

Picnic reveals the lives of four Kansas women through the course of a single, eventful day. Madge Owens (Kim Novak) is the town beauty, heading for a seemingly secure marriage. Millie Owens (Susan Strasberg) is a tomboy and rebel, jealous of her sister and unsure of her own femininity. Their mother, Flo (Betty Field), has raised two daughters alone and pushes Madge to fulfill the dreams she was denied. Boarding with the family is schoolteacher Rosemary Sidney (Rosalind Russell), who scoffs at marriage but inwardly longs for it.

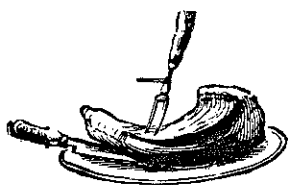
When a handsome stranger (William Holden) enters the scene, he forces them to realize the loneliness and frustration in their lives. Each of the characters feels trapped by the narrow role laid out for her and longs for fulfillment. Hal Carter, the drifter, becomes the catalyst for confrontation and change.

The movie **PICNIC** is based on the 1953 Pulitzer-prize-winning play by William Inge. Inge, a native of Independence, Kansas, left the state upon his graduation from KU in 1935. But his most successful plays intimately depict the small town life he knew in Kansas. During the 1950's, Inge enjoyed a series of Broadway hits--"Come Back Little Sheba," "Picnic," "Bus Stop," "The Dark at the Top of the Stairs." All were successfully adapted to the screen, culminating with **SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS**, featured next month in the "HOME ON THE RANGE" series.

Joshua Logan directed both Broadway and Hollywood productions of **PICNIC**. Logan lavished attention on the details of small town life, highlighted by the picnic sequence. In his quest for a realistic setting, Logan brought cameras and movie stars to the sunflower state for the first time in motion picture history.



Prior to selecting the location for **PICNIC**, Logan surveyed the landscape of central Kansas by airplane. Independence residents hoped that Inge's hometown would serve as the movie locale. But Logan rejected Independence, reportedly on the grounds that the "hilly" countryside was unsuitable. Instead, he was attracted to the "flat terrain and numerous grain elevators" around Hutchinson. (As a persistent movie motif, Logan's grain elevators and freight trains not only reinforce the themes of rigid structure and escape, but also serve to bolster a stereotype of the Kansas landscape.)



The fictional community of Salinon, Kansas is actually a composite of five towns, including Hutchinson. The waterfall scenes were shot within a stone's throw of downtown Salina; Nickerson and Sterling provided many of the homes pictured; and Halstead hosted the picnic. Some 300 Kansans were hired as extras, and hundreds more swelled the crowd scenes voluntarily.

Home from the Range...

PICNIC marks a significant turnaround in the Hollywood portrayal of Kansas. Previous to 1956, movie-makers presented a wild and glamorous Kansas derived from the nineteenth century. Cowboys and Civil War heroes rode larger than life on a landscape "hostile, lonely and magnificent"--with California mountains hovering on the horizon.

With **PICNIC**, Hollywood visited modern Kansas for the first time, to find the prairie replaced by mundane farmland, and the drama moved from the countryside into the homes of ordinary people. The heroic Kansas projected in the 1930's and 40's, where anything might happen, had suddenly been circumscribed by convention and sedentary lives.

Because he is the state's best-known playwright, and because his works achieved such success in the influential medium of film, William Inge helped to shape the national image of Kansas in the 1950's. With Eisenhower in the White House and McCarthy in the Senate,

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PICNIC

the midwest was an already ambivalent symbol of both tranquility and frenzy. One PICNIC reviewer noted a similar ambivalence in the contrast between the beautiful Kansas landscape and "the persistent, insidious hysteria which seems to haunt this romantically photographed episode in the national heartland."

During the long picnic sequence, the film celebrates communal activity and ritual. But with nightfall, discontent and isolation surface. Madge, the beauty queen, Millie, the misfit, Rosemary, the "respectable" teacher--all are hemmed in by the expectations of their community. Freedom and happiness become equated with escape--and by the film's end most of the characters have left town or announced their intentions to flee.

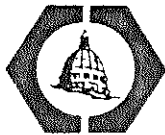
Do these images of Kansas and Kansans linger on into the 1980's? How have they affected the way we as Kansans perceive ourselves? Does Inge's verdict on small town life jibe with first-hand experience? These are some of the questions PICNIC raises. As we watch PICNIC, with its devotion to place and "realism," we are in an ideal position to judge how authentically this film captures the world we know.



a kaleidoscope of classic films featuring the Sunflower State

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February 12 and 13

DARK COMMAND (1940) John Wayne
defends Civil War Lawrence against
raider Walter Pidgeon.

February 19 and 20

THE HARVEY GIRLS (1946) Judy Garland
and Cyd Charisse ride "The Atchison,
Topeka and the Santa Fe" in this musical
of the old west.

February 26 and 27

DODGE CITY (1939) Marshall Errol Flynn
fights for law, order and the hand of
Julia de Havilland

March 5 and 6

SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS (1961) Natalie
Wood and Warren Beatty discover the
pain and beauty of young love

PICNIC



P L U S...

Chapter Five in **THE LAST FRONTIER**

"Clutching Sands"