

# Wayne Stater

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SUPPLEMENT TO  
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## IN MEMORIAM

We respectfully dedicate this special issue of the Wayne Stater to the memory of John Gneisenau Neihardt (1881-1973) and to those who knew and loved him.

John Neihardt was born near Sharpsburg, Illinois, on January 8, 1881. He was the third child of Nicholas and Alice Neihardt.

In 1886 the family moved to northwestern Kansas, and in 1888, they moved to Kansas City where John began his education. In 1891, he and his mother and sisters moved to Wayne, Nebraska.

At the age of 13, Neihardt attended the Nebraska Normal School, now Wayne State College. He graduated three years later with a Bachelor of Science degree at 16. His first book, "The Divine Enchantment," was published in 1900.

Neihardt taught in a country school for two terms. He then moved to Bancroft, Nebraska, where he worked as a bookkeeper and had many associations with the Omaha Indians. Later he edited a country weekly, the Bancroft Blade, for three years.

Thereafter he devoted his time to writing fictional and lyric verse, which earned him national fame. During this period he spent much time living among the Indians, and becoming an authority on their tradition and customs.

In 1908, he was married to Mona Martinsen (1884-1958), daughter of Rudolph Vincent Martinsen, sculptress and student of Rodin. They had four children, a son Sigurd, and three daughters, Hilda, End and Alice.

In 1912, at the age of 31, Neihardt began writing "Cycle of the West," his major work which took 18 years to complete. A legislative enactment made Neihardt Poet Laureate of the State of Nebraska, a title he retained all through his life, making his reign as Laureate the longest in recorded history.

He was literary editor of the St. Louis Dispatch from 1928 until 1938. Neihardt wrote his last book dealing with Indian life, "When the Tree Flowered," in 1951.

In 1958, his wife, Mona, preceded him in death. The poet spent the remainder of his life living with friends and relatives, teaching at the University of Missouri in Columbia, and touring and lecturing all over the world.

On November 3, 1973, John Gneisenau Neihardt died at the age of 92. Before his death, Neihardt gave an outlook on life that probably summarizes best his own life and works:

"Love is everything for without it all else is drab and meaningless."



*John Neihardt*  
1881-1973

# Little Things About 'Doc' Are Best Remembered

By Tom Allan

Omaha World-Herald State Reporter

Written for the Wayne Stater

When one remembers an old friend, the things that remain in the mind — and heart — are the little ones shared in the spirit of camaraderie.

The historians and disciples of lyric literature have chronicled the life and works of John G. Neihardt for posterity far better than I.

His books and his poetry are his monument. Reference books can detail his long list of doctorates and honors for generations of scholars and readers to come.

But only those privileged enough to know him can add another dimension, the completely human side of this little man with the flowing white mane who loved life so much.

Universal love and time is the essence of Doc's philosophy and his talent was making people come alive in history through the music of his words.

But to those lucky enough to have known him it was the little things — and perhaps in the realm of friendship, the most important — that made him Doc.

He used to admonish, "You can write it when you hear it in your heart." But how can one put into words the almost mysterious, yet beautiful, charisma he had with youth and animals?

How can one capture in words that well remembered chuckle, describe that humorous twinkle in his always bright eyes, his zest for a good joke of limerick, a cold beer at 10 a.m. and 3, his joy of craftsmanship and his deep spiritual insight.

It was 12 years ago, December 7, 1961, that he was "seized with consternation" — a remark made with a sly wink and that hearty chuckle — at having to say a few words at the unveiling of his portrait bust in the rotunda of the State Capitol at Lincoln.

## BUST IN HOUSEMOTHER'S BED

One of his favorite stories was one about another likeness of himself, the one lodged in Neihardt Hall.

My daughter Susie, a former Wayne student, had confessed being a part of such hijinks as placing the bust in the housemother's bed. Doc shook with delight thinking of the surprising consequences.

Perhaps he said it best that day when his bust was more formally imbedded in the capitol.

The thought of Tom Sawyer prematurely enjoying his own funeral had occurred to him and he lamented that there had been no precedent since it was an honor usually reserved for those long gone. Waving at the bronze busts of other greats in the Hall of Fame, he noted that with their "fixed bronze stares upon horizons that we cannot know, they seem to say 'No comment.'"

"But surely I have a rare advantage here today," Neihardt mused. "For I know the secrets of this image with its sphinx-like reticence. I know what visions are implicit in its seeming vacant gaze. And much of what I know has made me grateful beyond joyous laughter to express, and more, has made me humble beyond tears."

Those lucky enough to know him were privileged to know some of what made his laughter joyous and his tears humble.

I'm sure he would not think it sacrilege that two of the things I remember best are his "hog swill" and his "ghost dog." They are Doc in every sense.

Hog Swill? He loved to tell how a troubled student once came to him with the announcement he was quitting school.

"It's a lousy, stinking world," the youth said. "There is little to change it here."

Doc surprised him by agreeing, "You are absolutely right. It is a lousy, stinking world." Then he had the youth join him in writing a list of all the things wrong with the world. When the youth had finished, Doc prodded him to other additions:

## THE PICTURES ON PAGE ONE

This memorial edition honoring John G. Neihardt pictures him on varied occasions when he visited Wayne State College and his former hometown of Bancroft, Ne. Identifying photographs on Page 1, clockwise from top left: The Poet Laureate as pictured in the 1924 Spizz (WSC yearbook); his last visit to Neihardt Day in Bancroft, August, 1973; Neihardt at WSC alumni reunion, 1969; grinning husband Neihardt embracing bronze cast of bust sculptured by his wife Mona, at WSC in 1965; with Mrs. Julius Young, at WSC, 1969; The Sioux Prayer Garden in Bancroft; WSC commencement speaker, 1971; with then President W. A. Brandenburg, autographing a book at Bancroft, 1973.



JOHN AND JACQUO: Seldom separated for long years of the Poodle's life, Poet and Pet were apart for 32 days. Neihardt died November 3, 1973. Jacquo followed his master into the next adventure on December 5.

Then he asked him, "Son, do you eat hog swill? Do you eat garbage?"

"Certainly not!" said the youth.

"But you are, son," said Doc. "Let's sit down now and write a list of all the beautiful things, the wonderful things of this world. I guarantee you it will be a much, much longer list. So why partake only of the garbage of the world. Nourish yourself of the good so that you can strengthen yourself to help rid the world of that bad."

His "hog swill" story carried the same message as another he loved to tell, the cry of the eagle. When an Indian youth, despairing of his lot in a vision dream, wailed in anguish, an eagle soared past and in the voice of the boy's long-dead father cried "Hold fast, hold fast. There is more to come."

That was Doc's birthday message to youth on his 92nd birthday.

