

“Garland Lines, New and Old”
Hamlin Garland Poetry Reading

3:00PM, Sunday, June 26, 2022
3907 Nobel Avenue, Osage, Iowa

Sponsored by the Mitchell County Historic Preservation Association

SECTION ONE: GARLAND’S ANIMALS

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THE FAITHFUL BRONCOS
THE BLUE JAY
THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF
THE VULTURE

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A CHILD OF THE SUN

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IN THE DAYS WHEN THE CATTLE RAN
A WISH
COMING RAIN ON THE PRAIRIE
THE VOICE OF THE PINES
HERE THE TRAIL ENDS

THE MEADOW LARK

Brave little bird that fears not God,
A voice that breaks from the snow-wet clod
With prophecy of sunny sod,
Set thick with wind-waved golden-rod.

From the first bare clod in the raw cold spring,
From the last bare clod, when fall winds sting,
The farm-boy hears his brave song ring,
And work for the time is a pleasant thing.

THE FAITHFUL BRONCOS

They go to certain death—to freeze,
To grope their way through blinding snow,
To starve beneath the northern trees—
Their curse on us who made them go!
They trust and we betray the trust;
They humbly look to us for keep.
The rifle crumbles them to dust,
And we—have hardly grace to weep
As they line up to die.

THE BLUE JAY

His eye is bright as burnished steel,
His note a quick defiant cry;
Harsh as a hinge his grating squeal
Sounds from the keen wind sweeping by.

Rains never dim his smooth blue coat,
The winter never troubles him.
No fog puts hoarseness in his throat
Or makes his merry eyes grow dim.
His cry at morning is a shout.
His wing is subject to his heart.
Of fear he knows not doubt
Did not draw his sailing-chart.

He is an universal emigre;
His foot is set in every land.
He greets me by gray Casco Bay,
And laughs across the Texas sand.
In heat or cold, in storm or sun
He lives unfeigningly, and when he dies
He folds his feet up one by one
And turns a last look at the skies.

(last lines of the poem)

He is the true American! He fears
No journey and no wood or wall,
And in the desert, toiling voyagers
Take heart of courage from his call.

THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF

O a shadowy beast is the gaunt gray wolf!
And his feet fall soft on a carpet of spines;
Where the night shuts quick and the winds are cold
He haunts the deeps of the northern pines.

His eyes are eager, his teeth are keen,
As he slips at night through the bush like a snake,
Crouching and cringing, straight into the wind,
To leap with a grin on the fawn in the brake.

He falls like a cat on the mother grouse
Brooding her young in the wind-bent weeds,
Or listens to heed with a start of greed
The bittern booming from river reeds.

He's the symbol of hunger the whole earth through,
His specter sits at the door or cave,
And the homeless hear with a thrill of fear
The sound of his wind-swept voice on the air.

THE VULTURE

He wings a slow and watchful flight,
His neck is bare, his eyes are bright,
His plumage fits the starless night.
He sits at feast where cattle lie
Withering in ashen alkali,
And gorges till he scarce can fly.
But he is kingly on the breeze!
On rigid wing, in careless ease,
A soundless bark on viewless seas.
Piercing the purple storm cloud, he makes
The sun his neighbor, and shakes
His wrinkled neck in mock dismay,
And swings his slow, contemptuous way
Above the hot red lightning's play.
Monarch of cloudland—yet a ghoul of prey.

SETTLERS

Above them soars a dazzling sky,
In winter blue and clear as steel,
In summer like an arctic sea,
Wherein great icebergs drift and reel
And melt like sudden sorcery;

Beneath them plains stretch far and fair,
Rich with sunlight and with rain;
Vast harvests ripen with their care
And fill with overplus of grain
Their square great bins;

Yet still they strive ! I see them rise
At dawn-light going forth to toil;
The same salt sweat has filled my eyes;
My feet have trod the self-same soil
Behind the snarling share.

ATAVISM

Sometimes, ranging the upland sod,
A lean, lone steer comes suddenly upon
A trace of blood. Like a hound he stops
And wheels, snuffling the earth.
His eyes roll savagely, his nostrils expand
And his wrinkled neck stiffens. He paws
The ground with horny hoofs. He lifts
His voice in a wild roar that ends
In a harsh scream.

The herd listens, still as statues
Every horn lifted, every nostril spread!
Again it comes, that screaming roar,
Wild as the tiger's food-sick cry!
A score of voices echo it, and then
The whole herd wakes to action.
The plain swarms with flying forms
Centering with savage, menacing run
Towards the bawling sentinel.

