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## Steinbeck Today

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## STEINBECK TODAY

### STEINBECK AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

J. HARRINGTON, RETIRED POLICE CHIEF OF SAG HARBOR DIES  
Steinbeck wrote about him in the Sag Harbor *Express* in 1966: “When he was [*sic*] to pick up a juvenile for violent delinquency, he doesn’t look for excuses to explain why the kid or the dame or the drunk did it. To our chief violence is bad no matter what caused it. . . . We have less destructive delinquency in Sag Harbor than any place around. Even the kids know where they stand, and are far from resenting it, they are kind of relieved.”

(*Newsday* 3 October 2002. Submitted by Richard Hart and Bill Groneman)



### LETTERS CHANGED STEINBECK’S VIEW OF SALINAS

A former Marine Corps sergeant and Salinas native, Leo Hudspeth, exchanged letters with Steinbeck in 1953, telling him that his hometown was avidly reading *East of Eden*. The Salinas library had eight copies, Hudspeth reported, with sixty people on the waiting list. Steinbeck wrote to Hudspeth: “There are so many changes in Salinas and I am not quite sure that I know what is still there.”

(Dave Nordstrand. 23 April 2003. Submitted by Carol Robles)

[*Editor’s note: These letters are now owned by SJSU, the acquisition made possible by a donation from Bruce Springsteen at Elaine Steinbeck’s death as well as through a generous partial gift of the letters from Don Richards, owner.*]

◆

“QUEEN OF THE ROW: KALISA MOORE AND HER LA IDA CAFÉ ARE ONE OF THE FEW AUTHENTIC THINGS LEFT ON CANNERY ROW”

[Editor’s note: This article ran the week before a benefit party for Kalisa at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in January 2003. At the crowded benefit, Kalisa was crowned as queen, and revelers enjoyed food, music, and belly dancers swaying before the large fish tank.]

Since 1958, Kalisa Moore has “nurtured workers, artists, tourists and bohemians of one ilk or another.” In 1960, Dennis Murphy brought Steinbeck to Kalisa’s restaurant. Steinbeck “wouldn’t give her his address, but he did give her the address to his lawyers, just in case she wanted to get in touch. It wasn’t until after Steinbeck’s death that Kalisa found out he had been sincere. In planning the first Steinbeck Birthday

Party on Cannery Row in 1970, Kalisa wanted to produce a play that included excerpts from Steinbeck’s writings. Wanting to keep things legal, she contacted the lawyers—who told her Steinbeck had instructed them to forward any mail from Kalisa to him. The play went on, and the parties have been an annual event on the Row ever since.”

(*The Weekly* 23–29 January 2003: 28. Submitted by Lee Richard Hayman)



John Steinbeck with Willy Brandt, Berlin, 1963.

◆

In *The New Yorker*’s review of Nora Ephron’s play “Imaginary Friends,” which details the feud between literary legends Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman, McCarthy is quoted listing Steinbeck among overrated authors of the twentieth century.

(*The New Yorker* 16 December 2002: 34. Submitted by Greta Manville)

◆

An email from John McNulty: “In 1970 I was a newly arrived private attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the village of An Khe, in the Central Highlands of South Viet Nam. In July, having been ‘in country’ less than a month, I found myself at the USO, where I came upon a book entitled *The Moon is Down*. In

war there is no shortage of fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and, curiously, boredom. I was a poor student from a poor background, which seemed to be the requirements for an expendable young life. But boredom prevailed, I read the book and I loved it.

Some time later, on another visit to base camp, I found *Travels with Charley*. I can't describe the profound impact that book had on me, crawling around in hell, bolstered by marijuana and heroin. It gave me something to believe in, not to fight for, but to survive for. And it started me on a life devoted to reading.

There were plenty of other books I read while I was there: Jimmy Breslin's *The Gang that Couldn't Shoot Straight*, reaching straight into my Brooklyn heart. *Catch 22*. But *Travels with Charley*, a good dog and a wonderful, wise, avuncular man of conscience stayed with me forever. I credit it with saving my life.

I've made several trips to Sag Harbor in the hope of running into his widow. She's a regular at the antiquarian bookstore on Main Street, but I've never met her. It's enough, though, to have shaken the hand of the proprietor, simply because he is a friend of hers.

Continue your work and let no one besmirch this wonderful man; let no one question the value of his writing, or the importance of his message."

## STEINBECK'S CRITTERS

Rob Foster's cartoon strip, "Over the Edge," details Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet, in bindle-stiff regalia, walking down a dirt road. Underneath, the caption reads, "John Steinbeck's little-known collaboration with A.A. Milne... 'Lennie the Pooh.'"



