

# Wallace Stegner:

## THROWING A LONG SHADOW

# 1909-1921 Frontier Childhood



Wallace Earl Stegner was born into a family that roamed the West in a restless search for the good life. His frontier childhood shaped his writing for the rest of his life.



Pictured from l. to r.: Wallace, age 3 (a sickly child), mother Hilda, brother Cecil, age 5 (a robust and athletic child), and Aunt Mina (Hilda's sister). Not pictured: father George. Seattle, 1912.

Wallace was born near Lake Mills, Iowa on February 18, 1909. His warm and loving mother, Hilda Paulson, had married hard-living, risk-taking, self-centered vagabond, George Stegner. His father unsuccessfully tried farming, gambling, prospecting, and bootlegging.

*"My father was a boomer, a gambler, a rainbow-chaser, as footloose as a tumbleweed in a windstorm. My mother was always hopefully, hopelessly, trying to nest. Like many western Americans, especially the poorer kinds, I was born on wheels."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>

—JAMES THALMAN<sup>1</sup>



The family moved often: *"My first five years were in constant motion, and what I retain of them is no more than flits and flashes: rare sun on the roof of our tent in the deep woods where now stands Redmond, Washington; the musty, buttery odor of the bread crusts distributed from a dishpan at mid-morning in the Seattle orphanage where my desperate mother stashed my brother and me for a while; the foreign smells and sounds of my grandfather's Norwegian-speaking house in Lake Mills when we retreated there in the winter of 1913...."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>



From North Dakota to Redmond, Washington, where the Stegner family lived in a tent camp like this one.



Then to Seattle, where the boys lived briefly in an orphanage like this Seattle Children's Home.



Next back to Iowa and Wallace's strict grandfather's home. This is a typical Midwestern Norwegian farmhouse built about 1908.



Then by horse and wagon to Eastend, Saskatchewan.

*"We lived the first winter in the dining car [such as the living quarters pictured above]. Later we lived in a rented shack."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>



In 1990, the Stegner house in town was restored and established as a Residence for Artists.

*"After two years [in Eastend], my father built a house and a small barn down in the west end."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>4</sup>



The Stegner's isolated farm on the prairie was 50 miles outside of town. In the summers George and the boys tried to grow wheat.

*"We plowed our first field, and dammed our coulee, and built our shack, in the summer of 1915, and thereafter we spent the summers on the homestead, the winters in town."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>

*"You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>



Wallace (second from the right) and Eastend friends on the bank of the White Mud River in town.

*"I never returned to town in early September without a surge of joy—back to safety and shelter, back to friends, games, Sunday school parties, back to school, where I could shine."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



418 Fourth Avenue North was the Stegner's new address.

Six years later, after several seasons of crop failure, George moved his family to Great Falls, Montana into a house in an established community, a first for Wallace.

*"On my first day there I made the acquaintance of things that I had read about but never seen: lawns, cement sidewalks, streetcars, streets with names, houses with numbers... hardwood floors and a flush toilet."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>8</sup>



# 1921-1930

## A Sense of Belonging



Nine years in Salt Lake City gave Wallace the sense of community and belonging that his early nomadic childhood had lacked.



Temple Block, 1920's.

George Stegner again wanted a new business opportunity, so in the summer of 1921 he drove his family to Salt Lake City.

*"How it is dignified with monuments and steeped in sun tempered with shade, and how it lies protected behind its rampart mountains."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>



The old Saltair resort pavilion on the Great Salt Lake, 1925. It was built to provide "a wholesome place of recreation" under church control for Mormons and others.

*"If I have a home town, a place where a part of my heart is, it is Salt Lake City... The Mormons who built it and lived in it had a strong sense of family and community, something the Stegners were notably short of."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>



A Salt Lake City library in the 1920's.

*"My long-term addiction to books had been intensified by access to the Carnegie Library on State Street. I was always down at the library taking books out four and six at a time."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>4</sup>



At age 15 while in his senior year of high school, a miracle happened. Wallace grew 6 inches to slightly over 6 feet tall.

*"Suddenly I was big enough to hold my own in sports. Suddenly I had friends who looked on me as an equal and not as a mascot."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>



Main building, University of Deseret, 1884. Name was changed in 1894 to University of Utah.

After graduating from high school in 1925, Wallace entered the University of Utah at the tender age of 16.

*"That was the first chance any of us had to see minds at work at all. My teachers were very kind to me and they opened up a lot of doors."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>8</sup>



Wallace took freshman English from a radical young atheist professor, Vardis Fisher.

