

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 24

emrsociety.com

June 2023

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 2023

DANIEL PIZAPPI

My friends and fellow Robertsians, It is my pleasure to write to you at this momentous occasion as we approach the 25th anniversary conference of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, to be held in Springfield, KY on July 2-5, 2023. As I reflect on my time as president of this Society, I am struck by how much has changed since I first accepted this position a few long years ago. I remember naively assuming that things would continue much as they had for the past two decades, perhaps with a few minor changes here and there to modernize our practices. And then of course we were met with the untimely passing of our dear friend and founder, H.R. Stoneback. I won't pretend that I was particularly confident in our Society's future at that moment.

I remember attending Stoney's funeral, standing by the church in Port Ewen, in the mud of the little graveyard in Esopus, looking through leaf-bare woods past his grave to see Black Creek running quietly, and telling people that day that all I wanted to do is keep the wheels on our little Society until the 25th anniversary. After the funeral, I walked back to my car and changed my mud-caked shoes for a pair of dry boots. When I got home, I left those shoes in my garage and they sat there for a long time. In fact, it was only a few weeks ago that I finally got around to cleaning the mourning mud from those shoes.

As I did so on an April morning, I couldn't help but wonder if the trout had started to dance yet in that creek beyond Stoney's grave, as he wrote they would in his song "Lord Let Me Live by the Hudson."

(cont. on page 2).

THE XXV ANNUAL ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS CONFERENCE: JULY 2-5, 2023

St. Catharine Motherhouse—
Springfield, Kentucky

This year we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference in Springfield, Kentucky. As we have done for the last quarter century, we continue to welcome papers that explore Roberts' works through a wide variety of perspectives and lenses.

This might include papers that deal intertextually with Roberts and other writers: especially Roberts and Modernists; Roberts in the context of European and Trans-Atlantic literature; Roberts and other Southern writers; Roberts in the context of the Southern Renaissance, regional and historical perspectives; Roberts and Religion; etc.

In honor of the occasion, we also welcome retrospective essays on the history and work of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, particularly the scholarship of our late founder H. R. Stoneback.

First-time reader response papers or essays of discovery and celebration from new readers of Roberts continue to be encouraged. Finally, we welcome papers on recently published works by Roberts, see Society website (link below) for details.

In addition to the society's other unique plans to celebrate the 25th anniversary of this conference, all papers will be considered for publication in a new collection of essays on Roberts that will be put together following the conference. Papers should be no more than 15 minutes in oral presentation. Paper sessions will be held at the St. Catharine Motherhouse in Springfield.



Direct all conference inquiries to
Conference Coordinators:
James Stament (Agnes Scott College)
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Check the Society website:
emrsociety.com for conference updates
and more information.

SOCIETY NEWS

- Daniel Pizappi received his PhD in English from the University of Tennessee in July of 2022. He continues at UT as a Postdoctoral Fellow.
- Adam Neikirk received his PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Essex in January of 2023.

(PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, cont. from pg. 1)

And today, I am pleased to report that just as enough saddle soap and polish were able to get those shoes back to serviceable after over a year of sitting in dry mud, we have more than been able to keep the wheels on the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society.

In some ways, as we approach our 25th anniversary, the Society is in better shape than it has been in a long time. Thanks to the tireless work of my fellow board members and other members, we have completed a revision of the EMRS bylaws; held our first modern, democratic, and virtual election process; instituted more regular board meetings; and completed a soon-to-launch (and much-needed) redesign of the EMR society website. We are planning a number of new-to-the-conference events for the expanded format of our gathering this year, and I for one am personally excited to hear from our keynote speaker, Danville, Kentucky native poet and educator Frank X Walker.

I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our board members, conference organizers, and newsletter editors for their hard work over the past year, including Amanda Capelli, Joe Curra, Goretti Benca, Jamie Stamant, Eleanor Hough, Phil Westcott, Nathan Lee, and Alex Pennisi.

However, I also want to emphasize that the future of this Society is still very much in all of our hands. It is incredibly apt that our own Jamie Stamant has proposed a roundtable discussion for this year's SAMLA conference asking "What Does the Future Look Like for Single-Author Societies and What Will Their Place Be in the Study of Literature?" (Please do consider applying and/or inviting friends and colleagues in other single-author societies to participate.)

Tides of change far beyond our control, within and without academia, have shifted the prospects and material basis for our own Society, for others like it, and for literary studies and the humanities more generally. If this Society is to continue for another 25 years, and I believe it should, it will require a collaborative effort, adaptability, and a willingness to respond to these changes and build a version of the Society that both honors its history and can and will continue to thrive, even as our positions continue to evolve around it.

As we look ahead to the next 25 years, I want to express my gratitude to each and every one of you for your dedication to the study and appreciation of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and her works. I encourage you to think creatively about how we can expand our membership, broaden our reach, deepen our impact, and to imagine what the future of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society can and should look like.

It has been an honor to serve as your president, and I look forward to seeing you all in Springfield this July.

Here's to the future of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, the Mad Ox Society, or whatever we continue to build together. It's worth it.

The Roberts Society is excited to publish excerpts from a forthcoming piece of developing scholarship by society member Nathan Lee (PhD candidate, University of Louisiana-Lafayette) on Roberts' 1928 novel *Jingling in the Wind*. In the following excerpts, Lee contextualizes Roberts' novel as a high modernist experiment in self-satire, farce, and "weirdness." He further argues for a continued revitalization and reevaluation of Roberts' place in both American and international letters.

(NB: "... " will mark where portions of Lee's larger draft have been cut to maintain brevity in the newsletter. Lee's Bibliography can be made available to interested scholars by emailing the NL editors.)

EXCERPTS FROM "AGAINST THE BLUE OF THE WELKIN": ON "LOSS", REVIVAL, AND WEIRDNESS IN *JINGLING IN THE WIND*

NATHAN LEE

Elizabeth Madox Roberts is no longer a lost author, if indeed she was ever more than at considerable risk of being one. Through the journal efforts of some scholars in the latter part of the twentieth century and the conferences and publications of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society over the past twenty-four years, a contemporary body of scholarship on her works is now better established than ever before. Yet she remains one of the more seldom-read of the American modernists. Gina Herring attributes this to Roberts' belonging to what Elaine Showalter called "the other lost generation". Herring notes that "according to Showalter, unlike the male high modernists characterized as a 'lost generation' because of their cultural and spiritual alienation, the women of the same era were *literally* lost—distorted, diminished, devalued, discarded". Herring goes on to establish that, while some of these women modernists shared the sensibility of alienation often attributed to the High Modernists, others, such as Zora Neale Hurston, "drew on life-sustaining, universal female experiences to write a literature of personal and communal affirmation, not alienation" (188). Herring goes on to compare Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with Roberts' *The Time of Man*: "both novels follow the lives of women marginalized racially and socially, and both were criticized in the 1930s because they didn't promote the activist social agenda of the era". Herring also finds that "both authors draw on and celebrate vital folk traditions, complicate conventional male and female plots and mythologies, and create strong women intensely alive to the possibilities of human experience" (189). The comparison is apt, but Herring admits in the introduction to her article that, while both novels share much in common, she doubts that *The Time of Man* will ever attain the readership that *Their Eyes* did, both due to Alice Walker's championing of Hurston after her death and the relative weakness of Robert Penn Warren's 1963 "literary endorsement" of Roberts' most well-known novel (189).

