not in such eloquent terms as the Federal WPA Guide cited above. This is a local Louisville document under state WPA auspices; the typescript is at least 453 pages long (there may be some end pages missing from my copy). Given its length and its sole focus on writers, it includes far more authors than the Federal Guide to Kentucky.

For example, Jesse Stuart rates three pages here. The biography section announces: "He is a Methodist and his political affiliation is that of a Republican. Mr. Stuart resides at Riverton, Kentucky. He is unmarried." Curious document indeed, but maybe not so much as it might seem now—this is, after all, a *local* document and its intent is, in part, to address the kind of local knowledge that might matter to

neighbors. But it is very curious indeed to read, at the end of a useful section of quoted "Critical Estimates," the final sentence of the essay on Stuart: "Mr. Stuart is a Mason." This is, then, a document more to be faulted for its style than its information, which is generally accurate and somewhat useful throughout.

For another example, Robert Penn Warren gets two pages. In his bio section we read: "Mr. Warren is a Democrat. His address is Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana." In the "Critical Estimates" section there is this observation: "From the imagists (right-wing) Mr. Warren has also learned much." This will seem to some to go beyond the merely curious and achieve the sublimely ridiculous. But then, after all, this is a document of the 1930s when writers, even in Louisville, were mostly "left-wing." Later in the "Critical Estimates" section the Louisville librarian-authors make sure to get this statement in regarding Warren's edited collection of short stories *A Southern Harvest*: "Kentucky is represented by its famous novelist, Elizabeth Maddox [sic] Roberts."

As for the "famous novelist" Roberts, her bio begins: "She lives in Springfield, is a Democrat and a member of the Christian Church." There are other curious bits of informa-

continued on next page

tion here such as the observation that Roberts “is one of the few American authors who is represented in the Popular Gyldendal Series of Norway.” Or the information that *The Great Meadow* “has been done in Braille and on the cinema.”

The Louisville librarians clearly think that Roberts’ “most successful work is *The Great Meadow*.” But they include in their “Critical Estimates” section ample praise for almost every Roberts volume. For example, they cite *The New York Times* (1932) reviewer who wrote: “In that remarkable galaxy of talent and genius formed by writers of the contemporary South, no star is more brilliantly ascendant than that of Elizabeth Madox Roberts.” (Code statement for a common view at the time: Roberts is greater than Faulkner.) They cite *The Publisher’s Weekly* (1935): “*He Sent Forth a Raven* . . . will surely be regarded by many as her greatest work to date, will cement forever her position as one of the few very great writers of our time.” And they close with quotes from the *Courier-Journal*: “[Roberts is] a writer of genius . . . has written scenes which stand with the finest in the history of fiction,” including Russian, French and English novels. In sum, if this 1941 Louisville Library document amounts to *neglect*, we’ll all take such neglect.

A Query: Cotter & Merriweather & Roberts?

H. R. Stoneback

The Kentucky WPA project cited above lists two “Negro” writers as representatives of Black or African-American (they do not use either term) writing in Kentucky: Joseph Seamon Cotter (1861-1949) and Claybron W. Merriweather (1869-1952). They are not listed in alphabetical order, but segregated at the back of the typescript. One of the sources listed is the “Kentucky Colored Authors’ Scrap Book” in the Louisville Library.

The articles are replete with observations, characteristic of the time and place, about being “a credit to his race” and possessing “the proper spirit and recognition of the relations between the white and the black man.” Offensive statements and article placement aside, the articles present Cotter (a Louisville educator) and Merriweather (a Hopkinsville lawyer said to be the first black lawyer in Kentucky) as distinguished figures and accomplished authors. My question is this: if anybody knows anything at all that might make a Roberts connection to Cotter and/or Merriweather—did she ever read or was she aware of their work? Did they cross paths in Louisville or elsewhere?—please send me your information (Stoney_Sparrow@webtv.net).

The Reading Roberts Series— Four Books in 2012

The long awaited and much discussed EMR Society project, the Reading Roberts Series of volumes, was launched in 2012 with the publication of four volumes:

1. Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *Flood*. Editor, Vicki Barker
2. *Reading Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*. Editors, H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel
3. *Kentucky: Poets of Place*. Editor, Matthew Nickel
4. H. R. Stoneback, *Composition of Place: Essays and Meditations on Elizabeth Madox Roberts 1968-2012*

The Reading Roberts Book Series is a project committed to publishing a wide range of scholarly and literary volumes devoted to the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, including previously unpublished Roberts manuscripts, critical monographs on Roberts, collections of critical essays on Roberts and her legacy, volumes of poetry and other creative endeavors that illuminate the terroir of Roberts’ work, reissued volumes of importance to Roberts scholarship, and other works.