*"[Vardis Fisher] was one of those teachers who liked to take can openers to unopened minds... It was thrilling, in a way, to be treated almost like an adult."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>9</sup>



East High School, Salt Lake City, 1920.

*"Between my 12th and 21st years [our family] must have lived in 20 different houses. [so I trekked to school] across lots from many different directions."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately the family's numerous homes were all within the attendance area for East High. It was there that Wallace first pursued sports and joined the tennis team.



Wallace in his tennis whites.

Wallace declared that it was tennis that really saved him from the army of the estranged and disaffected.

*"I was fully a part of East High School and the city, contented with myself and my place in the world."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



Wallace (right) and good friend Jack Irvine were co-captains of the University tennis team.



*"By his second year Wallace was in a fraternity [Sigma Nu], dating, and having a wonderful time, hanging out with the jocks in various beer joints near campus."*

—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>12</sup>

He continued getting A's and was included in the literary salons held for the brighter young English majors. At school, Wallace found the acceptance he so craved. He graduated from the University of Utah in 1930, having grown intellectually, athletically, and socially.



# 1930-1939

## From Grad Student to Professor

With no clear-cut career in mind, Wallace was saved by a Utah professor who negotiated a teaching assistantship for him at the University of Iowa in a Master's program in English.



In September 1930, Wallace arrived at the University of Iowa.

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one I was pushed into."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>

*"During an endless rainy fall, [I realized] that I came from the arid lands, and liked where I came from. I was used to earth colors—tan, rusty red, toned white—and the endless green of Iowa offended me."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>



While at Iowa, the Great Depression deepened. For his Master's thesis, Wallace wrote a series of three short stories, completing his degree requirements by mid-1932. He decided to stay on and work for his Ph.D.

*"I looked outside and saw the Depression so deep and black that it was frivolous to think of going out into it and making a living. It was safer in school..."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>



Older brother Cecil at age 5.

In his first year at Iowa, tragedy struck the family back in Salt Lake City when Cecil died unexpectedly at age 23. As young children, the brothers had been very close, and Wallace often recalled how Cecil had defended and protected him.

*"[Cecil's death] made me realize how tight a cluster [the Stegner family was], knotted against respectable society, our own sole resource, our own prison."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>4</sup>



In June 1933, Wallace discovered his mother was dying of cancer. He left school and moved to Salt Lake City so he could help care for her. True to form, his father soon departed for places unknown. Wallace never forgave this final betrayal. He continued to care for his mother until one cold day in November, she whispered to him that he was a "good boy" and gave up her difficult life.

*"I was not intelligent enough to comprehend the kind of example you had been setting me, until it was too late to do anything but hold your hand while you died."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>

*"I was never lower in my life."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>



Six months from their first meeting, Wallace and Mary's small wedding took place September 1, 1934, followed by a brief honeymoon.

Wallace returned to the University of Iowa in Spring 1934, just in time to meet graduate student Mary Stuart Page, the woman he would love for the rest of his life.

*"He was tall, handsome, and well-built; she was slight and beautiful.... It was a courtship that went on intensely, but without much money... a lot of walking and talking."*  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>7</sup>



The happy newlyweds.

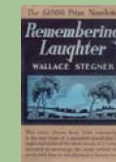
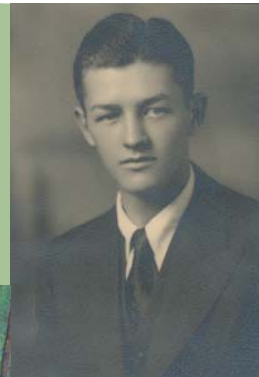
*"I love you because you are fine and clean and youthful and high-hearted and honest and loving and dozens and dozens of other adjectives that don't mean anything in the abstract, but mean much when applied to you."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>8</sup>

In 1935, while carrying a one-semester teaching position at Augustana College in Illinois, Wallace completed the University of Iowa requirements for his Ph.D. in English with a dissertation on the Utah naturalist Clarence Dutton.



Dutton explored and researched unique areas that later became national parks, including Zion, Bryce, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Mount Lassen, and Grand Canyon (pictured here).

*"The dissertation shows [Stegner], a young man of 23 who, in the mid-1930's before environmentalism became the movement it is today, was concerned about preserving the beauties of the national parks and conserving our land heritage."*  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>9</sup>



Wallace survived the Depression in graduate school earning his masters and doctorate. During these years, he weathered the loss of his childhood family but discovered joy in starting a new family. He got his first taste of teaching and published his first book.



Wallace often led discussion sessions with his University of Utah students at his home.