Herring's article is quite typical of what one finds in the annals of Roberts scholarship. There is almost always an acknowledgement, especially in earlier articles on her work,

of its relative obscurity and Roberts' place as what H.R. Stoneback termed a "lost modernist" for many years. More recently, the EMR Society has moved away from narratives of loss into those of revitalization. I trace the call for this shift to the publications of Matthew Nickel's "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Modernist" in *The Mississippi Quarterly* and the Roberts Society's publication of the essay collection *Keenly Aware of the Ceremonies of Place* in 2016. Nickel's article served to codify, on a larger stage, the catalyst of the EMR Society's ongoing discourse, placing Roberts alongside Joyce and Pound through the scholarship of Ford Madox Ford and Robert Penn Warren (414) and validating Roberts' most enduring novel by close reading through a high modernist lens (421). The essay collection sought to broaden Roberts scholarship for those seeking a more interdisciplinary or broader theoretical approach, particularly the then-youngest generation of Roberts scholars. As a further act in the project of those two publications, this paper seeks to further the discourse on what may be Roberts' least-read novel, a maximalist satire firmly in the modernist tradition, but sometimes stretching itself to the bounds of satirizing modernism itself, *Jingling in the Wind*. The goals of this paper, aside from increase of the scholarship on the novel, are to establish *Jingling* as a text that has too-often been wrongly characterized as a light diversion turned off in between more serious work, and rather as one that belongs on syllabi encompassing Weird Literature and to lesser-known early science fiction, social satire, and obscure modernisms.

As an object portrait of Roberts discourse stretching nearly back to the start, I will begin at the novel's frontispiece. The author of said blurb characterizes the narrator/author's (he does not distinguish) point-of-view as one of "amused detachment" and makes ample reference to Roberts' much-banded (even in 1928) "sensibility". Note that the copywriter of this frontispiece praises Roberts' "high place in American letters"(fp), which is, as one might infer from Herring's statement on the 1930's "activist social agenda" above, far from the reputation Roberts died with. It could be that *Jingling* was the first act in which the critics began to see her "female" sensibility and eccentricity as a deficit rather than an asset, but with the publication of *The Great Meadow* (and the rest) in the following years, that concern would have slept. Although the argument I put forth here may be at risk of presentism, there is a ring of misogyny to the frontispiece's "[*Jingling in the Wind*] should not be regarded [as a novel at all; it is a gay and mocking farce, turned off as a diversion from more exacting work; but the wisdom and humanity of the author's mind give it true meaning and timelessness" (fp). The narrative of a weak sensibility diluting Roberts' talent as she aged did pervade notions, both scholarly and popular, about Roberts' talents, with some notable exceptions, for much of the twentieth century, from her death in 1941 until the founding of The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society in 1998. In fact, it is one of the narratives that the Society is most devoted to disavowing in its mandate to establish Roberts' importance as a great author of international value.

....

There is much to consider in [the] piece of front matter, not

least of which is that it is the first thing someone considering the purchase of the book would see pasted inside the front board of the first edition. The copywriter giveth, and the copywriter taketh away. In one breath, he offers what I would rate as a fairly accurate appraisal of the novel's nature: there are indeed layers to this text, modernist striations that lie on a bedrock of Roberts' extensive reading both of classics, Victoriana, and her contemporaries, as well as her observations of cultural moment, such as her biting mockery of Billy Sunday and his ilk, satirized in the novel in the irascible figure of the Reverend Ahab Crouch. However, in the next breath, he praises "Miss Roberts", a spinster, schoolteacher, freshman at the University of Chicago at age thirty-six, and even in 1928 seen to be an outlier, for her "delicate perception". It is difficult not to read those two sentences as seeds of her undeserved latter-day obscurity, rooted in literary chauvinism, beginning to sprout.

....

Jeremy's song is briefly interrupted when he meets a snake who speaks in an Irish brogue, diaspora'd by St. Patrick. The first bit of out-and-out dialogue in the novel is between Jeremy and that snake. While it is emblematic of Roberts' humor, it also sets the tone by introducing, within the first few pages, a fantastical element that would only be at home in some of Roberts' poetry and not in any of her other novels (at least those that are in publication—there are rumors of a screenplay meant to adapt *Jingling* before the project was abandoned and some manuscript material of Roberts' planned sequel to the novel "Drusilla" [see Jane Eblen Keller's report in *Keenly Aware* 211]). This scene can be read as tossed off in comparison to the overall structure; a minor, though important, piece of scene-setting in the novel's opening idyll. While I am arguing that *Jingling in the Wind* should be taken up by serious scholars of the modernist satire, the book does have some disparate elements. The overall thematic structure is unified, but there are a multitude of apparently unrelated comic asides that close reading can only sometimes resolve as belonging to that thematic structure.

....

For all that the scope of this novel is maximal, with seeming digressions at many places with only the journey of Jeremy from Jason County to the metropolis, from country rain-reeve to the well-respected "Rain-Bat" of the final parade, the last act of the novel parallels a classical structure. I argue here that the beginning of the final act, coming after Jeremy's long employment in the horse-barn, functions as a katabasis wherein, rather than descending into hell, Jeremy ascends the floors of the Capitoline to Mr. Breed's suite. Breed is characterized in the Chaucerian episode of the novel as "the man in pepper-and-salt clothes" whose tale from that section I have written about elsewhere (*Keenly Aware* 103) represents something of the critique of modern agriculture in the narrative. At this point in the novel, Jeremy is well-aware that Breed is not as he seems. Preceding this section is a debate between two voices named "Man's Judgment" and "Woman's Intuition". Man's Judgment wonders that Breed should be at the Capitoline, the highest-pedigreed hotel in the capitol:

“But why the Capitoline?” asked Man’s Judgment, coldly. “He was attired in but modest salt-and-pepper clothing and bore the marks of a farmer or grower of some sort.”