The noise becomes frightful
Every curling tongue joins the sudden tumult
Lions are not more terrible of voice.
The domestic is lost in savagery.
The snorting, bawling roar of heavy-uddered cows,
Proclaims the power of memory.
All frantic with roused memory of war
And fear and hate of man and wolf,
They rush in ranks like warriors.
Their tails wave like pennon lances.

(ATAVISM, continued)

The herdsman dreaming beneath the shine
Of poplar trees, springs to his saddle
And sits wondering, while his horse
With nostrils blown like trumpets,
Fronts the scene, his eyes
Reflecting the storm-like rush
Of the trampling herd.

The bulls paw the earth;
Their eyes roll and flame from the dust
Their hollow hoofs have raised
The herd surges to and fro in mass,
Blind and savage, seeking an unseen cause
Of some ancestral danger.

MAGIC

Within my hand I hold
A piece of lichen-spotted stone—
Each fleck red-gold—
And with closed eyes I hear the moan
Of solemn winds round naked crags
Of Colorado's mountains. The snow
Lies deep about me. Gray and old
Hags of cedars, gaunt and bare,
With streaming, tangled hair,
Snarl endlessly. White-winged and proud,
With stately step and queenly air,
A glittering, cool and silent cloud
 Upon me sails.
 The wind wails,
And from the canon stern and steep
I hear the furious waters leap.

ANTICIPATION

I will wash my brain in the splendid breeze,
I will lay my cheek to the northern sun,
I will drink the breath of the mossy trees,
And the clouds shall meet me one by one.
I will fling the scholar's pen aside,
And grasp once more the bronco's rein,
And I will ride and ride and ride,
Till the rain is snow, and the seed is grain.

(Anticipation, continued)

The way is long and cold and lone—
But I go.
It leads where pines forever moan
Their weight of snow,
Yet I go.
There are voices in the wind that call,
There are hands that beckon to the plain;
I must journey where the trees grow tall,
And the lonely heron clamors in the rain.

Where the desert flames with furnace heat,
I have trod.
Where the horned toad's tiny feet
In a land
Of burning sand
Leave a mark,
I have ridden in the noon and in the dark.

Now I go to see the snows,
Where the mossy mountains rise
Wild and bleak—and the rose
And pink of morning fills the skies
With a color that is singing,
And the lights
Of polar nights
Utter cries
As they sweep from star to star,
Swinging, ringing,
Where the sunless middays are.

MOUNTING

I mount and mount toward the sky,
The eagle's heart is mine,
I ride to put the clouds a-by
Where silver lakelets shine.
The roaring streams wax white with snow,
The eagle's nest draws near,
The blue sky widens, hid peaks glow,
The air is frosty clear.
*And so from cliff to cliff I rise,
The eagle's heart is mine;
Above me ever broadening skies,
Below the rivers shine.*

BENEATH THE PINES

O sunless deeps of northern pines!
O broad, snow-laden arms of fir!
Dim aisles where wolves slip to and fro,
And noiseless wild deer swiftly skirr!
O home of wind-songs wild and grand,
As suits thy mighty strains, O harp
On which the North Wind lays his hand!
I walk thy pungent glooms once more
And shout amid thy stormful roar.

As in wild seas a deep is found,
No wintry tempest stirs, though high
As hills the marching waves upbound
And break in hissing foam, so I
Walk here secure; though, far above,
The Storm-king with his train of snows
Sweeps downward from the bitter north,
And shouts hoarse fury as he goes.

I laugh in tones of ribald glee,
To see the shaking of his hair,
And hear from out his cloud of beard
His furious threatenings sweep the air.
The dark pines lower their lofty crests—
As warriors bow, when chieftain grim
Rides by and shouts his stern behests—
And with swift answers echo him.

THE CLOUDS

Circling the mountains the gray clouds go
Heavy with storms as a mother with child,
Seeking release from their burden of snow
With calm slow motion they cross the wild—
Stately and somber, they catch and cling
To the barren crags of the peaks in the west,
Weary with waiting, and mad for rest.

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THE GIFT OF WATER

“IS water nigh?”
The plainsmen cry,
As they meet and pass in the desert grass.
With finger tip
Across the lip
I ask the somber Navajo.
The brown man smiles and answers “Sho!”*
With fingers high, he signs the miles
To the desert spring,
And so we pass in the dry dead grass,
Brothers in bond of the water’s ring.

(*Meaning: Listen; pay attention.)

THE GREETING OF THE ROSES

We had been long in mountain snow,
In valleys bleak, and broad, and bare,
Where only moss and willows grow,
And no bird wings the silent air.
And so when on our downward way,
Wild roses met us, we were glad,
They were so girlish fair, so gay,
It seemed the sun had made them mad.