Wallace, the new father, with his only child, son Page. (1937)



Mary and Page playing in their first Wisconsin winter.



George (left) and Wallace in happier times, together on a hunting trip.

Wallace accepted a position at the University of Utah starting in Fall 1935.

*"Wallace didn't have any classes until ten in the morning, so he sat down in their apartment every morning at eight and wrote until he had to grab his coat and books and race up the hill the two blocks to his first classroom."*  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>10</sup>

Wallace achieved national success as a writer when his *Remembering Laughter* was published after winning the \$2,500 prize in the Little, Brown Publishers short novel contest in 1937.

*"We had quite a party [to celebrate]. At the end, Mary went into labor... and produced a son. My new family and my new literary life began together."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>11</sup>

After the success of *Remembering Laughter*, Wallace packed up Mary and Page and accepted a new position at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1937. A letter of recommendation written to Wisconsin by an Iowa professor stated, "My guess is that Stegner is not likely to produce much 'research', though he will always handle his courses in a scholarly manner. What he will produce—as things look now—is fiction."  
—NORMAN FOERSTER<sup>12</sup>

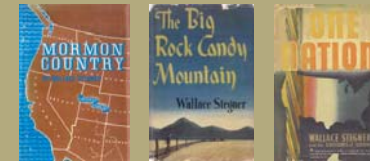
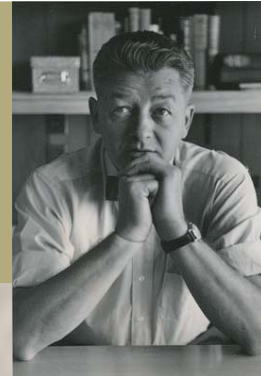
Although Wallace and his father had been estranged since George's desertion of his dying wife in 1933, Wallace sent his down-and-out father money whenever he could. But in Salt Lake City in the summer of 1939, the final chapter was written when George Stegner, full of self-pity, defeated and weak, committed suicide after killing his girlfriend.

*"For Wallace there was bitter irony in this act, which he considered the ultimate display of weakness... adding shame to the hatred, guilt and distaste."*  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>13</sup>

*"Finally, like many another gambler no worse and no better, he died broke and friendless in a fleabag hotel, having in his lifetime done more human and environmental damage than he could have repaired in a second lifetime."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>14</sup>



# 1939-1945 The East Coast Years



Taking advantage of promising opportunities offered him on the East coast, Wallace continued to develop as a writer and teacher. And in these years he decided his literary career would be foremost.



Maple Cottage on the Bread Loaf campus of Middlebury College in Vermont.

Professionalism in writing was emphasized at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, a celebrated summer program for authors held in Vermont. Wallace was invited to join the staff in 1938, and continued to participate until 1946.

*"I can remember vignettes from those evenings: Eudora Welty sitting worshipfully at the feet of Katherine Anne Porter after a reading, Truman Capote holding himself conspicuously aloof from Louis Untermeyer after Untermeyer called T.S. Eliot a writer of society verse, Carson McCullers in her starched white boys' shirt deep in talk with W.H. Auden."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>



One summer's faculty at Bread Loaf: (rear) Raymond Everitt, Robeson Bailey, Herbert Agar, Herschel Brickell, Wallace Stegner, Fletcher Pratt; (center) Gorham Munson, Bernard DeVoto, Theodore Morrison, Robert Frost, John Gassner; (front) Mary Stegner, Helen Everitt, Kathleen Morrison, Eleanor Chilton.

Besides influencing his writing, many of the famous authors and poets at Bread Loaf, like Robert Frost, became Wallace's life-long friends.

*"[At Bread Loaf], for the first time in my life I was moving among people who really rattled my brain."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>



1940 Fellows and Faculty at Bread Loaf Summer Writers' Conference. Rear: Eudora Welty, John Ciardi, Brainard Cheney, Edna Frederickson, Louis Untermeyer. Front: Marian Sims, Theodore Morrison, Carson McCullers.



The Stegners with their good friends from Vermont, Phil and Peg Gray.

Charmed with Vermont and its residents, the Stegners bought an old 200-acre farm for \$600 outside of Greensboro. They fixed up the house and barn and then spent almost every summer there.

*"Everybody who grows up [in Vermont] grows up working hard, and at all kinds of jobs. They're all jacks-of-all-trades. They can fix things, toggle them up. That's a characteristic of any frontier, and that's the kind of West that I grew up in."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>



Mary, Wallace, Page, and their dog Koofna, Winter 1942.

