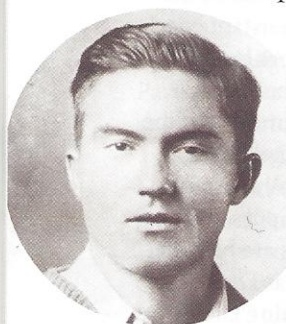


Rock Chalk Review

Home works

Stafford's Kansas poems reflect central role of state in poet laureate's work

William Stafford was known primarily as a poet of the northwest, but it was to Kansas that the Hutchinson native could trace his point of view.



"He had a dual citizenship, like many of us do," says Denise Low. "But he grew up here, [Kansas] shaped how he thought, shaped the dialect of English he speaks, his frame of reference, his pacing—these are all things that are from your mother tongue."

Though she believes Stafford, c'37, g'46, was "not a regionalist," Low thought it made sense to bring together in one volume the Kansas poems from the poet's vast body of work. And Stafford agreed. Writing to her in 1990, after the first edition of *Kansas Poems of William Stafford* appeared, he declared himself "pleased and awed" at seeing "my home poems" together.

"I guess all the time I have been spreading work around I have felt wistful about scattering my home feelings so widely. Now I can take a good look at the center of my life."

Now Low, c'71, g'74, PhD'98, has put together an expanded second edition that includes additional poems as well as essays and interviews by and about Stafford, who died in 1993.

"When he died I immediately wanted to get people to write reflective memories of his work," says Low, a Lawrence writer and a

former poet laureate of Kansas. "I didn't want an academic dissection; I wanted larger human considerations, what he meant to people and the literature of the state and the nation."

Essays by Low; Thomas Fox Averill, c'71, g'74; Robert Day, c'64, g'66; Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, PhD'96; and others; plus interviews with the poet and with his son and biographer Kim Stafford offer new perspective on his life and work.

Stafford moved to Oregon in 1948 to teach at Lewis and Clark College. Though he published a memoir in 1947—his KU master's thesis, *Down in My Heart*, a chronicle of his experience as a conscientious objector during World War II—his first major book of poetry did not appear until 1962, when he was 48. It won the National Book Award, and Stafford was on his way. By 1970, when he was appointed to a two-year term as the Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (a position now known as the national poet laureate), he had published seven books of poetry, three with the venerable New York

house Harper & Row. He went on to write more than 60 books and serve a 15-year term as Oregon poet laureate.

The 56 poems collected here are not all of Stafford's "home poems" (those controlled by Harper & Row cost too much to reprint, Low says), but they create a clear sense of how much Kansas meant to a poet known both for his quiet humility and iron moral will. Places (the Cimarron Hills, Coronado Heights, the Oregon Trail), images (prairie swells and cottonwood leaves, fencelines and wagon traces) and weather (sun "like a blade," wind that makes fences sing and like "a giant in disguise still knocks at our chimney") will resonate with Kansas readers. But beyond that, Low believes, is an attitude that may ring familiar.

"There is a whole sensory contact with all the elements, from the sky down to the dirt, that is not a naive environmentalism, but an awareness," she says. "There's a receptivity. He listened."

Stafford allowed that he wrote about Kansas, yes, but he wrote about every place



After his grad-school days at KU (top left), William Stafford left his native state, but his Kansas roots ran deep. "His Kansas patriotism saturated our childhood," wrote son Kim Stafford. The poet on a visit to El Dorado in 1986 (left) and his childhood home in Hutchinson.

he'd been: "My attitude is this: Where you live is not crucial, but how you feel about where you live is crucial."

Kansas Poems of William Stafford makes plain how he felt. Kansas is where he grew up, where he took his first moral stands, where he learned from his bookish parents to love literature. It's where he discovered for himself, as he writes in "Vocation," that "Your job is to find what the world is trying to be."