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H. R. Stoneback

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The list price of the first four books in the series is \$20 each. There will be a very special discount for books purchased at the conference. If you cannot attend the conference the EMR Society Member’s Discount for books to be mailed will be in excess of 20%—i.e., \$16 per volume or all four books for \$60. (In effect, with shipping and handling costs included, this amounts to more than a 30% member’s discount for all four books.) Send your order with updated mailing address (and check payable to “Tina Iraca”) to the EMRS Treasurer, Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery St., Tivoli, NY 12583.

2011 Conference Report

Amanda Boyle

The XIII annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 16-18, 2011. We began with a reception at Kentucky Lit, generously hosted by Chad Horn. At the Beaumont Inn, the opening greeting was given by William Boyle, President of the Society, followed with the Keynote by H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Roberts Society ("Roberts at the Crossroads of Poetry & Fiction: Dialect, Dialogue & Interior Monologue, Inscape & Landscape, Voice & Place"). Later, the Terry Ward and Sparrow Memorial Awards were presented.

On Sunday, attendees traveled to Roncevaux Farm, followed by Kentucky Writers Day and the premiere of the anthology: *From Penn's Store to the World*. In the afternoon, the society was honored at the Springfield Opera House by Mayor John W. Ceconi, The Springfield City Council, Nell Haydon and Main Street Renaissance, and the Ladies of Springfield. Students from Washington County High School read from Roberts' works, and we were treated to two wonderful musical performances. Conference participants were then given a tour of Elenores, Roberts' house, hosted by Joan Hamilton.

Monday morning the Society was greeted by President William D. Huston and Leo Hamelin at Saint Catharine College. Academic papers were presented throughout the day by many new and veteran Roberts scholars. The conference ended with a poetry reading at Roberts' grave.

Session 1: Jane Eblen Keller (U of Baltimore): "Stuck in Springfield: EMR's Ambivalent Love of Home"; **Vicki Barker** (Carson-Newman C): "Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Unpublished Flood Novel: The Historical Context Behind the Story"; **William Slavick** (U of Southern Maine): "Treachery: A Death's Head with a Bone in its Mouth."

Session 2: Jessica Conti (SUNY-New Paltz): "The Haunted Self: Image and Identity"; **Matthew Nickel** (U of Louisiana—Lafayette): "'Can a song of a rose answer me?': Wastelands, Mystic Agrarianism, and Prophecy in 'The Prophet'"; **Gisèle Sigal** (Université de Pau—IUT de Bayonne): "Landscapes of the Mind: Recurrence & Variations in the Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **William Boyle** (U of Mississippi): "'Pioneer Perspective': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Barry Hannah"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State U): "'His Shadow . . . Crouching at his Feet': Time and Timelessness in 'Record at Oak Hill.'"

Session 3: Emily Jacobson (Pratt Institute): "Prominence and Discovery: Archiving Roberts"; **Lee Conell** (SUNY-New Paltz): "Slow Reading Roberts in Manhattan: *The Time of Man* in a Turbulent City"; **Brad McDuffie** (Nyack College): "'Running up to

the new field': Rereading 'The Scarecrow.'"

Session 4a: Adam Neikirk (U of Mississippi): "Invisible Speakers: A Diagram of Self-Refraction in Roberts' Poetry of Childhood"; **Roy Verspoor** (SUNY-New Paltz): "Unearthly Terror: Dark Shadows in *The Great Meadow*"; **Jennifer Stuck** (Iona C): "The Drawing of the Horse and the Sticking of the Sow: A Look at the Struggle for Self in 'A Haunted Palace'"; **Roxanna Billington** (U of Wisconsin: Green Bay): "'It's Only a Matter of Time': Roberts' 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.'"