When offered a sabbatical from teaching in 1942, Wallace and his family spent a memorable winter in Vermont so he could finish writing *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*.

*"It was not the best of conditions for writing: typing while sitting at a table in the living room, wearing a wool shirt and two sweaters, sitting surrounded by a kerosene lamp and enough candles to read by, and having to get up every few minutes to stir or stoke the fire."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>4</sup>



Harvard's Memorial Hall.



Bernard DeVoto.

Wallace's next career move was facilitated by colleagues from Bread Loaf's faculty, especially Bernard DeVoto and Theodore Morrison. Harvard University offered Wallace a teaching fellowship in 1939. The Stegners packed up, left the University of Wisconsin, and moved to Cambridge.

*"Cambridge was our Athens and our Rome."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>

But it was the war years, and Wallace soon found he was teaching writing in the Army Specialized Training Program exclusively. The government program had essentially taken over Harvard's curriculum.



*"It was a melancholy job to see these eager guys from Philadelphia ghettos, who had been drafted into the army. They found themselves in Harvard, wide-eyed and loving it, but it would only last a quarter, a semester, and they would be gone to lose the top of their heads"*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>



The title page of *One Nation*.

In 1944, Wallace accepted an assignment with *Look* magazine to write a series of photojournalism articles about discrimination in wartime America.

For over a year the Stegners traveled while researching, interviewing and writing. But *Look* deemed the articles too controversial, and instead published a summary book, *One Nation*, in 1945.

*"[Stegner] was fighting as far back as the mid-1940s... advocating a nation of cultural diversity and arguing the importance of the preservation of Native America, African-American, and Latino heritages decades before the phrase 'cultural diversity' was coined."*

—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>7</sup>





# 1945-1950 Stanford: The Early Years

In these, his most satisfying teaching years, Wallace founded the prestigious Stanford Creative Writing Program that inspired many successful authors and poets. He built a home in Los Altos Hills where he and Mary lived until his death. And he began in earnest his life-long commitment to environmental issues.



No Mills College appointment for Wallace.

Wanting to move back to the West and wishing to find a faculty position that would offer more pay and flexibility, Wallace applied for an opening at Mills College in Oakland—but was turned down!

*"The president of Mills wanted [Stegner on faculty] badly, but he was vetoed by the board of trustees, several of whom considered The Big Rock Candy Mountain 'too pornographic.'"*  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>1</sup>



Wallace in early days at Stanford.



The Stegners frequently invited fellows from the Creative Writing Program to their home for food and conversation. Ed McClanahan (far left), Wallace (center), Larry McMurtry (in plaid jacket), Mort Grosser (far right).

Once again a Bread Loaf colleague stepped in. Upon Edith Mirrielees' recommendation, Stanford University offered Wallace the perfect job: a full professorship with tenure. His half-time appointment included teaching literature as well as founding the world-renowned Creative Writing Program.

*"When I came to Stanford in 1945, they were still cutting oats right up to the walls of the library. There were only a few men on campus. It seemed like a quiet girls' college.... And then came September and the GIs and the place just exploded. My own part in that explosion of growth, the writing program that I established in 1946, was a direct response to their energy, their talent, and their need."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to Wallace's persistence in securing endowed funding, the "Stegner Fellows" program attracted aspiring poets and novelists.

*"Instead of green nineteen and twenty-year-olds, my classes were full of mature, highly-motivated men and women with hard experience, serious minds, and an urge to catch up lost time.... Teaching had never been, and has not been since, the pure pleasure that it was in those years."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>



Wallace's friend Robert Frost came to Stanford on several occasions and met with the creative writing students.

Believing that famous and accomplished writers should visit the creative writing seminars to critique and inspire the students, Wallace invited well-known friends and colleagues to travel to Stanford.



*"When the university is a great one, as Stanford is, the suburb or town in which it is set takes on a glow. It offers the best that has been thought and said in the past, and it holds the key to the future."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>4</sup>

Early on, Wallace and Mary joined a cooperative housing association that was planning a community behind the campus. But upon learning no FHA loans would be forthcoming unless discriminatory rules were allowed, the Stegners withdrew and bought land on a hilltop in Los Altos Hills.



As in Vermont, Wallace did much of the new house's carpentry and landscaping himself.

*"My wheels didn't stop rolling until, at the age of thirty-six, after several years of graduate school in Iowa and California and a decade of teaching in Illinois, Utah, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts, I arrived with my wife and son at Stanford and the house in the Coast Range foothills, within sight of the last sunsets on the continent, where we have lived ever since."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>



Wallace writing in the office sanctuaries designed to look out over the foothills, where he wrote many of his famous books.