Woman’s Intuition: The Capitoline. You’ll see I’m right. (194)

The ensuing debate sees Man’s Judgment bewildered in the face of so modest-seeming a man lodging at “the most costly hostelry of the city”, casting about for explanations as to how a modestly attired man might attain the status of a guest there. This is germane to the novel’s humor. Very often, and especially in Jeremy’s case as the narrator establishes from the first chapter, the philosophy of men is made comical, not to say impotent, by the vicissitudes of reality and the wisdom of women. It is so prevalent in the novel as to be a leitmotif, as it can be seen in the parallels to the *1001 Nights*, the relationship between Jeremy and his sister-in-law, Josephus’ difficulties in his long story of the city, Bolingbroke’s story of the clever wife, &c. Woman’s Intuition replies to Man’s Judgment’s pondering “Go on to the Capitoline and quit arguing” (195). The reader does well to remember that this dialogue takes place in Jeremy’s mind, right before he reaches the Capitoline and Mr. Breed’s suite.

....

As far as Roberts’ beliefs evident in the text and the possible futures of this novel, this paper has focused in some wise on suggestion, but the scope of those questions goes well beyond what is possible in twenty pages. While examining authorial intention in this case is likely to be an exercise in futility, a study of agency that touches upon each of the major characters suggests itself, based on the moral structure of the novel’s final passage. It is unfortunate that we do not have ready access to the manuscript of Roberts’ planned sequel, but what we do have invites close reading and contextual research just as much as it resists classification as anything but a singular, if flawed, satire by an author whose imagination was never less constrained than on its pages. If the frontispiece disrespects Roberts’ powers of art, readers can now interrogate those powers beyond its perspective in an attempt to strike at wherever the heart of this novel may lie. It was more than turned off as a diversion. Roberts planned, according to my conversations with her biographer, a sequel about Tulip Tree and Jamie’s children. Roberts would read aloud from it to her friends and have to pause from laughter. It may have started as a diversion from her “more serious” work, but I have presented evidence here that in so doing Roberts created, whether intentionally or no, one of the most compelling and difficult modernist satires to be as little known as it is. This argument is not to court canonicity, but in hopes to draw some attention to this least known and discussed of her works, hoping to pique the interest of the broader audience that Roberts scholarship has sought for decades.

So It Goes

AUTUMN HOLLADAY

Sometimes I think about Dena Janes walking down the road, eyes awake even when they seem shut, saying to herself, *I’m alive so I got the right to live then.*

It’s not a song like *I’m a-liven!*
It’s a compromise, a refuge, an oath;
for what is this life but a series
of dazzling tragedies?

For when you’ve experienced more
than you could want,
learned the shapes of evil,
heard the dog that hoots like an owl,
and still continue to walk.

I’ve told the tale of Rue
the one-eyed rooster who fought a bear.
I’ve rubbed the legs of a goat
who could not walk until one day she could.
I’ve fed the goose who sat on an egg
that never hatched.
I’ve marveled at praying mantis’ eyes,
how they blend among the mum buds.
I’ve cared for a 60 year old orchid
whose flowers are the color of mauve
whose roots hang as fragile as spaghetti.

And even though I loved it all,
I sometimes forget
like names, birthdays, doctor’s appointments,
the first “r” in February...
In the midst of pandemics, funerals, hospitals,
nightmares, hurricanes, floods, droughts, gunshots, car
crashes, loss of bodily autonomy, and whatever the hell
shows up on my newsfeed.

But every morning, I walk to my car
on my way to work and there at the door,
there at the gate, there under the tree
a spiderweb catches me.
I rub my forehead, my arms,
I try to get it off. It’s annoying
like a strand of loose hair on my skin.
I feel it, but I cannot see it.
Every morning.

And every night, there at the door,
there at the gate, there under the tree,
the spider crawls and spins its web for me
saying, again and again,
I’m alive so I got the right to live then.

“FAREWELL, FAREWELL”

MATTHEW C. NICKEL

I. At my door the leaves are falling

It has been a little over a year since his passing. I remember the day he died, seeing the missed call from his son, Rick. And then another from Ed. I knew it. I was out with my son in the woods uncovering a bear skull and we had found some teeth in the soil. That was when Rick called, but I missed the call. The bear skull was quite something. When I got back in, I called Rick, and he said, “Not a good day, Matt.” I knew when I saw the missed call, so I was not surprised. I didn’t cry right away. I didn’t cry for a long time after. But later that afternoon, I was across the street cutting up firewood and hauling it to my truck to take up the driveway and split. As I carried each log out of the woods, a distance of about 30 yards, I couldn’t stop saying over and over the prayer of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, “For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.”

It has been over a year now and I can cry. The loss is very big. Those of us who know can understand. It is a complicated loss, and almost everyone who has experienced that complication is unified not only in how he touched our individual lives but in the community of spirit, the binding resonance made manifest through his effect on us and now the vacuum of that effect, essentially, the loss of his presence. He was there and now he is not.

It has been a little over a year, and I think there are still some things to say. I am writing now simply because I must. There is a void with him gone, even for those who had not seen him in years. He was somehow just always there, even when we weren’t there in his kitchen, drinking his wine, talking over a pipe. Just after he died last year, the President of the Hemingway Foundation and Society, Carl Eby, wrote to me asking if I’d like to offer a few words. I was technically still a board member for one more week. I was unable to even think straight about what I could say. There was so much to say, yet I had no desire to say any of it publicly at that time. It was too close. I told Carl, “almost everything I’ve written in the last 18 years has been for Stoney, so right now we can let someone else say something.” And it was true: most of what I had to say in the majority of my scholarly work was directly or indirectly in praise of his work, his life, his teaching. Stoney was the main subject of three of my conference papers at three different conferences in 2018 alone. So, when he died, what more could I say—hadn’t I been saying it for almost two decades already? Well, it turns out there are a few things left that must be said. This may be a little personal, but I learned after years of traveling with Stoney that we cannot get to the general, the universal, without starting with the personal.