I've been with Doc on several treks into the country and was always amazed how he could have vicious farm dogs licking his hands with delight after a few soft words. Their masters couldn't believe it.

Although his "Ghost Dog" story was verified by Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Young of Lincoln, the friends with whom he'd made his home in his last six years and who witnessed it, he'd only chuckle when asked if he thought a dog's love reincarnate could live through generations.

"You tell me," he would say slyly.

## "HOLD FAST, MORE TO COME"

This much of the story is based on fact. In 1967 the Youngs took Doc back to Spearfish, S. D., for his first visit in 60 years.

When he departed six decades before, he left behind a girl with a saddened heart and a dog that had adopted him. The girl accepted love's fate. The pet, reflecting her, furiously attacked the engine of the train that had taken his beloved new master away. The dog died instantly. The girl buried the dog beside the tracks and erected a simple monument reading "John's Dog."

Sixty years later, when Doc returned with the Youngs to the site of his old cabin, another dog, a Shepherd with the same coloring and markings,

launched himself into Doc's arms, licking his face with unbounded joy. The dog's master was dumbfounded. He said the dog was vicious and had never taken to a stranger before.

When they left, the dog even trailed them into town several miles away, nuzzled through a door of a restaurant and streaked across the busy room to find Doc in a rest room.

## GREATEST HONOR CAME FROM OLD COWBOY

"I remember back those 60 years when the dog first came to me," Doc recalled. "He ran up and told me, 'I'm your dog.' I told him 'No, you are not.' But even though I took him back to his master, he wouldn't take 'No' for an answer. So we became good companions."

There was that hearty chuckle when I asked him if he felt that a dog's love for a man could last through generations of pups.

"Animals have always made me ashamed," he said. "They teach us humans more about love than most learn by the regular process. I believe there is a close relationship between mystical awareness and animals. The unanswered question is whether the love consciousness of the dog that died carried through the years."

"My good friend Hilda Black of Lakeside has told me, 'You and I know deep in our hearts it is so.' So have other friends. What do you think?"

Doc smiled when I answered, "I believe it if for no other reason than because I want to."

There is one more little thing I will always remember. I once asked this man who has gained more honors than any man could possibly hope to attain what he thought had been his greatest accolade.

There was no hesitation.

"One time after I had read of the death of Sitting Bull from the 'Cycle of the West' at a gathering in the Sand Hills a big old cowboy came up to me," he replied. "Towering over me he stood for a moment looking into my face, slapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Damn you, you made me cry.'"

Even to Doc the little things were remembered most.

# Poetry Was His Gift to World

By Debi Killeen

"He was most definitely an optimist." This is how Mrs. Mildred Jones, English instructor at Wayne State, describes John G. Neihardt. "Throughout his life he was a very humble, serious person. Neihardt was so busy with his work, he didn't have time to realize he was famous. Right to the day of his death, he was busy writing his autobiography."

"Dr. Neihardt spent his whole life doing the things he wanted and felt he needed to do. There were many times when he would become intensely immersed in his work. At one point in his life he was criticized for his "Song of Hugh Glass." Critics said it was impossible for his character to crawl as far as Neihardt had described. Neihardt, though, proved them wrong when he himself traveled the same route as this character on foot."

Life was not always easy for the young Neihardt. He grew up in a family where his father made \$35 a month as a cable car conductor. His mother took in sewing to help with the family income. During his college years also money was scarce. Mrs. Jones remarked, "He worked his way through college ringing the school bell. He would ring the bell whenever a class would end and another would begin." Neihardt also did some part-time janitorial work.

"One of his great loves," according to Mrs. Jones, "were the Indians. He was able to explain the plight of the Indians better than most because he understood them better. He was sensitive, as most poets are, to what was taking place around him and to these people he loved so."

"Most men work so that they can leave something to the rest of the world, something that might make them eternal. Neihardt wanted his poetry to be his contribution to the world."

## MRS. IDA MONSON REMEMBERS NEIHARDT

"Dr. Neihardt was full of life and ideas," according to Mrs. Monson, resident director of Neihardt Hall. "He enjoyed every minute of every day. If he experienced bad days, I was never aware of them."

Mrs. Monson first met Neihardt in the fall of 1966 when he occupied Neihardt Hall's guestroom. He stayed there for a period of two weeks while he was conducting a workshop on campus. During this time he seemed to thoroughly "enjoy the homey atmosphere and memories of Wayne State."

How did he react to his fame? Mrs. Monson replied, "He enjoyed the simple things of life the most, like home cooked meals, after dinner conversation, visiting with the girls in the dorm, and talking about his family." Unlike many who earn fame, he never forgot his old friends. When he would visit Wayne, he'd often visit with old acquaintances who resided at the Dahl Retirement Center.

Mrs. Monson treasures personally autographed books, Christmas cards, and personal correspondence from Dr. Neihardt. One unforgettable characteristic always comes to mind whenever she recalls his visits. "When he spoke, he had a gift for words that was simply unbelievable."



## Always Regarded Wayne 'His' College

By Debi Killeen

"I thought at once I had met a man of great humane feelings, as well as a person of tremendous aesthetic nature." This is how Dr. William Brandenburg, professor of history and former college president, describes his first impression of John Neihardt.

"I first met him in about 1958. The Nebraska Legislature was honoring him by placing a bust of him in the Capitol's Hall of Fame. My first impression of him was fortified in the years that followed. He was a very kind man, benign in the true sense of the word. He hated shame, insincerity, and materialism. Dr. Neihardt had a keen sense of humor in which there was more than a pinch of mischief."

Dr. Brandenburg went on to explain that one of his great loves was students. "He showed a great interest in both students and staff members. I think he still regarded this as 'his' college although he received many degrees and honors from other institutions more famous than Wayne State. Neihardt never declined an invitation to visit the college and he would pop in many times for alumni reunions and special events. His visits to Wayne continued through the last year of his life."

When Dr. Brandenburg was asked how he thought Neihardt would respond to the proposed renaming of the college if he were still alive, he replied, "I think he would be genuinely pleased, although not overwhelmed. Such an honor would not have affected him as deeply as an egotist, for instance."

Dr. Brandenburg remembers, "In my 17 years of being President at Wayne State, the finest commencement address was given by Dr. Neihardt. For 25 minutes he enthralled an overflow audience in Rice with his poetry. Twenty five minutes without a halt, never groping for a word, his memory perfect, his voice strong and musical. Dr. Neihardt was then 90 years of age. As I look back, I'm proud to say that Dr. Neihardt's friendship will always be among my most cherished memories of Wayne State."