A *New York Post* "Pets" section article by Julia Szabo titled, "Great Animal Tales," observes that "There are two remarkable 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries in literature this year: the birth of John Steinbeck and the publication of 'Peter Rabbit.' And both will resonate with animal lovers. Steinbeck, of course, wrote one of the greatest dog books of all time, 'Travels with Charley,' about a cross-country road trip he took with his standard poodle."

(14 July 2002: G4. Submitted by Groneman)



Bill Groneman also writes: “The following article was listed in the March issue of *QSS*, the monthly journal of the American Radio Relay League: ‘Of Mics and Men,’ Tom Morton, W5TOM ‘Take advantage of the author’s experimentation with home-brew microphone designs and roll your own.’”

## NEWSWORTHY

In a letter to the editor of *The New Yorker*, Chris Collins and Sheila Isenberg expressed their disappointment over a fashion spread showing models in “distressed” clothes in front of migrant scenes of poverty. They write, “The Okies lived through hard times with values of trust, love, and self-reliance. None of this is reflected in Ritts’s pictures, with their substitution of fashion models for the eternally beautiful faces of pain and poverty that we recall from [Walker] Evans’s photographs.”

(23 September 2002: 9. Submitted by John Ditsky)



Dr. Dharamdas M. Shende of Nagpur University in India organized a 101<sup>st</sup> Birthday Celebration and Conference for Steinbeck titled, “Multidimensional Steinbeck: New Millennium Perspective.” The conference was held 27 February 2003 in Nagpur, India.

(Submitted by SS)



### YOU CAN STILL GET A FEW KICKS ON ROUTE 66

“Even though the ‘Mother Road’ is now somewhat of a forgotten relative, there are still plenty of unique landmarks worthy of pit stops.”

...

“The last leg of the Mother Road runs from the top of the Cajon Pass, through the Inland Empire and on into Los Angeles, through downtown, finally ending in the coastal breezes of Santa Monica.”

At the Summit Inn on top of the Cajon Pass you can order “date shakes, ostrich burgers and the house specialty, the hillbilly burger.” The first McDonalds is in San Bernadino; the Wigwam

Motel in Rialto is “one of three such motels in the country and along the route, but takes a less subtle approach to beckoning customers with its slogan, ‘Do It In A Tee-Pee’”; and there is the “last remaining orange-shaped juice stand in Fontana.”

(Danielle Samaniego. *Inland Valley Voice*. 27–28 July 2002: B1, B3. Submitted by Robert Morsberger)



On 22 January 2003, newsman Dan Rea from WBZ TV in Boston, reporting on the severe weather hitting the Northeast, described it as “The Winter of Our Discontent.”

(Submitted by Groneman)



Reviewing a recording of Frank Lewin’s *Burning Bright* in the June 2002 edition of *Gramophone*, Donald Rosenberg writes: “The original play has faded into relative obscurity, a fate that Lewin’s opera doesn’t deserve. This recording reveals his *Burning Bright* to be an affecting work of rich imagination.”

(Troy 469/71 93 minutes: A6 Submitted by Ditsky)



In her review of a current production of *Of Mice and Men* entitled, “Buddy Drama,” Ellen Pfeifer summarizes Steinbeck’s popular drama thus: “Less a piece of social criticism than *The Grapes of Wrath*, the tale is about the failed pipe dreams and doomed relationships of ordinary men.... the migrant worker’s most commonplace yet seductive vision [is] a little piece of land to own and farm.”

(*The Boston Phoenix* 28 March 2003: 7. Submitted by Arthur Krim)

## BOOKS AND CHARACTERS

### THE MATUSON REVELATIONS BROADSIDE

*John Steinbeck on Matuson Revelations*. That’s the title of a broadside referred to in *Author Price Guides* compiled by Allen and Patricia Ahearn (Dec. 1995 edition). In nearly 40 years of collecting anything by or about Steinbeck, I’d never heard of it. What is a “Matuson revelation” anyway? There is no “matuson” in my dictionary or encyclopedia. The Ahearns kindly responded to my inquiry that they had taken the reference from

a dealer catalog but knew nothing further about the broadside. It remained a mystery to me for some time.