II. The picture of my face, reflected on the pane

Most people who knew Stoney knew him as in a photograph. They knew the photographic moments in which being with

Stoney was caught up in the excitement of an experience, usually in a spectacular place like Paris or Provence, a poetry reading in the Eiffel Tower, a bullfight in the Nîmes arena, a song in the sun of Gravel Switch. For some, it will be a dinner, a banquet, a speech. A keynote in Louisville, which rocked the academic world. A wheelchair bound paper on love in Stresa. Closing remarks on the Seine. For others, it will be a song in Spain or maybe Key West on a boat ride, with Sparrow in China, without Sparrow in Kansas City, for his students in New Paltz. For some others it will be a class, a lecture on Hemingway or Faulkner, a midterm with a curve—thank God for the curve—a thesis, a conference paper, a last class party at his house playing boules and drinking wine. Around the world, there will be those in moments on cruise ships or in cafes, in libraries and at sacred places, those lost soldiers of World War II, the forgotten tourists who became pilgrims in his presence. There are even those from Asbury college reunions, camp meetings, others from South Jersey and Philly and Camden once upon a time. Songs and feasts and poems and lectures. These are the photographs. These are the photos that bind us amid the moments of our scattered lives.

For a select few, there was more than your average photograph. There were liner notes. There was a story behind the images that most people collected. There was that fish once and we know the fish keeps getting bigger in each telling of the story and we expect it and we love him for it. There were the caravans and papers and presentations in the South, all the nights drinking and singing in hotels, strange colleges, streets and parks, the waiting until 2 am to stop for food because there was that place once just over that hill. There were the songs, new and old, with Sparrow and after. There was the river cottage and West Park, Marcells, Burroughs and Riverby, the Monastery, Krum Elbow and the River, white sails. Vandy and Nashville, the recording studios, folksingers, protests and parks and Fugitives. New Orleans and jail and Bourbon Street and well. . . . Asbury and bluegrass and required chapel. Hawaii and surf and more songs and that disaster and the bloom of love. Rutgers and the dulcimer and the intimacy of an inner city. Secret restaurants in Philly, Atlantic City, New York, Paris. Gentlemen Clubs. Club life. Are you a gentlemen yet? Friends in unlikely places. One cannot know all of the moments or places, but those who have studied the liner notes, who are even mentioned somewhere in those notes, know the Stoney of the road of the song of the poem of the place.

And then there are the intimate few, the very close friends and family. We know the deleted passages that did not even make the liner notes. We have made the personal trips, we have studied the trip logs, and we know the secret moments of a life that we would never share with anyone, except maybe each other, and only on occasion. It is love that allows us to hold each moment, some even of betrayal, and keep them quiet and to ourselves. It is love that allows us to look at the man, Stoney, and love him, to love the whole person, despite his defects and to forgive him these even as we long for one more song, one more story. He was there and now he is not.

The world is a lonely place without H. R. Stoneback.

III. To meet the deeds that I have done

I met him first in the year 2000. It was one year since he had founded the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. It was the year he returned from Bimini, where he brought in the new millennium. I had read his *Singing the Springs* and I was there at Ariel bookstore in New Paltz for his opening of *Café Millennium*. I remember he called me his “neighbor,” because I grew up two miles from his home on Maple Ave. From the very first, I wanted to be in his presence. I would pass by his office in College Hall and wait for that whiff of pipe smoke. I’m sure he mentioned Roberts in that first class I took with him, something about how she should have been in the anthology, etc., etc. I did not read Roberts until three years later. I did, however, start reading another agrarian, John Burroughs, because Stoney said Burroughs was our “neighbor” too; he had lived up the road in West Park. I knew West Park, because I lived there with my mother when I was young. I used to catch the bus on the same road you go down to find Burroughs’ famous cabin, Slabsides. So, then I read Burroughs voraciously. He was a writer and a farmer and a neighbor too.

My world and Stoney’s world converged over the next two years in many ways until 2002 when it met for good. He was, by then, in a wheel-chair and barely able to walk. I would meet with him in his kitchen twice a week, lift him up from his wheelchair to stand in his upright walker. He would practice walking while I read poetry to him. At first he could barely make it across the kitchen. Eventually he started in the hallway, and I read from his staircase. That was where I recited *The Waste Land* to him. I believe he made 1000 steps that day. Sometimes Sparrow would make us a meal after. Once grad school began, I started driving him to class and Sparrow would make us sandwiches. Her ham salad was my favorite.

There was something in those moments—the tallest man in the world—a famous writer, poet, scholar, professor, entertainer—he was larger than life—he and Sparrow were a hit in China and I could barely order Chinese take-out. There I was, a quiet nerdy kid who liked to read and track animals in the woods and write awful poetry. Yet, there was something so unique and genuinely precious in those moments walking with him, an image of humility and love. God had bound us together for reasons I could not understand.

So, that’s how it was then in the beginning and with Sparrow. I made many mistakes. We all made mistakes. And then I went to Kentucky for the first time in 2003. It was only a two car caravan back then. When we stopped in Lexington at the Liquor Barn, Sparrow said, “Take off that thing and put this on. You’re in Kentucky now.” I took off my Mets hat and put on a University of Kentucky hat. Sparrow was always like that. She always watched out for me. She taught me a lot about love and loyalty.

I do not need to say what Kentucky was like for the first

time, because most of you reading this have had some similar experience on the road with Stoney. There was plenty of turmoil in my life then and I made some very poor decisions, but Kentucky was always there to balance out all the bad. Even as I entered the Hemingway world, I measured all conferences from Kentucky. When I left to live in France in the summer of 2004, I made sure to return in the Spring of 2005, so I could get back to the Roberts Conference. I lived with Catha Aldington in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, and I remember telling her I had to go home so I could learn how to grow leeks from Stoney and to get back to Kentucky in April. It was point zero in many ways. The Beaumont, the porch at Goddard, the singing and all-night drinking, and then those cheese grits to fill in the hang-over holes. I’m surprised we all stayed awake for Penn’s Store. That was before Gregg had fixed up the farm, so Penn’s Store was a longer day. Somehow all of these rituals mattered more than anything else. We always returned to Kentucky in April and we brought back with us the glorious spring.

I do not have many pictures of those years in Kentucky. It’s just there in my heart for always. That’s where we keep the people we have loved and lost so that when the photos fade and the crowd walks away, you still have a voice, a song, a poem ringing in your ears.

I did get home from France in 2005, and I learned how to grow leeks and garlic from Stoney. Every summer was spent growing things with Stoney and Sparrow. I was at their house probably 4-5 times a week then. It was idyllic. It was a beautiful hymn. I needed them so badly. Before I knew it, I had to leave to go get a PhD.

When I was packing to leave for Louisiana, Sparrow got sick. That was the summer of 2007. I had surprised them at the Bastille Day celebration with a festschrift, a book of poems for Stoney and Sparrow. We all read the poems. I look back at photos of that night and you can see Sparrow looking with *that* look. So, it broke my heart to be leaving then and especially when we found out she was sick. That was a really hard year for everyone.