Wayne State's Victory Bell, now enthroned on a stone pedestal, once tolled from the steeple of the original Nebraska Normal College structure, located on the site of the present Education Building. John Neihardt earned part of his NNC expenses by ringing that bell to signal class hours. In 1945, he chuckled with memories while ringing the bell again.



Neihardt mementoes fill his old study at Sioux Prayer Garden, Bancroft.

# Neihardt Sought Truth and



The Poet and his poetry: John G. Neihardt recites verses that enshrined him among immortals of world literature.

By Joe Mahan

Many times in history men who at the time were living rather normal lives have been given greater destinies by visions. Of them perhaps the most notable are Constantine, Francis of Assisi, Paul, and Charlemagne. It is not inconceivable to add to this list the name John G. Neihardt.

In 1892, Neihardt was living in Wayne, Nebraska, continuing what has been termed "a normal childhood" and dreaming of being an inventor or a daring sea captain.

## ILLNESS DESTROYS BOYISH DREAMS

That all ended when Neihardt became ill and was seized by a terrible fever. Dr. Neihardt explained what happened to him as no one else could in this passage from his autobiography "All in the Beginning":

"...one afternoon I fell. It came upon me suddenly and with little or no warning. The world tottered and began to rotate. Then there was blackness.

"When I came to, I was in bed, floating in a sea of light and my Mother, grotesquely distorted above me, holding something cold and wet on my forehead. I tried to speak to her, but she became someone I did not know and slowly dissolved.

"Then I was flying face downward, with my arms and hands thrust forward like a diver's. The vastness — terribly empty, save for a few distant, too dim and wearily remote ever to be reached — there was a dreadful speed, a speed so great that whatever lay beneath me — whether air or water — turned hard and slick as glass.

## DRIVEN BY 'GREAT VOICE'

"I wanted to rest. I wanted to go home. But I cried out in desperation, it seemed a great voice filled the hollow vastness and drove me on. It was something dear to leave behind, something I would never be overtaken. Faster! faster! faster!

"...It will be noted that there are two conflicting forces (in the vision), which may be interpreted as expressing the higher and lower conceptions of being; the simple satisfaction of common sense and the costly rewards of striving; the urgent obligation to give oneself up to be lost in something impersonal and bigger than oneself; the conception of living as a process of progressive wearing."

## SPIRITUAL STRIVING

Shortly after, Neihardt wrote his first verses, "Stubble Haired Boy." At the age of 13 he entered the Nebraska Normal College in Wayne and he graduated three years later he had taught himself to read Latin and wrote two epics of about 1,000 lines each.

The boy Neihardt had graciously stepped aside, allowing the newly inspired searcher for spiritual understanding to fulfill his destiny. From that moment on Neihardt belonged to all ages, seeking understanding, dreaming the dreams, and totally committed to his adventure, where he should take him.

By Joe Mahan

John G. Neihardt's interest in the American Indian began as early as 1900 when he moved to Bancroft, Neb., the hub of Omaha Indian activity. There he obtained his initial contact with Indian culture by working as a bookkeeper for J. J. Elkin, a local Indian trader.

During this time Neihardt would learn much of the Indian ways, observing and synthesizing the life style he would later so eloquently interpret to the white man.

He was very much impressed by the race that white men termed "savage." To obtain first-hand knowledge of the mystical qualities of the American Indian religion, Neihardt, through the Pine Ridge Agency, learned of an old Sioux preacher named "Black Elk," and with his son, Neihardt visited Black Elk in the spring of 1931.

"Within a half hour, after I met him he had chosen me as his spiritual son," Neihardt recalled, "and he seemed not only to know that I was coming but had expected me a long time." This experience resulted in "Black Elk Speaks," Neihardt's 21st book, published in 1932.

## BLACK ELK'S VISION

In the 1880's the desperate Indian race had come to believe that a Messiah would come to save them. These hopes were washed away at the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.

Many beliefs of the Indian religion were given to Neihardt by Black Elk and thus saved for posterity. Much of it is of Black Elk's vision and his long yearning for its fulfillment.

This is an excerpt from the book where Black Elk tells of his vision: "So I looked down and saw it (earth) lying yonder like a hoop of peoples, and in the center bloomed the holy stick that was a tree, and where it stood there crossed two roads, a red one and a black."

From this comes the design for the Sioux Prayer Garden, one of which is recreated in Bancroft. The garden consists of a large circle, or the Hoop of the World, which is divided by two lines into four segments each designating the quarters of the earth, each quarter having its own particular power and color.

## FOUR QUARTERS OF THE EARTH

The quarter of the West has the power to make live and to destroy. Its color is blue signifying the western blue rain clouds.

The color of the North is white for winter. It has the power to cleanse and heal as winter cleanses what has been left by the growing season.

The power of the East is light and understanding, and its color is red, for the first light of dawn is red.

The power of the South is power for growing because the summer enters from the south. The color is yellow as is the summer sun.

Two roads cross the Hoop of Life. A black one represents the worldly difficulties that man must suffer in his life's journey. The red road is the road

of spiritual understanding.

Where these roads meet springs forth the tree of

life, "filled with many leaves and singing birds."

Prayers are said to each quarter in order that these powers be given to the people. Afterwards, prayers are offered at the center of the Hoop of the World to Wakon Tonka, the Great Mysterious One, and to Mother Earth. Here is Black Elk's prayer to Wakon Tonka:

"Grandfather, Great Mysterious One, you have been always and before you nothing has been. There is nothing to pray but to you. The star nations all over the universe are yours, and yours are the grasses of the earth. Day in, day out you are the life of things. You are older than all need, older than all pain and prayer. Grandfather, all over the world the faces of living ones are alike. In tenderness they have come up out of the ground. Look upon your children, with children in their arms, that they may face the winds and walk the Good Road to the Day of Quiet. Teach us to walk the soft earth as relatives to all that live. Sweeten our hearts and fill us with light. Give us the strength to understand and the eyes to see. Help us, for without you we are nothing. Hetchetu aloh (so it is forever)."

## SOME RELIGION, CULTURE SAVED

Whenever explaining the Hoop to someone, Dr. Neihardt was quick to add with a smile, "This comes from savages." Perhaps a Messiah never came to save the Indians and restore to them what had once been theirs, but through Black Elk and Dr. Neihardt, some of their religion and culture was indeed saved for all men to know and share.

Credit to Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Neb.



POET AND FRIENDS share ideas past and present at Bancroft's Neihardt Day.

BANCROFT WAS AN INDIAN TOWN

To visualize Bancroft at that time, one must remember that the reservation towns of Rosalie and Walthill were non-existent. They were founded in 1906, and Bancroft preceded them by 26 years, being founded in 1880.