One of an author's worst enemies is the typo. This was a typographical error. The reference should have been to "Matu-sow." That was the name of the government's star witness in the McCarthy hearings who testified that he was a communist and then named many others whom, he said, were as well. He later recanted that testimony, and a furor arose about when the liar had lied and when (if ever) he told the truth. Steinbeck's article about this sorry chapter of our history is "Death of a Racket" in the 2 April 1955 issue of *The Saturday Review* (26). The broadside was a promotion for that issue. The sleuth who solved this mystery is Jim Dourgarian.

(Submitted by Kenneth Holmes)



On 16 November 2002, *The New York Times* reported that "Text-book-Novels Help Keep Classes Awake In, Say, Econ 101." *Saving Adam Smith*, for example, "has found its way onto reading lists in economics courses at Rutgers University, LaSalle University, the University of Richmond, and a handful of other colleges around the country." But Professor Deirdre McCloskey, professor of economics, history, and English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, "prefers serious literature to the narrative textbooks." She, after all, "got into economics because of 'Grapes of Wrath' and Joan Baez."

(Patricia Cohen, A17, A19. Submitted by SS)



A poll conducted by Robert O. 'Doc' Burgess of the Western Writers of America was sent to "writers, authors, editors, historians, newspaper and magazine columnists; professors of English, creative writing, and history, physicians, lecturers, screenwriters, book reviewers and critics" to submit their favorite characters from fiction through the ages. Odysseus was #1; Lennie Small #20; and Tom Joad #36. Burgess writes, "An unflinching look at the Great Depression and the effect of class in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, *Wrath* unveils a duplicitous protagonist Tom Joad. Doing what he can to stay alive, he makes us wonder what we would do in desperate circumstances."

(<http://www.sweetwaterpress.net/sweet6.htm>. 12 June 2002. Submitted by Groneman)





Rodney Rice heard this on Garrison Keillor's "Writer's Almanac": "It's the birthday of novelist John Steinbeck, born in Salinas, California (1902). His most famous novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize. The novel tells the story of the Joads, a poor Oklahoma farming family, who migrate to California in search of a better life during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Through the inspiration of the labor organizer Jim Casy, the Joads learn that the poor must work together in order to survive. While he developed his writing career, Steinbeck worked many jobs, as a manual laborer, a caretaker, a surveyor, and a fruit-picker. Steinbeck set much of his fiction in and around his birthplace of Salinas. He wrote *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), about Lennie and George."

(February 2003)



In a *New York Times* article, "Graham Greene's Unquiet Novel," Martin F. Nolan writes: "The book endures, having served as a journalistic guidebook, a prophecy and even a tourist icon. Banned in Vietnam in the 1950s, 'The Quiet American' is now sold at kiosks in Ho Chi Minh City as a symbol of local color, like 'Moby Dick' on Nantucket or 'Cannery Row' in Monterey."

(20 January 2003; Bt. Submitted by SS)



"VARIATIONS FOR FOUR HANDS ON A THEME BY TOCQUEVILLE"

In the series "Writers on Writing," Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster discuss collaboration: "When we set out nearly three years ago to do 'In Search of America,' our newest book, we joined a grand tradition in journalism. All literary works of any depth aim at taking the reader on some kind of trip...the journey book is a classic form of the reporter's craft."

...

"Those of us who undertake the challenge to redefine America work in the shadow of some stunning past achievements: in recent decades Richard Reeves, John Steinbeck, and Luigi Barzine (to name a mere few) all told us something important about the America of their time. Still, any modern

American journey book must suffer the inevitable comparisons to the great Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville.”

(*New York Times* 27 January 2003: B1, B5. Submitted by SS)

## FROM STEINBECK COUNTRY

“ANCHOVIES, SARDINES SEEM TO TAKE TURNS THRIVING: STUDY FINDS PACIFIC CYCLES ALTERNATE EVERY 25 YEARS.”



Monterey Harbor, circa 1940. Photo by Al Aagard.

“One such event was highlighted by John Steinbeck in his book ‘Cannery Row,’ set in coastal Monterey, amid closing canneries when the sardines disappeared.”

(10 January 2003: A5. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Submitted by Herb Behrens)



“BOOK-THEFT SUSPECT POSED AS TRANSIENT”

“Staking out the lobby of Palo Alto’s upscale

Westin hotel, San Jose police officer Ken Munson waited to see who would approach the front desk and ask for an overnight package from Massachusetts.

“Inside was a rare first-edition copy of John Steinbeck’s Pulitzer Prize-winning ‘The Grapes of Wrath,’ purchased by phone for nearly \$6,000.

“But police say the rumpled fellow in slacks and a baseball cap who claimed the package was not a rare-book connoisseur in town for this weekend’s Antiquarian Bookseller Association fair in San Francisco.