Session 4b: Christopher Paolini (SUNY-New Paltz): "The Snake in the Garden: Moral Preservation Against Temptation and Environmental Encouragement in *The Time of Man*"; **Andrew Limbong** (SUNY-New Paltz): "Finding Brother Andrew's G Fiddle String: Music, Sound, and Growth in *The Time of Man*"; **Valerie Werder** (SUNY-New Paltz): "'How far is it to a star?': Celestial Signifiers of Order and Community in *The Time of Man*"; **Jared Young** (SUNY-New Paltz): "Traditions in Song: Kentucky Literature"; **Shawn Rubenfeld** (SUNY-New Paltz): "'And I'll Know Everything Some Day': Childhood Growth through Nature from *Under the Tree* to *The Time of Man*."

Session 5a: Amanda Capelli (SUNY-New Paltz): "'I'm A-liven' Like 'a Wet Seed Wild in the Hot Blind Earth': The Intrinsic Poetry of Ellen Chesser and Dewey Dell"; **Cristin Rogowski-Vita** (Indep Scholar): "'Our Place to Keep': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the American Dream"; **Natalie Lozinski-Veach** (SUNY-New Paltz): "*Heimweh*: Home and Belonging in Roberts' *The Time of Man* and the poetry of Mascha Kaléko"; **Amanda Boyle** (SUNY-New Paltz): "'I'll Never Set Foot on Earth Again While Time Lasts': Misconceptions and a Renewal of Vows in Roberts' *He Sent Forth a Raven*."

Session 5b: Jessica Kimmel (SUNY-New Paltz): "'A Right to Live': A 'Ruined Woman' in *Black is My Truelove's Hair*"; **Sharon Peelor** (U of Oklahoma): "From 'Screaming Gander' to 'one of the most beautiful songs in the world': Reassessment and Recovery of the Values of Dena's Story"; **Michelle Kramisen** (SUNY-New Paltz): "New Beginnings through Times of War in *The Great Meadow*"; **Russell Karrick** (SUNY-New Paltz): "'All My Enduren Life': The Burden and Beauty along the Dusty Road."

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference Attendees 2011



EMR's Bodaciously Survigrous Style

H. R. Stoneback

Many readers who come to Roberts' work are entranced by her use of folk speech, dialect, and the richly textured voices of her Kentucky characters. Some of these readers—those who have lived in Kentucky or in the parts of the South where such colorful speech endures in Appalachia and Knob-country uplands—are impressed by Roberts' extraordinary *ear* as well as by the literary devices she uses to render so authentically the speech of her country characters. And the few Roberts scholars who have studied her manuscripts and papers at the Library of Congress are likely to recall the scraps of lists and notes where she recorded particularly striking folk-speech-vocabulary.

Going through my copies of her Library of Congress materials recently, seeking unpublished material to publish for the first time in one of our books in the *Reading Roberts Series*, I was struck by the fact that she recorded the strange word "survigrous" more than once. I seemed to recall that she employed this word somewhere in her fiction, but I could not remember where and I have not yet located it. The word haunted my dreams several nights in a row and one morning I woke up thinking that the exact phrase for Roberts' *style* is "bodaciously survigrous."

Not long ago at an academic conference, I happened to hear in passing an academic panelist opine that *bodacious* was a recent contribution to vivid speech, one typical of the beat-hipster counter-culture of the 1950s from which it emanated. I smiled inside, moved on, thinking *why listen to such uninformed nonsense*. Bodacious, of course, is a good old word that has thrived for centuries, especially in the

Appalachian and upland South. The OED suggests that it may be a variant of the English dialect word "boldacious," meaning bold and audacious, and defines its meaning as complete, thorough, arrant. Perhaps so, but the word, as I have long known it, evolved with the dropping of that "I" to include the *body*: bold, bodily audacity. I remember that Roberts inscribed it somewhere but I cannot find it—when will we have a concordance of Roberts' extraordinary use of folk speech? At any rate, she would know the word if not from the speech of her countrymen then from her literary predecessors in Kentucky (and Tennessee) hillfolk fiction: Mary Murfree and John Fox Jr., both immensely popular writers, had used it long before she began to write.