So at this time Bancroft was enjoying its frontier heyday. Indians lived in and around the town, and the countryside was full of land seekers and Indian traders. New settlers were moving in, attempting to acquire Indian reservation land. In fact, it was a mecca for Indian activity, and as history tells us, "a bit of hellraising."

This is the new locale to which the Neihardts moved. John supported himself by working as a bookkeeper for Indian traders and writing for the Bancroft Blade newspaper from 1903 to 1906.

To quote Neihardt: "I worked with J. J. Elkin, who did business with the Indians on the reservation, and became acquainted with them, and made friends with the tribesmen."

"It was from Elkin and the group about him, Fred Nelson and the Copples who bought the stock Company with me and bought the Bancroft Blade from William Sinclair."

He also reviewed books for the St. Louis Dispatch during his residency at Bancroft, recalling how the books were stacked from the floor to the ceiling in his small study.

LA FLESCHÉ FAMILY

In these busy years he became acquainted with the famous La Flesché family, including the four renowned daughters of Iron Eye, Suseffe Tibbles, Rosalie Farley, Marguerite Diddoch, and Susan Picotte.

Neihardt often recalled his friendship with this family, citing them as dear and valued friends, and also Carol and Jack Farley, who helped him in his contacts with the Omaha Indians.

OTHER INDIANS

Another Indian who especially helped him was Shonga Kha (White Horse) the last real chief of the Omahas after Iron Eye. Neihardt said of him "Old Shonga came to like me, and had much to tell me of the old days — he was 90 years old at the time."

So here Neihardt learned Omaha Indian history, legend, and lore by sharing thoughts, feelings, and rich memories with them. From them he received the Indian name — Tae Nuga Zhingá (Little Bull Buffalo).

WESTERN KNOWLEDGE

From hearing these ancient tales and adding Indian folklore to his tremendous knowledge of the West, Neihardt produced some of the world's greatest literature, written in his tiny study at Bancroft.



# Poet's Life in Frontier Town

By Maxine Kessinger

Public Relations Director for Neihardt Foundation

It seems inevitable that Nebraska, the great pioneer state, so rich in history, Indian legend, and lore, would produce writers that would bring a high literary form to our Nebraska way of life.

While our state has produced many fine writers, not one has received the acclaim and literary honors that John G. Neihardt has. He held the title of State Poet Laureate longer than any other person known throughout the history of the world.

The works of this home-town man has made Bancroft and our rich heritage known throughout the world. All Nebraskans, and particularly those living in this area would like to continue to have praise, honor and glory bestowed upon Poet Neihardt, in appreciation for all he has done in expressing the heritage they cherish.

The people of the Village of Bancroft wish to pay special tribute to Neihardt, for Bancroft is the place he always referred to as his "spiritual home." Here he lived from 1900 to 1921.

Nearly all of his famous works except "Black Elk Speaks" were written while he lived here. His fondest memories centered on his years in Bancroft. He lived with his mother (the town dressmaker) while two sisters, Lula and Grace, taught school.

In Neihardt's Words

"Here I had my spiritual beginnings. This is where my dreams came true, where the youth became a

man, the town that brought out the best in me. My most productive years were here."

During this time he was married to Mona Martinsen, famed sculptress, who journeyed from Europe to marry Neihardt in 1908. Several of his children were born in Bancroft. He fondly recalled his children romping and playing on the tree-lined streets of the town he immortalized in "Prosy Village" a selection from his "Lyric Poems" book.

Here is a verse from "Prosy Village":

'Mid glad green miles of tillage  
And fields where cattle graze  
A prosy little village, you drowse away the days.  
And yet — a wakeful glory  
Clings around you as you doze.  
One liltng lyric story  
Makes music of your prose.

In the year 1900 Neihardt was living at Wayne with his mother and his sister, Grace. The poet was already doing a great deal of writing and he was becoming deeply interested in Indian culture, religion, and folklore.

Because Neihardt felt that he had to know the essence of his characters — their ideals, customs, triumphs and sorrows, the family moved to Bancroft.

Bancroft, at the turn of the century, was a frontier town located on the edge of the Omaha and Winnebago Indian reservations. Neihardt knew that this would be the place to provide him with the Indian culture he desperately wanted to know.

# Purposed Center Will Be Cultural Haven

By Bruce Frady

Last December, members of the Neihardt Foundation in Bancroft, Neb. decided to honor the poet by planning to construct a new Neihardt Center. costing \$872,000. Operation of the Neihardt Center will be managed by the Neihardt Foundation, a Nebraska non-profit corporation. The national honorary chairman for the Neihardt Center Committee is television

celebrity Dick Cavett; the Nebraska chairman is Carroll Thompson.

The Neihardt Center is tentatively designed as a simple one floor facility whose architecture will show strong traces of the simple sod houses used by the white settlers to shield themselves from the often severe elements of the Great Plains.

The plaza in front of the museum will be simple

and centered with an original work of sculpture of a Plains Indian in a posture of worship. An adjoining area will include parking for approximately 350 automobiles.

Esther Montgomery of the Nebraska Educational Television Network states that the Midwest in general and Nebraska in particular are reaching that stage in their history when they are awakening to a pride in their heritage, coupled with a desire to learn more about it.

The Neihardt Center will join the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library at Abilene, Kan. and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation at Red Cloud as one of the fine landmarks of the Midwest and of the country.

The Center will contain 25 thousand square feet of public and administrative space, and the bulk of the space will be utilized in an exhibit area of rectangular shape. The outside wall will be largely glass, overlooking the Neihardt Sioux Prayer Garden.

The exhibit area will be long enough to accommodate special rotating displays of artifacts to be borrowed from museums and demonstrations of both white and Indian living styles and customs from the period between 1822 and 1890.

The basement area will include a library and archives dedicated to and including the complete works of John Neihardt and his unpublished papers and manuscripts. A second basement room will contain a permanent collection of artifacts and other displays from the life and region of Neihardt and his beloved Great Plains Indians.

Editor's Note: The late Evelyn Vogt of Bancroft, Ne. was the first person in that town to put the wheels of progress in motion. Her original conception of a shrine for Neihardt was expanded upon by other interested persons especially Mrs. Marie Vogt presently the Vice Chairman for the Neihardt Foundation. Mrs. Vogt, in collaboration with Dr. Neihardt plotted the Sioux Prayer Garden. The Garden was built by foundation members and volunteers.

STORY FROM 20'S

# 'Best Poem Was Lived, Not Written'

By Diane Olsen

Keene Abbott, well-known reporter for the Omaha World-Herald in the '20's, gives an intimate look into the home life of the Neihardts. It provides a vivid picture of the poet as a warm and vibrant person.