“He was a thief who allegedly used a stolen credit card number to buy the original bestseller and reserve a room at the hotel where he planned to pick it up, police say.

. . .

“On Jan. 28, a man ordered a first-edition copy of Steinbeck’s 1939 classic hardship tale of Dust Bowl migrants from Massachusetts bookseller Ken Lopez, the Antiquarian Booksellers’ president. The 50,000 first-edition copies are worth \$2,000 to \$10,000, depending on condition and whether they are signed, Sanders said.

“The buyer appeared to know something about books. He talked the price down from \$6,500 to \$5,850, and had the book sent overnight to the Westin Palo Alto, Munson said.”

(John Woolfolk. SJ *Mercury News*. 8 February 2003: B1, B6. Submitted by SS)



“The Tower Connection: A Newsletter for members of the *Tribune* Go-Getters Club,” a monthly journal for former employees of the *Oakland Tribune*, published a story on Steinbeck in their March issue. “Steinbeck in the Trib? A Summer of Discontent,” suggests that Steinbeck was employed by the *Tribune* as correspondent for the Republican Party’s national convention in 1956, but that his articles were never printed in the *Tribune*, due to his satirical view on proceedings that were considered sacred by the paper’s powers-that-be.

[Editor’s note: Those columns were, of course, commissioned by the Louisville Courier-Journal and printed in that paper. Steinbeck was not hired by the Oakland Tribune.]

(Vol. 16, No. 1: March 2002. Submitted by Thomas York)



In an article entitled, “Writing project has ‘Red Pony’ focus,” *Salinas Californian* reporter J. Michael Rivera describes a new program in Monterey County aimed at improving junior high students’ writing skills. “The project was created to provide an opportunity for students across the county to explore the excitement of writing, enhance their writing skills and introduce them to the works of Steinbeck.” [Students wrote their own essays on an experience like Jody’s and “writing coaches” from the area spent a morning going over essays with an individual student and then having lunch with the student.]

(10 May 2003. Submitted by Carol Robles)

## STEINBECK AND CENSORSHIP

### BOOK TROUBLE II

“A group of Ohio parents wants to remove John Steinbeck’s novel, *Of Mice and Men*, from the local high school reading list because of the ‘low down rotten filthy’ language it contains, reports the *Wilmington New Journal*.

“Lloyd Caldwell, whose granddaughter was assigned the book for a freshman English class at Blanchester High School, called on the board to take it off the list. Currently, students whose parents object may be assigned another book instead, but Caldwell wants everyone to be assigned another book.

“‘There’s words on there you wouldn’t say to a drunken sailor,’ Caldwell said. ‘Every page in this book except four, and that’s right at the beginning, has swear words of one nature or another—and some of them are just dern right, down rotten filthy.’”

(“Banning Books, Dying Birds, Dissing Dixie” Scott Norvell. Fox News Channel. 3 February 2003. 1–2. Submitted by Miles Barnes and SS.)



High-school teacher Janice Stickley-White recently contacted the editor, fearing that Steinbeck’s novels, among others, will soon be encountering censorship attempts. “In our area [Southern California] a band of parents formed and dubbed themselves ‘The Parent Review Board.’ They developed a website and on it have begun to review nearly every work of literature that we teach at our high school...including *Of Mice and Men*, which the site notes as having ‘animal torture,’ and *Grapes of Wrath*.” (1 April 2003. Submitted by Janice Stickley-White)

The National Coalition Against Censorship reports in a recent newsletter that “John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* was challenged recently at a high school in Grand Valley, Michigan, by parents who complained that the novel contains words and phrases students are prohibited from using by the school official handbook. The school district rejected the request for banning, explaining why the classic novel is widely taught, how students are prepared to read the book, and that parents may ask for alternative reading.”

(17 January 2003. Submitted by Ingrid Reti)



The Fall 2002 issue of *Weber Studies* includes a memorial statement about Louis Owens: “Louis’ association with *Weber Studies* began in the [sic] 1997 when—as an American Indian novelist of Choctaw and Cherokee ancestry—he began work on a special issue on Native American Literature guest-edited by him. With remarkable dedication and delight, he saw the issue to its publication in 1999 (including a wonderful essay memoir on growing up with his brother Genen), and since that time he has served as a member of our editorial board frequently called upon for his professional opinion.” (Submitted by Robert DeMott)

**GRAHAM WATSON** 8 JUNE 1913–14 NOVEMBER 2002

“Literary agent who took a personal interest in all his authors and who watched the growth of corporate publishing with unease.”