IN THE COLD GREEN MOUNTAINS

In the cold green mountains where the savage torrents roared,
And the clouds were gray above us,
And the fishing eagle soared,
Where no grass waved, where no robins cried,
There our horses starved and died,
In the cold green mountains.

In the cold green mountains,
Nothing grew but moss and trees,
Water dripped and sludgy streamlets
Trapped our horses by the knees.
Where we slipped, slid, and lunged,
Mired down and wildly plunged
Toward the cold green mountains!

RELENTLESS NATURE

She laid her rivers to snare us,
She set her snows to chill,
Her clouds had the cunning of vultures,
Her plants were charged to kill.
The glooms of her forests benumbed us,
On the slime of her ledges we sprawled;
But we set our feet to the northward,
And crawled and crawled and crawled!
We defied her, and cursed her, and shouted:
“To hell with your rain and your snow.
Our minds we have set on a journey,
And despite of your anger we go!”

SIWASH GRAVES

Here in their tiny gayly painted homes
They sleep, these small dead people of the streams,
Their names unknown, their deeds forgot,
Their by-gone battles lost in dreams.
A few short days and we who laugh
Will be as still, will lie as low
As utterly in dark as they who rot
Here where the roses blow.
They fought, and loved, and toiled, and died,
As all men do, and all men must.
Of what avail? we at the end
Fall quite as shapelessly to dust.

LINE UP, BRAVE BOYS

The packs are on, the cinches tight,
The patient horses wait,
Upon the grass the frost lies white,
The dawn is gray and late.
The leader's cry rings sharp and clear,
The campfires smolder low;
Before us lies a shallow mere,
Beyond, the mountain snow.
*“Line up, Billy, line up, boys,
The east is gray with coming day,
We must away, we cannot stay.
Hy-o, hy-ak, brave boys!”*

(Line Up, Brave Boys, continued)

Five hundred miles behind us lie,
As many more ahead,
Through mud and mire on mountains high
Our weary feet must tread.
So one by one, with loyal mind,
The horses swing to place,
The strong in lead, the weak behind,
In patient plodding grace.

“Hy-o, Buckskin, brave boy, Joe!

The sun is high,

The hid loons cry:

Hy-ak—away! Hy-o!”

THE EAGLE TRAIL

From rock-built nest,
The mother eagle, with a threatening tongue,
Utters a warning scream. Her shrill voice rings
Wild as the snow-topped crags she sits among;
While hovering with her quivering wings
Her hungry brood, with eyes ablaze
She watches every shadow. The water calls
Far, far below. The sun's red rays
Ascend the icy, iron walls,
And leap beyond the mountains in the west,
And over the trail and the eagle's nest
The clear night falls.

THE COAST RANGE OF ALASKA

The wind roars up from the angry sea
With a message of warning and haste to me.
It bids me go where the asters blow,
And the sunflower waves in the sunset glow.
From the granite mountains the glaciers crawl,
In snow-white spray the waters fall.
The bay is white with the crested waves,
And ever the sea wind ramps and raves.

I hate this cold, bleak northern land,
I fear its snow-flecked harborless strand—
I fly to the south as a homing dove,
Back to the land of corn I love.
And never again shall I set my feet
Where the snow and the sea and the mountains meet.

A GIRL ON THE TRAIL

A flutter of skirts in the dapple of leaves on the trees,
The sound of a small, happy voice on the breeze,
The print of a slim little foot on the trail,
And the miners rejoice as they hammer with picks in the vale.

For fairer than gold is the face of a maid,
And sovereign as stars the light of her eyes;
For women alone were the long trenches laid;
For women alone they defy the stern skies.

These toilers are grimy, and hairy, and dun
With the wear of the wind, the scorch of the sun;
But their picks fall slack, their foul tongues are mute—
As the maiden goes by these earthworms salute!

A CHILD OF THE SUN

Give me the sun and the sky,
The wide sky.
Let it blaze with light,
Let it burn with heat—I care not.
The sun is the blood of my heart,
The wind of the plain my breath.
No woodsman am I. My eyes are set
For the wide low lines. The level rim
Of the prairie land is mine.
The semi-gloom of the pointed firs,
The sleeping darks of the mountain spruce,
Are prison and poison to such as I.
In the forest I long for the rose of the plain,
In the dark of the firs I die.

IN THE DAYS WHEN THE CATTLE RAN

It was worth the while of a boy to live
In the days when the prairie lay wide to the herd
When the sod had a hundred joys to give
And the wind had a thousand words.

 It was well to be led
 Where the wild horses fed
As free as the swarming birds.

Not yet had the plow and the sickle swept
The lily from the meadow, the roses from hill
Not yet had the horses been haltered and kept
In stalls and sties at a master's will.

 With eyes wild-blazing,
 Or drowsily grazing.
They wandered, untouched by the thill.