The following excerpts from an article in the World-Herald were reprinted in the Goldenrod, Wayne State's newspaper, on December 27, 1920, which was the first special "Neihardt Edition" of the Goldenrod:

"At the Poet's Town, which calls itself Bancroft, Nebraska, I arrived with a shower. On the shiny, rainflashing platform of the railway station he was there in the wet, the poet himself. Also his son. Also two umbrellas, one of them a cripple.

"While we went wandering off up the street the shower increased and the cripple collapsed. I, being the taller, held the cripple, and watched the poet get wet, and wondered how wet he could get without knowing it. For our talk was about books, and life, and plans, and poetry; and once John Neihardt gets to talking about the meaning of life and how to express it, he is the sort who might be ducked in the Missouri River, without ever suspecting what had happened to him.

"The little boy, Sigurd, informed his father about the umbrella's collapse, and the poet said: "Oh yes!"

"So the unjointed rubs were put back in place; the dripping shelter was hoisted once again, and along we walked, and along we talked till we came to the house where the poet's mother lives. We stopped, dried ourselves out, and a while later went over to the poet's home for an improvised family reunion...

"I ought to remember what we had to eat, but I don't. What I do remember are certain delicious, characterizing features of the Neihardts.

"What, after all, do the critics know about Neihardt's best poem? Not a thing; not a blessed thing. For that poem is one that is lived, not written. It is "The Song of the Poet's Home." By my visit I caught a glimpse of it; I was touched to smiling reverence by the good, healthful, mellowing spirit of it.

"For I saw the mother who begrudges none of the pain and sacrifice that the producing of a poet have demanded of her, and I saw the wife whose artistic gifts and dear comradeship and understanding have helped unflinchingly to keep his heart brave and his vision clear."

So we see that this poet, John G. Neihardt, did live a rich and full life. He, as a man, as well as a poet, touched gently the lives of many people; his generous spirit and diving humbleness always producing a lasting impression.

# Long-Time Residents of 'Poets Town' Remember Neihardt in the Old Days

By Vicki Miller

"A lot of people around here didn't like him cause he didn't work all the time like they did. To me, he was pretty much like everybody else, except he didn't do their kind of work." Speaking slowly, recollecting memories of Neihardt, Pete Ockander told of the poet during the days he resided in Bancroft, Neb.

Ockander is a life long resident of Bancroft, and although he was reluctant to reveal his exact age, his years number near 80. He and his family ran a mill north of town during those years. The stream which powered the mill was a favorite swimming hole for young and old alike.

Remembering that the Neihardts frequented the spot, Ockander chuckled and asked, "You want a good story about Neihardt?" He was grinning, seemingly excited to relate his tale.

## SWAM NUDE

Ockander began by explaining that the poet and his wife enjoyed swimming nude near the mill. Once, Ockander's younger brother and a companion decided to venture up to watch the swimmers.

"Well, the little rascal (Ockander's brother) got up in a tree over the spot. He got to laughing so hard, he fell in right between 'em."

Later, Ockander's brother returned home "all wet."

"What'd ya see?" Ockander asked.

"I seen plenty," the boy replied.

"What did ya do, get right out?" questioned the older brother.

The boy sheepishly replied, "They made me stay in there and swim with them."

Ockander wasn't much bothered by the unusual swimming attire, "You can't blame 'em, they just liked to swim," he said.

Mrs. Ockander, who had remained silent, spoke up, not agreeing with her husband, "At least they could have put some clothes on!"

The Ockanders related stories about the poet, the man he was and the problems he faced living in a small, rural community when hard work was the only thing important to the residents.



MRS. C. C. COPPLE



PETE OCKANDER

Active for many years in the town Neihardt called his home, Mrs. C. C. Copple related her memories of the poet.

In her first years of marriage, Mrs. Copple lived across the street from Neihardt. She explained that she was young at the time and busy with her family, but she often borrowed books from him.

"He'd always try to interest me in a good book," she said, adding that at the time, "I was mostly interested in the love and romance stuff."

## "PARROT NOSE"

Reflecting on those years, Mrs. Copple recalled a time when Mona Neihardt was ill, and she had gone

to see how things were going for the family. As she was leaving, Neihardt told her he had never realized how very hard housework was.

Neihardt always seemed to disagree with a man in Bancroft who happened to have a very large nose, Mrs. Copple said. At the time of the disagreement Neihardt was the editor of the local paper, so he printed a cartoon portraying the man with a greatly exaggerated nose and a caption reading, "No, boys and girls, it's not a parrot, it's a man."

While telling of her experiences with Neihardt, the bright, smiling woman held a scrapbook about the man on her lap. It was easy to see that some citizens of the village loved the poet, even long ago, when he was a resident.

# Youthful Encounter Spurred Lasting Interest

By Jay Copple

At the age of 12, while helping a friend deliver papers on his daily paper route in Bancroft, Neb., I had my first encounter with a significant element of John G. Neihardt's past. My friend asked me to take a paper to a little shack, across the alley, that could barely be seen due to dense shrubbery that surrounded it.

Hesitantly I approached what I thought to be the ominous abode of some sinister hermit. I later found that the old man living there simply had no other place to stay and that the shack was the former study of a poet named Neihardt.

About a year later I returned to that place with my classmates to meet a man who, we were informed, was Nebraska's Poet Laureate. At that time I don't think the title meant much to many of us because we cared little for poetry or even English in general. And what was a Poet Laureate anyway?

## MEETS LAUREATE

We were all squeezed into a little one room cabin (the shack I'd visited a year earlier, now renovated), and saw a little man sitting at a desk. This was my first formal meeting with Dr. Neihardt. I can honestly admit that I felt honored to be in the presence of a man of Neihardt's stature, but I can't say that I knew why.

He began to speak of a bush that he could remember across the street from where we were. He said he used to sit and look at the bush and think about things that I can't recall now.

We spent approximately 30 minutes with him and then were forced to leave in order to make way for the next class that was patiently waiting outside. I left with a much better feeling than I had when we went, and I had finally figured out what a Poet Laureate was. It was simple. It was a person who sat around looking at bushes, or something similar, and thinking.

Seven years later when I had a better background in regard to Neihardt, his works, and what he meant to Bancroft, I attended one of the annual Neihardt Day ceremonies which was held at the Sioux Prayer Garden in Bancroft.

A combination of the program, meeting the poet personally and having read some of his literature prior to attending the event seemed to give me the

incentive to learn more about this man and what he stood for.

This was no easy task in some respects because many of the people with whom I associated at the time didn't share my feelings, to say the least, towards Neihardt.

The following year, while attending Peru State College, our paths crossed again when Dr. Neihardt addressed the student body. I went to the program with the intention of talking to Neihardt on what I hoped would be a more personal basis than our previous encounters.