When we had the EMR conference in 2008, she was at that Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville one month away from dying. I had driven north from Louisiana to sit in the hospital with her. She could barely speak. She said a few things that I wrote down, and years later after she died, and I went through my own tragedies, I was able to write a poem about that moment called “Death’s Duel,” which I later published in *The Leek Soup Songbook*:

Death’s Duel

April 19, 2008, Vanderbilt Medical Center North, Nashville, TN

7:30am

The room is in Nashville and there is rain
It is a cold day to have come this far north
From bayou country; I tell her about bayou
Country, though in dreams, she only hears
What the morphine tells her to say

there’s a fly on the wall

I want to tell her the look of Breaux Bridge
 And the shrimp and crawfish boils, dancing
 Wild-legged to a fiddle tune, how old men
 Look at their women like we were taught
 To look at the Virgin Mary, then turning
 As the accordion welcomes their boots to the wood
 That shakes and smells like rust and gumbo.

7:45am

I give up trying to talk for a time
 And watch sparrows tremble in a dogwood
 Not yet confident to blossom, and she turns
 Toward me, the window, I wait for her eyes
 To open though she only murmurs
cold, house-coat

I move like Lazarus unknowing
 Reaching for a robe, covering her, watching
 Lines on her face lead to her eyes:
 Who can decipher the hieroglyphics of pain;
 I fix tubes on her face, a comforting gesture,
 Feeling futility but hoping beyond blind
 Knowledge for a moment of humanity.

8:32am

She was sleeping when I started to talk
 Of fishing, the time I brought her my first trout
 Like an offering, bent humbled beside a skillet
 As she smiled, reaching for the herbes de provence,
 Listening like Saint Francis to my epic fishing quest
what's he saying, what

Then I sang for her, about coming to the garden
 Loving to tell the story, anything
 Not about dying, though in that room
 With the floorboards that made no sound
 When the nurses creaked over the lines
 I could only think how all good hymns have to die
 And we die with them if we are any decent at heart.

8:49am

It is better to lay down now she is asleep
 I think, until her small wrists and fingers
 Search for something, her fingers must hurt
 Thinking, I must hold them in my hands
 She is so small like an angel, her face is an angel
thank you
 Her fingers are cold; I notice the wrist band
 The date, never knew she was born that year
 She suddenly starts awake, eyes, her hands clench
 And I sing our song aloud and she hums
 "You don't need to say you love me, you don't need
 To lead me on . . . I been around enough to know . . ."
 Her eyes close, her breath small, I keep singing.

9:52am

The light on the wall moves upward chasing shadows
 Nurses must see the same refractions, poised
 Like a steady hand; I read her a poem about Our Lady
 But she does not move; I imagine how the Virgin
 Looks in nurse's scrubs, hair pulled back,
come here, listen
 Pushing a cart with a tray of food into the room,

"Here's your lunch, honey, I snuck you a jello"
 Bending over slightly to check the oxygen, tipping
 Her eyes at the closed face, winking at me
 Almost flirting-like with the inevitable smile; her voice
 Aloud is sudden when she tells me, "Come here,
 Son, I think she has something to say to you."

9:58am

Bending an ear to this hour of morning
 I feel her breath making a word and the word
 Is unpronounceable in the sterile air
 I want to shout a word for her, a word crying
 Alone in the desert for a name to call itself

you help him now

Finally her words touch, my hand around hers
 Smooths fingers, her words echo, *you help him now*
You, a word, an image slanting the window
 Made cold by the rain; she waits for my eyes to turn back
 From the empty dogwood tree; slowly, I kiss her cheek
 "Yes," I say, feeling the light reflected rapidly
 As dove wings touch the untouched moment in the dogwood.

IV. I'm only halfway home, I've got to journey on

Sparrow really loved me like a mother, and she knew I
 needed that love. So, when she was gone, I was very lost.
 Stoney was lost too. We stuck together then. We gardened
 more furiously, opened up new beds, grew more garlic,
 potatoes, leeks. I was loyal, to a fault. I would lay down my
 life for him. We did a lot of work together, and we traveled
 more after Sparrow died, all over. Road trips, Europe trips,
 even secret trips up into the Catskills.

After Sparrow died, I then went through a really rough patch
 myself back in Louisiana. That's why I decided to stay up
 north for the summer of 2009. That summer, Stoney and I
 took a great trip through South Jersey and Lancaster County,
 Pennsylvania. One night, we stayed at the Red Caboose
 Motel. It was a motel of linked railroad cars out in the middle
 of farm land and your room was a whole car. Stoney always
 just found places like that. He had a magic about him. We
 ate dinner that night in the dining car, and we sang Jerry Jeff
 the whole time about our aging waitress, "She's a railroad
 lady, just a little bit shady . . ." We drove all over Lancaster
 and South Jersey on that trip, and we ate the best roadside
 BBQ in South Jersey. We talked about Kentucky a lot as we
 drove through Lancaster and South Jersey. There was Camp
 Meeting and Cowtown Rodeo, and Camden and Strathmere.
 We were like some lost pilgrims trying to find our way
 back to holiness. Stoney had a way of moving in the world
 that made you sit up and listen. Not just his stories but his
 presence. He was so much more than his publications, his
 titles, and positions. He was great. He could sing the world
 and make it be.

That summer he started writing songs again with his new
 Roland electric piano, and as I was out in the garden, he
 would play. There was one piano sequence he played on the
 choir function that stopped my heart, and I ran up the porch.
 It sounded like angels. He knew I was there. I said, "That was
 it." He said it was a tough song to play. Later, when I heard

the words, I understood. “Sing it, Oh darling sing it, sing it for me.” Tears streamed down my face, fingernails caked with dirt. It was all caught up together, Sparrow dying, my own loss, gardening, poetry, Stoney, the road, and that song.

By that time I had already read almost everything he had ever published. It was in 2009 that he started sending me manuscripts and notes, often asking me to proof and offer extensive commentary. In those years, we talked seriously about me writing his biography and what its shape would be. We drove through small towns throughout the South, and he’d tell me when he arrived via freight train or hitch hiking in the 60s, what he did, what he played and with whom. The working title for his biography was going to be *Pilgrim: The Story of H. R. Stoneback*. His life was incredible, interesting, unique, but I wanted to capture more than just his accomplishments, his degrees and publications and awards. I want to show people the way he moved in the world, poised between Original Sin and the Holy Ghost. He had presence about him, which made the subject matter of the book more interesting than just a book documenting his scholarly work or his teaching accolades. It was a gift, a grace, that was worth telling about, because in the telling, the story of Stoney would really illuminate and praise the story of God, the source of all Grace. Often the notes he sent to me would say, “For bio,” etc. Because we were living fast and moving a lot, I never compiled all of the notes—I don’t even know where they are, having moved a half a dozen times since—and right now, thinking back, it seems like such a monumental task that I am not sure I can do it anymore. We just kept moving on down that road.