Survigrous is another matter. It's a hard word to track down, but it is noted occasionally as occurring in Appalachian speech. And Roberts must have heard the word, since she was struck by it enough that she wrote it in her folk speech notes at least twice. I have heard it a few times, most memorably when a man working in my Kentucky Knob-country tobacco patch, a man whose family had been in that country (Roberts-terrain) since pioneer days, surveyed the tobacco in my riverside patch and said: "Them-thar plants in that-ere bottomland is sho-fire survigrous." Clearly, it means super-vigorous. Given the possibility of French origins through the prefix "*sur-*" (*surabondance*, overabundance; *suractivité*, hyperactivity; *surnaturel*, supernatural; even *surreal*, super-real), maybe a French troubadour passed through the southern hills and sang the *survigoureuse* Kentucky women. In any case, *bodaciously survigrous* is my term-of-the-year for Roberts' *style*: bold and bodily in its insistence on the earthy oneness of flesh and spirit, audacious in its combination of folk speech and High Modernist poetry, and super-vigorous in everything, every song and every sentence.

News & Notes

URGENT: Seeking old photos of EMR House

As Honorary President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society and Series Editor of the Society's publication projects, I am rather desperately seeking old photos of the Roberts House—photos from BEFORE the house was enlarged by EMR (twice). Since we hope to use such photo(s) in a publication, may I ask you please to scan any such photos and e-mail them to me at Stoney_Sparrow@webtv.net. Thank you kindly for your help!—H. R. Stoneback

Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of the new **Reading Roberts Series** books, *Reading Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*, *Flood*, and others soon to come. Also, please request other recent works by the Roberts So-

ciety, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008), *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Eds. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as original pieces of writing by her that have never before been published. For more information regarding ordering, please visit www.emrsociety.com.

EMR at SAMLA in Atlanta, GA, November 2011

The Roberts Society was well represented this past year at the SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Cristin Rogowski-Vita chaired the Regular Session of the EMR Society where several presentations were given by: **Vicki**

continued on next page

News & Notes from page 11

Barker (Carson-Newman C), **Amanda Capelli** (Indep Scholar), **Jane Massey Dionne** (Indep Scholar), and **Cristin Rogowski-Vita** (CUNY-Queens C). Matthew Nickel chaired the Second Session of the EMR Society where several papers were given on Roberts and Poetry: **Allen Jones** (U of Louisiana-Lafayette), **Jessica Conti** (SUNY-New Paltz), and **Matthew Nickel** (U of Louisiana-Lafayette).

CFP: SAMLA 2012**The Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

Papers for this session should deal with Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Poetry. Papers should run between fifteen and twenty minutes long. Please submit a title and a 250-word abstract to James Stamant (Texas A&M University) at stam202@tamu.edu by 1 June 2012.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Reading Roberts

More information for this second session will be forthcoming. Please email Matthew Nickel, mattcnickel@gmail.com, for further information.

2011 EMR Society Award Winners:

Terry Ward Memorial Award: Emily Jacobson (Pratt Institute)
Sparrow Memorial Awards: Jennifer Stuck (Iona College) and Valerie Werder (SUNY-New Paltz)

2011 Butterbean Award: Adam Neikirk (U of Mississippi)

Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer at tinair@hotmail.com, or send a check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant to: Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery Street, Tivoli, NY 12583.

Publication Notes

Please see Reading Roberts Series item in this present newsletter for detailed information about society publications. In addition, we would like to acknowledge: Honorary President H. R. Stoneback's recent publication of a large book (320pp.) of poetry, *Voices of Women Singing* (Codhill Press, 2011) and society member Brad McDuffie's publication *Teaching Salinger's Nine Stories* (New Street Communications, 2011). Also, *From Penn's Store to the World* (Des Hymnagistes Press, 2011), edited by H. R. Stoneback, Brad McDuffie, and Amanda Boyle, was premiered at Kentucky Writers Day 2011 in Gravel Switch, KY.

Correction

The editors of the newsletter would like to note one correction to last year's newsletter—the spelling of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' house. The proper spelling is Elenores. We apologize for the error.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

Honorary President: H. R. Stoneback, SUNY-New Paltz

President: William Boyle, University of Mississippi

Vice President: Matthew Nickel, SUNY-New Paltz

Vice President: Goretti Vianney-Benca, Marist College

Secretary/Treasurer: Tina Iraca, Dutchess Community College

EMRS Newsletter Editors: Matthew Nickel / James Stamant

Visit us on the web: www.emrsociety.com

Mission Statement

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and to encourage the teaching of her literature. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but we are always interested in Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Bill Boyle at wamboyle@olemiss.edu.