I lingered around nonchalantly, until everyone had greeted him after the program. At that point things started happening. I had no more than said two words — Copple and Bancroft, when I found myself off the stage and walking up and down the aisles of the darkened theater, arm in arm with Neihardt.

We talked about my family, and his prior knowledge of my family tree was overwhelming. He knew more about my family's background than I did. All the while we walked and talked, Mrs. J. D. Young, who had escorted the poet to Peru, was following close behind reminding him of the late hour and the long road home to Lincoln. On departing, Dr. Neihardt invited me to get together with him again so that we could pick up where we left off. We did exactly that.

Two years later, after transferring to Wayne State College and entering the area of broadcast journalism, I found myself compiling information for a research paper that was required for an Advanced Composition class. The objective was to prove the authenticity of characters in Neihardt's, "The Song of Three Friends," which is part of the "Cycle of the West."

## VISITS NEIHARDT IN LINCOLN

Unable to go straight to the source (Neihardt), I completed the paper using other references and handed it in. During the break between terms, I decided to visit my old roommate at Peru, who was living in Lincoln. While in Lincoln, curiosity impelled me to see Dr. Neihardt, if at all possible, to get his version on my research subject.

The J. D. Young home in Lincoln, where Neihardt was staying, impressed me in that they (Mr. and Mrs. Young) treated me so cordially when actually

they were not obligated to do so. I was about to embark on my last and most intimate meeting with the man I had come so much to respect.

It was obvious that Dr. Neihardt was not feeling well at the time; however, he treated me like a life-long friend. Our two and one half hour talk was most rewarding because I was able to first of all put my mind at ease in regards to the research topic.

There was no "generation gap." In personality and wit, in sharpness and accuracy of mind, he astounded me. What impressed me most is when he let me read parts of the second half of his yet-to-be-published autobiography, in its original form.

The impact of this experience was perhaps the most gratifying of my life. Now, after this man's death, which, in this case, is only a traditional term we use and not indicative of his outlook on life and death, my only regret is that I didn't come to appreciate him sooner and that more people didn't come with me.



On July 2, 1966, Neihardt came to WSC to help dedicate the Mamie McCorkindale School Museum. Humorous Tales of his own school days obviously delighted Miss McCorkindale. A long-time WSC faculty member, she died June 5, 1973 at Wakefield.

# The Professor Behind Poet

Behind the Poet there was a Professor, perhaps several professors, but in the opinion of Wayne graduate Calvon McKim, one professor really deserved kudos for his influence on John Neihardt.

That man was Dr. Julius House, described by McKim as "the professor who made the poet."

His comments came to the Wayne Stater in a response to a request that he write recollections of his years at Wayne State Normal and Teachers College when, in the 1920's, Neihardt frequently visited the campus and Dr. House presided over English and philosophy classes.

After graduation from Wayne in 1925, traveling extensively and earning a master's in geology from the University of Nebraska, McKim taught at Chadron State College and later at California State University Fresno. He has visited Wayne a number of times, currently is a trustee of the Wayne State Foundation, and last year gave the college several thousand of his photographic slides.

In his reply to the Stater, McKim remarked: "I have held back ire about the way we have neglected to give credit to the professor who made the poet. Dr. Julius T. House encouraged many of us to make use of what talent we had with words and the power to create ideas worthy of expressing.

## "SONG" SUGGESTIVE

"Neihardt had a gift in the use of words and the rhythmic soul which helped place them for best sounds that would please the greatest number of ears. The word 'song' in the titles is suggestive, and the appeal to Nebraska's Legislature composed of objective men and women from every occupation is clinching evidence. In 1921 they unanimously elected him Poet Laureate. Dr. House knew Neihardt was slated to attain much greater heights in the literary world."

McKim said Dr. U.S. Conn, president of Wayne State, 1910-1935, often invited Neihardt to talk to the whole school at one of the weekly chapels.

"Conn expressed the wish that he could take the whole time so he could give the Poet a proper introduction. He always stressed Dr. John's interest in Latin. I think Neihardt would have written at great length concerning the help of Conn and House in his memoirs if he had started the books while he was younger and still had his independence of others. In 'All Is But a Beginning' he cites no one with superior credit."

## HAYAKAWA WAS TO TEACH

McKim recalled that the Wayne State Foundation once allocated substantial funds for what was to be termed "the House-Neihardt Dialogs."

Semanticist David Hayakawa was to teach the course, but when he became president of San Francisco University — at that time riddled by anti-war dissent — Hayakawa knew at once he would not have time to carry on the course half a continent away, regardless of his admiration for House and Neihardt.

"Now that he is freed from the turmoil of administration," McKim suggested, "I am strongly in favor of hiring him to offer the course for a test run. I would be almost sure to be present for such a course."

For McKim, that would be a real trip. He lives near San Francisco, at Capitola.

## In Appreciation

We the editors of this special edition on the life and works of John G. Neihardt, would like to express our extreme gratitude to his daughter, Mrs. Hilda Neihardt Petri, of Columbia, Mo.; Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Young of Lincoln, Neb.; Mrs. Maxine Kessinger and Pete Ockander of Bancroft, Neb.; Tom Allan of the Omaha World-Herald, Ted Huettmann of the Wisner News Chronicle, Calvon McKim, graduate of WSC now residing in Capitola, Cal.; the Wayne State Alumni Foundation, the University of Nebraska Press (Bison Books); the John G. Neihardt Foundation in Bancroft, Neb.; our adviser, Richard Manley, assistant professor of journalism, Wayne State College; and staff reporters Sue Stolen, Dave Mowitz, Diane Oisen, Doug Coulter, Bruce Frady, and Debi Killen.

Jay Copple

THE EDITORS

Vicki Miller

Joe Mahan



At Neihardt Day in Bancroft last August 5: dancers perform in Sioux Prayer Garden.

## Neihardt's Life Filled with Many Honors

John G. Neihardt, a man of worldly distinction and honor, made his eminence known early in life. In 1921, when only 40 years old, Neihardt was appointed Poet Laureate of Nebraska by an act of the State Legislature. Nine years later his "Song of the Indian Wars" was chosen as one of the 500 volumes of world literature for the White House Library. Neihardt's "A Cycle of the West," was chosen as one of 3,000 of the World's Best Books Homer to Hemingway (a span of 3,000 years).

In 1968, the annual statewide Neihardt Day (first Sunday in August), was proclaimed by the governor of the State of Nebraska. Here is a list of honors bestowed to an extraordinary man of many talents and a man who made his contribution to our society.