—Steven Hill

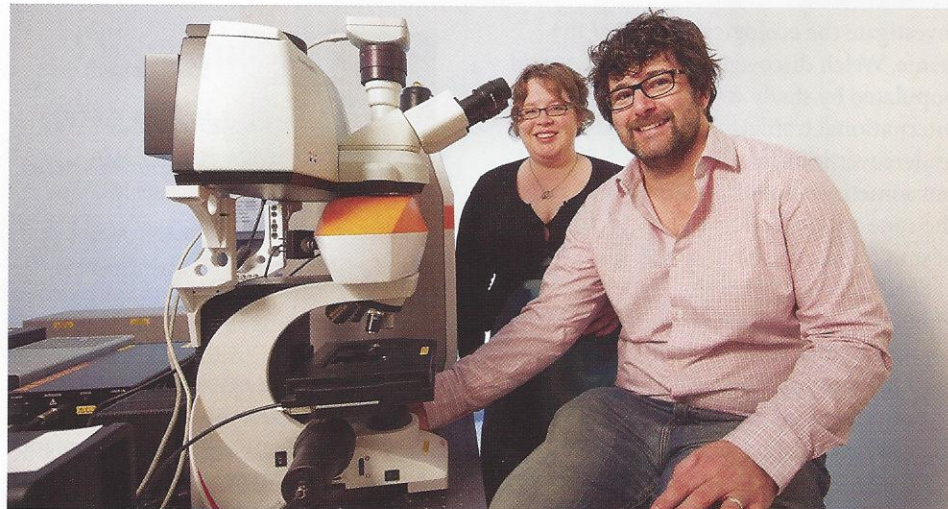
Life as we know it

Geologists' new evidence alters timeline for oldest life

When they set out to collect a specific sort of rock, called Apex Chert, from a certain site in Western Australia, called Pilbara Craton, KU geologists Craig Marshall and Alison Olcott Marshall were hunting for 3.5-billion-year-old bacteria fossils, the oldest-known evidence of ancient life.

First identified in 1987, the discovery of fossilized bacteria billions of years old was hailed worldwide, and the same researcher in 1993 gave his ancient fossil a species name and announced that it was linked to modern bacteria. As was the case six years earlier, scientists around the world accepted the findings.

But doubts began to appear in 2002, when another researcher examined the original slides and expressed skepticism. Arguments abounded in geology journals, but eventually fizzled. Nearly a decade later, the Marshalls—assistant professors



After collecting rock samples in Australia, geologists Craig and Alison Olcott Marshall used their laboratory microscope and KU's unique paleontology spectrometer to disprove previously accepted evidence of fossilized bacteria more than 3 billion years old.

of geology and husband and wife—settled the controversy by announcing that the famous bacteria fossils are actually lifeless hematite.

"This really points out how science is an evolving field," Craig Marshall says. "We think we're learning and teaching fixed facts, but things that have been accepted as true for decades aren't necessarily as clear cut as they seem. There's always room for more exploration and knowledge to be gained."

After the grueling chore of collecting the Apex Chert and shipping it to their KU laboratory, the Marshalls' first step was to re-create the 1987 study by slicing the rock into 300-micrometer samples. But they also cut a 30-micrometer set that was so thin light could pass through. Examining the new sample through regular microscopes, they observed new details and textures.

They then analyzed the samples with the country's most complex spectrometer dedicated to paleontology, housed in KU's Multidisciplinary Research Building on West Campus. The machine's laser light scattered at wavelengths that diagnosed the samples as mineral, not organic.

Olcott Marshall is already teaching the findings in her entry-level geology course, and faculty leading upper-level paleontology courses are using it as a lesson that new approaches can

yield dramatic surprises.

"We were originally hoping to add a new dimension to the data of the original story," Olcott Marshall says. "The risk of science is that you never know what you're going to find."

Another application for the Marshalls' research: the hunt for evidence of extra-terrestrial life. The ExoMars European mission, scheduled for 2018, will carry a miniaturized version of KU's spectrometer, but the KU researchers caution that lessons need to be learned from their terrestrial hunt for ancient biology.

"If proving the existence of ancient life on earth is so difficult and controversial," Craig Marshall says, "it's going to be very difficult to find with a rover on Mars."

—Chris Lazzarino

Man overboard

Human greed is biggest threat to wildlife in Welch's poaching chronicle

Craig Welch was an environmental reporter for the Seattle Times when he read a story about five poachers who stole \$3 million in geoducks, the world's largest burrowing clam. As he began to

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