And the boy! With torn hat flaring
With sturdy red legs which the thick brambles tore,
As wild as the colts, he went faring and sharing
The grasses and fruits which the brown soil bore.

 Treading softly, for fear
Of the snake, ever near,
Unawed by the lightning or black tempest's roar.

But out on the prairie the plows crept together,
The meadow turned black at stroke of the share.
The shaggy colts yielded to clutch of the tether,
The red lilies died, the vines ceased to bear.

 And nothing was left to the boys
 But the dim remembrance of joys
 When the swift cattle ran,
 Unhindered of man,
And their herders were free as the clouds in the air.

A WISH

All day and many days I rode,
My horse's head set toward the sea;
And as I rode a longing came to me
That I might keep the sunset road,
Riding my horse right on and on,
O'er take the day still lagging at the west,
And so reach boyhood from the dawn,
And be with all the days at rest.

(second verse)

For then the odor of the growing wheat,
The flare of sumach on the hills,
The touch of grasses to my feet
Would cure my brain of all its ills,—
Would fill my heart so full of joy
That no stern lines could fret my face.
There would I be forever boy,
Lit by the sky's unfailing grace.

COMING RAIN ON THE PRAIRIE

In sounding southern breeze
The spire-like poplar trees
 Stream like vast plumes
Against a seamless cloud a high
Dark mass, a dusty dome that looms
A rushing shadow on the western sky.

The lightning falls in streams,
Sprangling in fiery seams,
 Through which the bursting rain
Falls in trailing clouds of gray;
The cattle draw together on the plain,
And drift like anchored boats upon a wind-swept bay.

THE VOICE OF THE PINES.

Wailing, wailing,
O ceaseless wail of the pines.
Sighing, sighing,
An incommunicable grief!

No matter how bright the summer sky,
No matter how the dandelions star the sod,
Nor how the bees buzz in the cherry blooms,
Nor how the rich green grass is thick with daisies,
While the sun moves through the dazzling sky,
And the up-rolled clouds sail slowly on,
The nun-voiced pines, somber and strong,
Breathe on their endless moaning song.

The birds do not dwell there or sing there!
They fly to trees with fruit and shining leaves,
Where twigs swing gayly and boughs are in bloom
Among these glooms they would surely die,
And their young forget to swing and sway.
The wild hawk may sit here and scream;
The gray-coated owl utters his hoarse note;
And the dark ravens perch and peer,
But the robins, the orioles, the bright singers
Flee these sighing pines.

Sighing, sighing! Vast illimitable voice!
Like the moan of multitudes, the chant of nuns,
Thy ceaseless wail and cry comes on me.

HERE THE TRAIL ENDS

Here the trail ends. Here by a river
So swifter and darker and colder
Than any we crossed on our long, long way.
Steady, Dan, steady. Ho, there, my dapple,
You first from the saddle shall slip and be free.
Now go, you are clear from command of a master;
Go wade in the grasses, go munch at the grain.
I love you, my faithful, but all is now over;
Ended the comradeship held 'twixt us twain.
I go to the river and the wide lands beyond it,
You go to the pasture, and death claims us all.
For here the trail ends!

Here the trail ends!
Draw near with the broncos.
Slip the hitch, loose the cinches,
Slide the sawbucks away from each worn, weary back.
We are done with the axe, the camp, and the kettle.
Strike hand to each cayuse and send him away.
Let them go where the roses and grasses are growing,
To the meadows that slope to the warm western sea.
No more shall they serve us; no more shall they suffer
The sting of the lash, the heat of the day.
Soon they will go to a winterless haven,
To the haven of beasts where none may enslave.
For here the trail ends.

Here the trail ends.
Never again shall the far-shining mountains allure us,
No more shall the icy mad torrents appall.
Fold up the sling ropes, coil down the cinches,
Cache the saddles and put the brown bridles away.
Not one of the roses of Navajo silver,
Not even a spur shall we save from the rust.
Put away the worn tent-cloth, let the red people have it;
We are done with all shelter, we are done with the gun.
Not so much as a pine branch, not even a willow
Shall swing in the air 'twixt us and our God.
Naked and lone we cross the wide ferry,
Bare to the cold, the dark and the rain.
For here the trail ends.

Here the trail ends. Here by the landing
I wait the last boat, the slow silent one.
We each go alone—no man with another,
Each into the gloom of the swift black flood.—
Boys, it is hard, but here we must scatter;
The gray boatman waits, and I—I go first.

(last lines of the poem)
All is dark over there where the dim boat is rocking—
But that is no matter!
No man need to fear;
For clearly we're told the powers that lead us
Shall govern the game to the end of the day.
Good-by, boys—here the trail ends!