### I. ACADEMIC HONORS

- 1917 Litt. D., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska
- 1920 Sigma Tau Delta, member, diamond key (journalism)
- 1922 Bust by Mona Neihardt placed in Wayne State College Chapel, Wayne, Nebraska
- 1928 LL. D., Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska
- 1929 Neihardt Hall named by Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska
- 1947 Litt. D., University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri
- 1963 Fulbright Award, India
- 1965 Bronze bust by Cordier, Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska
- 1966 Bronze bust by Mona Neihardt, Fine Arts Building, Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska
- 1968 Dedication of bronze bust by Mona Neihardt, University of Missouri Library, Columbia, Missouri
- 1972 Litt. D., Midland Lutheran College, Fremont, Nebraska

### II. LITERARY HONORS, AWARDS, AND CITATIONS

- 1919 The Song of Three Friends awarded Poetry Society of America prize for "Best Volume of Verse"
- 1936 The Song of the Messiah awarded Gold Scroll Medal of Honor as "Foremost Poet of the Nation," National Poetry Center, New York, New York
- 1936 Award for Poetry, Friends of American Writers Foundation, Chicago, Illinois
- 1953 A Cycle of the West chosen one in 3,000 of the "World's Best Books from Homer to Hemingway" (a span of 3,000 years) by expert consensus
- 1967 Governor's Award, Nebraska's "Poet of the Century"
- 1968 The Thomas Jefferson Award, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri
- 1968 Citation and title, "Prairie Poet Laureate of America," The United Poets Laureate International
- 1971 Mari Sandoz Award, Nebraska State Library Association
- 1971 Hall of Fame Induction and Citation for Contributions to American Literature and History, Ak Sar-Ben Association, Omaha, Nebraska
- 1972 Nebraska Builder Award, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

### III. PUBLIC HONORS AND APPOINTMENTS

- 1921 Poet Laureate of Nebraska designation by Act of State Legislature
- 1922 Oil portrait by J. Laurie Wallace placed in city library, Omaha, Nebraska
- 1925 The Order of the Indian Wars of the United States, first civilian member, Washington, D. C.
- 1925 Granite and bronze morument placed in city park, Wayne, Nebraska, in honor of John G. Neihardt and remembering "The Poet's Town"
- 1925 Granite and bronze monument placed in city park, Wayne, Nebraska, in honor of John G. Neihardt and remembering "The Poet's Town"
- 1961 Bronze bust by Mona Neihardt placed in the rotunda of the Nebraska State Capitol building through legislative enactment
- 1968 Annual Statewide Neihardt Day (first Sunday in August) by proclamation of the Governor of the State of Nebraska
- 1970 Neihardt Study at Bancroft, Nebraska, listed in the National Register of Historic Places
- 1971 Oil portrait by Frank V. Szasz placed in University of Missouri Library, Columbia, Missouri
- 1971 Special ceremony by State Legislature honored John G. Neihardt for Fiftieth Anniversary of the Poet Laureateship of Nebraska
- 1972 Oil portrait by Avis Bishop placed in Nebraska Authors' Room, Bennett Martin Library, Lincoln, Nebraska
- 1972 Bronzed bust by Louis Martin on loan to Nebraska Authors' Room, Bennett Martin Library, Lincoln, Nebraska

### IV. OTHER DISTINCTIONS

- 1908 In Who's Who in America since this date
- 1923 Neihardt Club erected and dedicated monument to Hugh Glass at the forks of the Grand River near Lemmon, South Dakota
- 1927 The Song of the Indian Wars chosen by national committee as one of the 500 volumes of world literature for the White House Library, Washington, D. C.
- 1942 In Twentieth Century Authors, Kunitz and Haycraft, H. W. Wilson and Company, New York, New York (also in 1955 Supplement)
- 1949 In Webster's Biographical Dictionary since this date
- 1953 In International Who's Who since this date
- 1967 Designated by poll of historians and history teachers as one of the top ten persons making the most significant contribution to Nebraska in the first 100 years of statehood, World-Herald Newspaper, Omaha, Nebraska
- 1968 Golden Laurel Wreath presented by President of the Republic of the Philippines, Ferdinand E. Marcos
- 1969 Honored as member in Hall of Fame, Wisdom Society of Wisdom Magazine and Encyclopedia
- 1970 71 In International Who's Who in Poetry, edited by Ernest Kay, London and Dartmouth, England
- 1971 Nationwide television appearance, The Dick Cavett Show, New York, New York
- Biographical data, The World Book Encyclopedia, W. F. Quarrie and Company, Chicago, Illinois
- Geographical sketch, The Universal Standard Encyclopedia, Standard Reference Works Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New York

### V. AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

- Member, The Poetry Society of America, New York; Vice-President of Society for the Middle West
- 1943 Member, National Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, New York
- 1944 Life Member and a Founder, The Westerners, Chicago, Illinois
- 1951 Chancellor, Academy of American Poets, New York, New York, 1951 to 1967
- 1959 Fellow, International Institute of Arts and Letters, Lindau, Germany
- 1971 Life Membership, Western American Literature Association
- 1971 Life Membership, Official Scout of the Old West Trail
- 1971 Life Membership, Friends of the Middle Border

### VI. HONORS IN LAST YEAR

- 1973 Renaming of four residence halls on University of Nebraska campus to Neihardt Residential Center
- 1973 The Phi Beta Kappa Key
- 1973 Announced to Dr. Neihardt, but date for public notice and actual ceremony yet to take place, Honorary Fellow by the American Academy of Poets, New York, New York.

# College Honored Distinguished Graduate

By Sue Stolen

John G. Neihardt, Poet Laureate of Nebraska, acquired world fame and a long list of honors for his writing. However, he never forgot those who had seen him through his early days, especially the people of Wayne State College and the town of Wayne, nor did they forget Neihardt.

When much of the world had not yet opened its eyes and ears to his works, the people of Wayne were paying tribute to the man who had come to their town as a young boy, eager and willing to embark on the literary journey he later traveled so well.

From his arrival in 1892 until the time Neihardt left Wayne, there were many people in this town who played an active part in influencing the young artist and student James M. Pile, president of the Nebraska Normal College, and later, president U.S. Conn had much to do with his education, teaching him Latin and Greek, but also inspiring him to do his own self-teaching.

There were also several people in the town of Wayne that influenced the ideas of the young poet. In years to come he was to tell of a man named "Professor" R. Durrin, who owned and ran a tombstone shop. In this man, Neihardt was to find a fellow poet, someone to talk and read poetry with. Durrin who added much dimension to the young poet's life, loaned him the book, "The Bible of India," which was to give Neihardt his scheme for "The Divine Enchantment."

## WAYNE PROVIDED INSPIRATION

The influence that the town of Wayne had on the young boy of 11 was elemental in the shaping of his future, but the great influence that Neihardt had on the small village and its people must not be overlooked because it was to blossom into a love and respect that has carried up to the present.