...

“Graham Watson was a central figure in the postwar book trade in Britain and America, an age when publishing was still largely a matter of family firms and gentlemen publishers.”

...

“He was an immensely genial man with an instinctive love of books, and his approach to publishing was straightforward: it existed to serve the interests of authors without whom, he maintained, it was nothing.... As he wrote in his autobiography, *Book Society* (1980): ‘There is probably no other professional activity which brings one into contact with so many agreeable people.’

...

“The list of his clients was as varied as it was distinguished. Among his authors were Daphne du Maurier, Elizabeth Longford, Antonia Fraser, Richard Gordon, Malcolm Bradbury, Harold Macmillan, Wilfred Thesiger, Randolph Churchill, and C.P. Snow. His American clients included Gore Vidal, John O’Hara, Martha Gellhorn, and the Nobel Prize winner, John Steinbeck.”

(*The Times*, London. 16 November 2002: 8. Submitted by Jenny Boston)

## STEINBECK AND THE NATURAL WORLD

In the online “Sea Slug Forum,” Peter H. van Bragt posted an entry on tasting sea slugs with excerpts from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. The excerpt describes Ed Ricketts’s experiments in eating a succulent-looking nudibranch only to discover that it was not as tasty as it looked: “He reached under water and picked up a lovely orange-colored nudibranch and put it in his mouth. And instantly he made a horrible face and spat and retched, but had found out why fishes let these living tidbits completely alone.”

(<http://www.seaslugforum.net/mucus.htm#m5340>. Submitted by Peter H. van Bragt)



Roy van de Hoek, teacher of Marine Biology, recently wrote to praise the inclusion of “My War with the Ospreys” in *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction*: “I’m no longer on Catalina Island, but the Osprey has been returned to Catalina. They bring young osprey there to be raised. It won’t be long before they grow up and begin the tradition of ‘year-round’ Osprey again on Catalina. When [the SJSU Center] helped me with finding the article, several years ago in 1996–1997, it began the education program for the residents of Catalina to support such a program of Osprey recovery. SO THANK YOU. You played a part in that recovery of the Osprey.”

(6 May 2003. Submitted by SS and Roy van de Hoek)



An April 9<sup>th</sup> L.A. *Times* article entitled “It’s Something Exceptionalist,” referred to Steinbeck’s essay in *America and Americans*, “Paradox and Dreams,” as follows:

“In an essay titled ‘Paradox and Dreams’ John Steinbeck described the American dream as ‘our vague yearnings toward what we wish we were and hope we may be: wise, just compassionate, and noble.’ For our national political debate to bloom and bear fruit, for it to be worthy of all that is at stake, these wishes and hopes will have to be nourished. The choices offered to voters will have to acknowledge, as Steinbeck added, ‘the fact that we have this dream at all is perhaps an indication of its possibility.’”

(John Balzar. Submitted by Ingrid Reti)



“... AND THOSE WHO LEARN FAKE HISTORY WILL REPEAT LIES”

In an article on historians and plagiarism, Suzanne Fields notes that “Another kind of disease may be afflicting the study of history. In its current issue, the *New Criterion*, a journal edited by Hilton Kramer, which prides itself on exposing ‘intellectual mendacity,’ examines two books and brings out the hidden pictures that contain falsehoods.



Monterey Harbor,  
circa 1940.  
Photo by Al Aagard.

“One of the volumes is the ‘Encyclopedia of the American Left’ published by Oxford University Press. It was selected by Choice and Library Journal as one of the 10 best reference books published in 1990.... The other book under scrutiny is John Steinbeck’s famous novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

“Unfortunately for the reputation of the author...writes Keith Windschuttle, ‘there is now an accumulation of sufficient historical, demographic, and climatic data about the 1930s to show that almost everything about the elaborate picture created in the novel is either outright false or exaggerated beyond belief.’”

(Tribune Media Services: 21 June 2002. Submitted by Groneman)

**CORRECTION:** In the last issue, it was reported that Katie Rodger called the California Academy of Sciences in order to have SJSU’s Ricketts’s specimens examined. In fact, it was Maureen Bourbin of the Exhibits Department who was responsible for pointing out to us that our Ed Ricketts’s specimens were in desperate need of preservation, and she suggested we speak to a scientist at the Academy and recommended Dr. Van Syoc. I apologize for not mentioning her role in the original article; her help and interest were invaluable in preserving this valuable material.