Kentucky happened again, the next year, 2010, and that’s when I met Jessica. I was living in a bad place then, metaphorically speaking, though Louisiana was as beautiful as the purple sky over burning cane fields. James Lee Burke used to say that a love affair with Louisiana is like falling in love with the Biblical Whore of Babylon. He was right. So, when Jessica decided to stay by my side, it was nothing short of a miracle. Of course, it was Kentucky, the center of it all, that bound us. We moved back to Highland the next year, more gardening, poetry, songs, road trips, with Kentucky always there.

Eventually, I got a job at Misericordia University. If I had not gotten that job, I would have started a garlic farm right there on the slopes of Krum Elbow, where we lived in Highland. We lived in the same house Stoney and Sparrow lived in when they first came north from Vanderbilt in the late 60s. This was just one of the ways in which my life intersected with his life. It happened like that for almost two decades, all the time. Like I said, God had woven us together, inextricably. That first year at Misericordia we missed the EMR conference, because our son was born, Charles, within a week of the conference. It was the last year at the Beaumont. Everything changed then, some things for the better. Stoney and I worked closer together than ever, which was a gift and a burden at the same time. We continued to garden. We traveled. We ran the Roberts conferences together from then on; he was preparing me to run them for him when he was gone. We published books together, collaborated

together, readings together all over.

It was about this time we started discussing seriously the possibility of running the Hemingway Conference in 2018. He ran for President of the Hemingway Society and won. So, we ran the biggest Hemingway Conference ever in Paris in 2018. It took years to make. Most of the events were his idea, and yet, I did a bulk of the work on the ground and in Paris. I do not need to recount here the events that led up to the conference. It was a great conference, and it was the most work I had ever done. And in accomplishing something of such magnitude, our lives were forever changed. We were never the same after 2018. There was no going back to the summer of 2009 just after Sparrow had passed. It was as if a door had closed, but before it had closed, I was able to get a glimpse of things I could not turn back from. So, we moved on. Many things moved on.

There is a mystery to our being, a puzzle that makes no sense. When we look at it head on, when we stare that mystery straight in the face it suddenly disappears like a mirage over the distant road. It is there but when we get there it is gone. I cannot quite put my finger on the mystery of all of it, how it was and then what happened.

All I know is that Stoney died. And the next week, I was dismissed from my position as an Associate Professor at Misericordia. And one week later, the farm we had been trying to acquire was purchased for us by an unknown benefactor. It was nothing short of a miracle, but with it came such loss and heartache, an inability to find closure amid the wreckage of what had once been an intense, complicated, joyful, and beautiful friendship. I will carry that heartache with me forever now, but with it, I will try to order this chaos into something beautiful—an act of praise—through a life of humility and love.

The First Thing I Learned to Grow Was Garlic

Dig and plant, and transplant . . . That soil on your fingers will make you hold your pen more firmly—more of the earth-spirit will get into your books.

John Burroughs to Edith Rickert

The first thing I learned to grow was garlic
draw a straight row, stay low, close to the soil
“the closer you are the better you know how things grow”

each row loosened clods trowel twisted holes for cloves
everything is economy of motion, details in order
like Hemingway, like Pound, with poised tension

“Like Burroughs,” I asked, kneeling for garlic
trying to be precise, breaking each clove from the head
without finger-bruising thinking of a poem

each word in its proper place *allium sativum*
each seed in the right soil; I pushed the cloves
root-side deep into black earth.

“Will this teach me to write better, planting,

growing things, tending—”
not right away

*but someday, stay attentive
 to the way things grow, the way weeds take
 hold, you must be a steward*

I tried to imagine writers in the garden with us
 Hemingway planting potatoes under mounds,
 Pound humming birdsongs, trimming all the plants

Burroughs teaching girls to transplant
 holding roots with thick earth hands
 holding hands with thick smiles and laughter

*order the chaos of wilderness, but know each action
 has consequences, then you will learn to conserve things
 and by knowing exactly how to love without breaking.*

The row was finished *the earth trembles
 and we must choose
 to move in it with infinite care and love*

a catbird touched a low branch, tilted its head
 and I pushed the loose dirt over the third row,
 thought of winter, the garlic’s long growth

under earth slow cold then sudden spring burst
 rising into sun, June scapes,
 Bastille Day harvest, always the same rhythm

*that is why ritual is so important,
 on my knees
 I bury the last of the cloves.*

“So we keep planting in case we lose something,
 we can grow this here and make the loss mean something”
 the wind shifted *yes, someone has to keep making it new*

above a red-tailed hawk circled the wind
*someone has to write the poems,
 to stay and tend the garden.*

V. Now and at the hour of our death

Now we live on an 18 acre mission farm in northeast PA, where we farm full-time. It is a daily rhythm of chores, hard labor, planning, execution, failure, and suffering. It also carries with it a joy beyond comprehension. I am no longer an academic, something that had defined me for two decades. I no longer care about literary club life, famous writers, Hemingway manuscripts, or international conferences. It is not there anymore. God just plucked it out of me, like that. Now, I’m just a farmer. As I write this, I have to calculate how much electric fence we’ll need for our pigs this year, what gates, posts, and how I’m going to move this pig hut made up of recycled old fence boards and a pallet. In the toil and muck of farm work, I am often reminded of *The Time of Man* and the life of Ellen Chesser, the rhythm of coming and going, living and dying. We do miss Kentucky, and somehow, the gift of Kentucky is still with us here. As we try to start a

farm from nothing, a farm whose mission is to grow food and give it away to the poor and religious orders, I wonder what Stoney would think now. Haven’t you all wondered that as well, if he could see us now?

This life too, farming, started as a gift from Stoney, when he first taught me how to grow garlic and leeks, when he told me our neighbor up the road was John Burroughs, that famous writer farmer. Stoney gave me two lives, interconnected, growing things and writing things, cultivating and teaching. They all go together. Every thing we did blended together like a perfect song. It is not as simple as saying “we were close.” It was more than even closeness. It was symbiotic. We grew together, together. And then one day, you can’t send him an e-mail, because he’s not there to get it.

How then do you say goodbye?