Realizing the greatness of John G. Neihardt — the writer, friend, and alumnus — a number of Wayne citizens took the initiative to form the Neihardt Club in 1920. Honorary members of the club were to include people from all over the world and it was considered a true honor to be invited to join. The club held annual meetings, which often highlighted Neihardt as the main speaker in an effort to promote the author's work.

In conjunction with the Neihardt Club, the Goldenrod which was in those years the name of the college paper, ran a yearly Neihardt Edition beginning in December of 1920. The editions often featured letters from the author to the club, his



**CHERISHED MOMENT:** Neihardt radiated delight on the occasion of his visit to WSC October 12, 1965. A reception in Conn Library turned out to be something else: the unveiling of a bronze cast of the plaster bust which his talented sculptor wife Mona had created half a century earlier. "The greatest thing that ever happened to me!" Neihardt exclaimed. Currently the bronze is located in the Fine Arts Center; the original figure remains in Neihardt Hall.

works, promotion of his works and critical essays of his writing.

Through the years, these first two honors have stimulated many more from the people of Wayne. In 1925 a monument was dedicated to Neihardt in one of the city's parks. On the Wayne State College campus a dorm was named after him, and a faculty member

at the college, Dr. J. T. House, was to write the biography of Neihardt called "The Man and the Poet."

Of all the honors which Neihardt was to receive in Wayne, the events of October, 1965, were perhaps the most meaningful for the now aged man. The ceremonies of that visit included the unveiling of a bronze bust, cast from the original sculpture by his wife, the naming of the Neihardt Room in the library, and the presentation of the Distinguished Service Award. The service award, which is the highest given at Wayne State, was presented to Neihardt in recognition of his high distinction in letters, for great loyalty to alma mater, and for achievements bringing much credit to the alumni family of Wayne State College.

The people of Wayne by bestowing the various honors that they did on Neihardt may not have realized it, but they had done something very different and out of the ordinary. All too often we wait until a man's death to do him honor, but in Wayne this was not so in the case of Neihardt for they began honoring him when few other people knew of the talented artist.

## "MY HILL OF VISION"

In the many years of his life, Neihardt was to return to the town of Wayne and the college campus that he had once called home. The question can be raised as to why the now world-famous man made such a point to keep in contact with a place that played only a small part in his life. The answer is perhaps in a letter he wrote to the people of Wayne in 1925. Neihardt wrote:

"It was an ancient custom among the Omaha Indians that when a boy had reached the age of twelve, or thereabouts, he should be sent into the solitude of a high hill, there to fast and wait for the dream that should mold his life for good or ill. And when the dream had come to him, he would tell it only to a holy man of his tribe, receiving a new name in keeping with the vision he had seen, for it was deemed that by the vision he was born again. It was a beautiful and a wise custom, and surely it is the second birth that is the more memorable in the life of any man or woman, for, lacking that, the first is but a futile pang."

"Wayne was my hill of vision."

"It was in Wayne, thirty-three years ago this fall, that the particular John Neihardt, whom you honor in your kindness, was born. That John Neihardt is to be found in his work. If at any time, in anything that bears my name, you have felt more keenly than usual how human life, for all the hurt and pity of it, is shot through and through with a justifying glory, then you have met the best of me. And it is only the best of me that should be with you now."

## Passages Reveal Sense of Humor

By Joe Mahan

With all the praise and recognition being offered to Dr. Neihardt in this humble accolade of paper; it is important to remember that he was first a man and secondly a poet.

Neihardt felt and did most of the things all children do when meeting the formidable and sometimes humorous task of adjusting to the mysterious planet Earth.

Unfortunately not growing up with John Neihardt, I will offer a few stories given to us by the man who experienced them in "All Is But A Beginning," Neihardt's first of two volumes of autobiography.

Neihardt was four years old when he met his first love, a universal memory that alone travels time untarnished and possesses all the wondrousness that it did at the time of occurrence:

"Her name was Etta Stadden, Etta Stadden! . . . It was love at first sight, and she took me to her home nearby to see her mother, whose eyes were also big and soft and brown. And she was always sewing, because they needed money and their father was dead . . . After that, Etta and I liked to meet in the shade of the bridge, and once when I was not waiting there, she came to find me. That was when she kissed me through the screen door and told me she liked me. I wish I knew what ever happened to her. I went back there (Springfield, Ill.) once when I was over sixty. . . . I tried to find someone who, by happy chance, had heard the music of that name. But there was no one."

After moving to the sod country of Kansas when he was five years of age, Neihardt participated in a box social at the school grounds. It was customary at these socials for everybody to show their particular craft, be it card tricks or fiddling. When it came time for John to perform, he decided to recite some poetry taught to him by his "roguish" uncle. He began:

As I came down the new-cut road

I met a possum and a toad;

And every time the toad would jump,

The possum bit him on the rump!

"That was my first speaking engagement, and I brought down the house. I was so surprised and scared I wet my new pants!"

While in Kansas City, Neihardt began his education at seven. He recalls a certain little girl:

"My seatmate, I regret to recall, was a wicked little girl by the name of Lily. Lily was undeniably clever, and occasionally she would plague me by making offensive noises that seemed to emanate from my half of the seat."

"On this fateful afternoon, I had a spare horseshoe nail in my pocket; and when Lily furtively went into action against me, I did an ungentlemanly thing. Ignoring all moral and spiritual influences, if any, I vigorously pricked her leg with the keen point of my nail."

"Lily had an enormous voice packed away in her apparently frail body, and she turned it on all at once, together with her high-capacity fountain of tears."

In these short but revealing passages from his biography, Neihardt gives us a touching picture of the boy who, maybe subdued at times, was however always alive in the "little man with the white mane."

## Death Cannot Rob A Life Well Lived

By Dave Mowitz

"Let me live out my years in the heat of blood!

"Let me die drunken with the dreamer's wine.

"Let me go quickly like a candle light snuffed out in the heyday of its glow.

"And grant me, when I face the grisly Thing, One haughty cry to pierce the gray Perchance!

"O let me be a tune-swept fiddle string that feels the Master Melody — and snaps!"

Fear of death and boredom of life were never known to John G. Neihardt. For during the 92 years of his life he indeed was a "tune-swept fiddle string that feels the Master Melody." Life was much more than living from day to day, it was an experience to be tasted and savored to its fullest extent. He once said, "To grow old is the feeling you have been fulfilled. You need not be afraid of death. I believe it's the most wonderful experience of life."

"Death cannot rob me of life," Neihardt once commented, "I've already lived it. Oh, how I've lived it. Oh how I have loved." To him death was nothing more than an adventure, a very beautiful adventure.