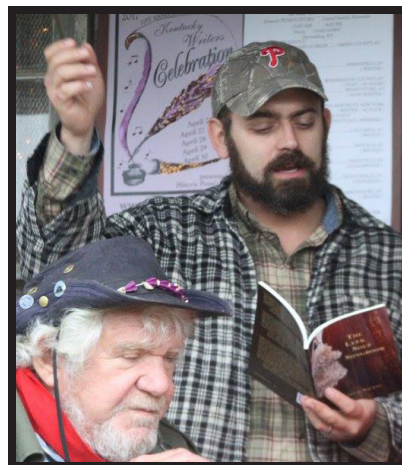
There isn’t a song I listen to, a place I go to, a seed I plant, a line I read, a tree, a flower, a cloud I look at, there isn’t a whole lot that I do that doesn’t remind me of Stoney. He is too caught up in my being to ever be gone for good.

Remembering can be liberating, but it is also a penance. It hurts. As I walk down the memory of every moment I spent with the man, every correspondence (we averaged 300-400 e-mails every year), every mile we drove on down that road (tens of thousands), every song, poem, all the weeds and seeds and garlic cloves, I pass by many joyous memories and there are some painful ones too. In the act of remembering, memorializing, someone whose mistakes we already forgave a long time ago, we must hope to make reparation for our own sins of omission. We must hope to forgive ourselves, and in forgiving, offer our memories, the good and the bad, to the Lord, for mercy, for Stoney. *For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.*

I still miss him. I miss Sparrow. I miss everyone. I miss the songs, the hymns, the smile, the hands, the eyes. I miss the hugs. I am sorry. I never got to say goodbye.

I love you Stoney, wherever you are tonight.

Matthew C. Nickel
 April 7, 2023 — Good Friday
 Divine Mercy Farm
 Pleasant Mount, PA



ON THE ROAD WITH STONEY IN *THE TIME OF MAN*

EVAN HULICK

It was EMR Spring 2014. My first convoy. He sat there with his pipe in the I-87 New Paltz parking lot. Cheshire grin on his face. Laughing joyfully. It was my joy to ride with him in the van that year. It turned out the last year the conference was held at the Beaumont Inn. Greg Bruno drove the van. I was still chicken-scared of highway driving in those days. I'd want Stoney to know that after his passing I overcame that fear and started driving myself to D.C., bravin' the Oranges, Turnpike, Camden neck of the woods, Delaware Memorial Bridge, and that whenever I pass through South Jersey, I belt out those P.P. Bliss hymns at the top of my lungs – "I Will Sing of My Redeemer," "Do Lord, Oh Do Lord, Oh Do Remember Me," "Victory in Jesus." It isn't lost on me that, if I was driving myself then, I wouldn't have been riding in the van with Stoney. God works in mysterious ways. Stoney's the man who helped me beat my fear into dust and squeeze my fist around it. Goonight, T.S. Eliot. It was all a matter of time.

I remember how wide and new the world felt, having freshly read *The Time of Man*. For me, it wasn't only a literary pilgrimage. Some may name it almost religious. There is a sacredness to the land Roberts evoked that Stoney helped me see. We went down on the convoy route to Frackville and down a long stretch toward Flatwoods. Stoney shared some of his salted hard-boiled eggs. Stoney explained the significance of the steepled city of Cumberland as we rode high into the mountains on the way from Pennsylvania through northern Maryland and out into West Virginia. He told the legend of the Flatwoods monster. I half-expected it to leap out of the woods at us, the way he told it. Jerry Jeff Walker had Stoney down to a T. We all squeezed onto Stoney's motel room porch and then had that first night at the Waffle Hut down the steep slope of the hill. I never had chicken fried steak before. Nothing's like the first time. Then a brief five hours of sleep later, we were off again. He told

all about the chemical plants of Nitro valley as we wound through West Virginia. We got to Hardee's for our burgers at Grayson, Kentucky, and I watched in awe as we passed into Bluegrass country. Before long, we were out at the horse farms of Lexington, and then we went down through the winding Kentucky River Gorge. Stoney told the tales of how many a driver never made it through, bewitched by its beauty. We popped out and passed what I did-not-yet-know-was-Shaker-Village and out toward Harrodsburg.

Stepping into the Beaumont Inn felt like time-travel. Suddenly, I was in the nineteenth century South. The shock and surprised look on my face when I learned I received the Sparrow Memorial Award. Sparrow had become a quasi-mythic figure in my mind from the grand tales Stoney told. Though I had never met her, and very much wish I had, part of me felt as if I had come to know her. That's the power of story Stoney taught me – more than any writer. He lived the tales he told. The power of language to keep the world alive across time as the Beaumont Inn preserved time as *The Great Meadow* endured time and yet remained much as it was: the deep green of the hills envisioned by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. The world blossomed. There was St. Lucy / St. Rose rising from the hills. Life was full of promise. Not was. Is.

Much time has passed since then. I'm reminded of the good, joyous things Stoney taught me: that there's life beyond this one, that there's always far more than we can hope to learn or know, and that life is always worth the living, come what may. No matter what he faced—from China to Cuba to the Suez Canal to countless other places—he held strong and true to the lessons that he taught us.

Innyhow, as Stoney says, I'll grip those things. It's all still there in *The Time of Man*. Make no mistake. For he taught me this: even now, he's there in the place with us. We may not see him with our eyes. So, let's close them. Let's raise our voices, listen, and we'll still hear him singing, "I'm here."



24TH ANNUAL ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS SOCIETY REPORT

AMANDA M. CAPELLI

The 24th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society was held in Springfield, KY from July 10-12, 2022. The conference began on Sunday evening with an opening banquet at Mordecai's restaurant where we enjoyed a traditional Sunday supper of fried chicken and other southern delights. Autumn Holladay was awarded the Terry Ward and Sparrow Memorial Award.

On Monday, July 11, we convoyed to Gravel Switch, meeting at the historic Penn's Store for a Memorial Tribute and Reading for H.R. "Stoney" Stoneback (1941-2021), graciously hosted by Dawn Osborne. Friends from across the state gathered on plastic folding chairs and blankets to pay tribute to Stoney through song, poetry, and prose. The event was emceed by Chad M. Horn. Afterwards, society members traveled to Roncevaux Farm for a private memorial and luncheon in honor of our founder.

Academic Sessions on Tuesday, July 12, started with Gregg Neikirk's moving keynote, "The Distinguished Influence of Professor H. R. Stoneback on Elizabeth Madox Roberts Studies," and then proceeded thusly:

11:00 AM—12:00 PM Session 1: Chair: Alex Pennisi

James Stamant (Agnes Scott College):
"‘She’s not of a mind to’: Medical Gaslighting and Roberts’ ‘The Scarecrow’"

Daniel Pizappi (Univ. of TN):
"‘The Time of Man: Pandemic Pedagogy, Perception and Psychotherapy’"

Gisèle Sigal (Université de Pau, France – Bayonne Campus):
"Leaving Home and Longing for a Home, an Odyssey through Rhizomatic Space in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s ‘The Mountainside’ and James Still’s ‘The Nest’"

1:45 PM—2:45 PM Session 2: Chair: Joseph Curra

Rev. Cynthia P. Cain (Independent Scholar):
"Erasure and Invisibility of Black Americans in Rural Kentucky: A Look at History and Literature"

Amanda Capelli (NYU):
"A New Cartography: A Proposal for the Continued Recovery of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"

Jane Dionne (Independent Scholar):
"Southern Female Short Stories: Influence on Females, Southern and Otherwise"

3:00 PM—4:00 PM Session 3: Chair: Amanda Capelli

Joseph Curra (Independent Scholar):
"Episodic Experiments in Shorter Fictions, or,



Consciousnesses Consciously Constructed: Observations on Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Her Contemporaries"

Autumn Holladay (UAlbany):
"Growing Up Like a Girl with Roberts and Ferrante"

Alex Pennisi (Independent Scholar):
Revisiting "The Haunted Palace" and *Not By Strange Gods*

Following the academic sessions, Dan Pizappi, James Stamant, and Amanda Capelli attended the Springfield City Council Meeting at City Hall to re-introduce the society to incoming board members and field any questions about the upcoming 25th anniversary conference.

The annual Business Meeting was held on Monday evening, under the big tent in the parking lot of the Springfield Inn, where we discussed the upcoming 25th anniversary conference and the future of the EMR Society. Two members who were unable to attend physically were able to participate in the meeting via Zoom. Highlights from the meeting minutes include:

Interest in publishing works on Roberts in conjunction with the 25th anniversary. This will be a new essay collection, either a book or a special issue of a journal (not a conference paper publication).

Interest in collecting Stoney's writings on Roberts and publishing them for the society. This includes past newsletters, keynotes, etc.

A Straw Poll to determine interest in shifting from an annual EMRS conference to a bi-annual model with a meeting at SAMLA in off-conference years following the 25th Anniversary. The vote result was 10 in favor/2 abstain.

The meeting culminated with a Rising Vote of Thanks and Moment of Silence for H.R. Stoneback for his years of service to the society and in remembrance of his legacy.

Special thanks to the 2022 Conference Coordinators, Daniel Pizappi and James Stamant, Program Co-Chair, Alex Pennisi, and Springfield Liaison, Laura Smith Haydon, for their hard work putting together the 24th EMRS conference.

THE ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS SOCIETY

*Elizabeth Madox Roberts home in
Colorado, 1913, via Explore UK*

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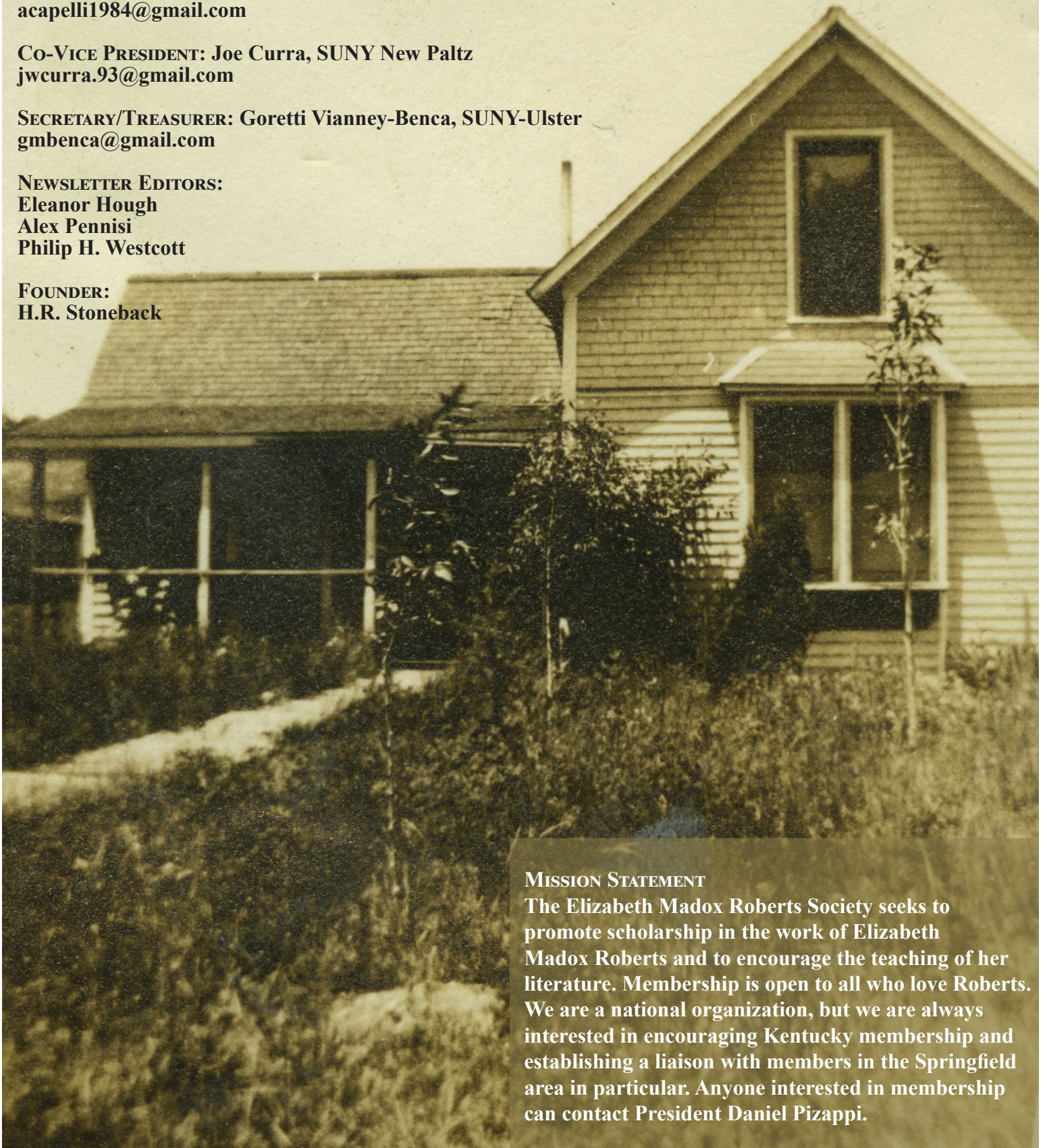
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MISSION STATEMENT

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 encouraging Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Daniel Pizappi.