Family time for Wallace and Page.

The family took many summer trips to parks, natural areas, and backroads while Wallace researched his biography of John Wesley Powell's exploration of the West. Wallace also wrote witty travel articles, which nonetheless warned of over-development of the land. He was becoming more and more involved in environmental issues.

*"My father could never just look at scenery. He had a kind of holistic relationship with the land, and he couldn't look at it without remembering its geological history, its exploration, its social development, its contemporary problems, and its prognosis for the future."*  
—PAGE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>



Mary, Wallace and Page about to fly to another city on their literary goodwill tour.

To promote the postwar exchange of literature between Eastern and Western writers, in 1950 Wallace and his family traveled around the world for seven months. The journey, with its hectic schedule of speeches and meetings, was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation.

*"Six weeks in England, Germany, France, Italy, and Egypt [were] followed by five months in India, Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



Wallace spoke to Japanese authors to encourage literary exchanges.

*"For two years after our return I was involved in a program to introduce Asian writers to American readers."*  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>8</sup>



# 1950-1965 A Man for the Land

Wallace became fully engaged in the battle for the environment on many fronts—at home, in the national parks, across the nation and across the seas. His powerful writings about the land had an enormous impact on the thinking and perceptions of the public and its leaders.

Wallace's writings often spoke eloquently of the land, especially his 1954 biography of John Wesley Powell, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*. It identifies Powell, the first man to explore and survey the full length of the Colorado River, as a key historical figure in the development of a rational federal land policy in the West.

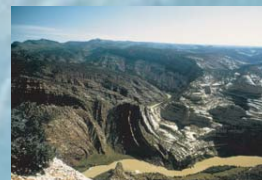
*"When I read Beyond the Hundredth Meridian, Stegner provided me with a way of thinking about the American West, the importance of finding true partnership between human beings and the land. He showed us the limitations of aridity and the need for human institutions to respond in a cooperative way."*

—BRUCE RABBITT<sup>1</sup>  
Secretary of the Interior  
under President Clinton



*"Nine men had plunged into the unknown from the last outpost of civilization on the sixth of July, 1869. On August 30, six came out. Only the loyalty of five men and Powell's own resolution had kept it from ending in failure on the very brink of success."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>2</sup>



Dinosaur National Monument today.

Wallace embraced Powell's conviction that the West's open spaces should not be exploited. Encouraged by the Sierra Club and other organizations, in 1955 Wallace edited a booklet, *This is Dinosaur: Echo Park Country and Its Magic Rivers*, which was distributed to all legislators. It persuaded Congress to halt the scheduled building of two dams, thus saving Dinosaur National Monument.

*"It is a better world with some buffalo left in it, a richer world with some gorgeous canyons unmarred by signboards, hot-dog stands, super highways or high tension lines, undrowned by power or irrigation reservoirs. If we preserved as parks only those places that have no economic possibilities, we would have no parks."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>



River trip photo taken in Glen Canyon's Hidden Passage before Congress dammed the Colorado River in 1963. Wallace is 5th from left, top row; Mary is seated 3rd from the right.

However, as a political trade-off, environmentalists stopped challenging the damming of Glen Canyon. Wallace and Sierra Club President, David Brower, took one last trip down that canyon before it was irretrievably lost. *"It was an incredibly sad occasion, a wake that the environmental movement will never forget."*

—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>4</sup>

*"By such a river it is impossible to believe that one will ever be tired or old. Every sense applauds it. Watch its racing current, its steady renewal of force: it is transient and eternal."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>



Congress finally passed the Wilderness Act of 1964 which preserved and protected wilderness areas. Pictured above is Olympic National Forest.

The "multiple use" policy in the National Parks and Forests in the 1950's was proving disastrous to the preservation of wildernesses. On one December afternoon in 1960, Wallace wrote the famous "Wilderness Letter" in support of undeveloped public land.

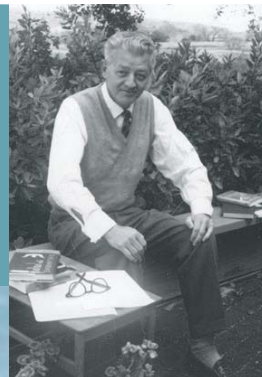
*"We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>



Wallace (left) and Mary with Stewart Udall, 1961.

Taking a sabbatical from teaching at Stanford, Wallace joined the Kennedy Administration in 1961 as Special Assistant to Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior.



David Adams



*"[I gained] a quick, deep look into the politics of conservation as it might operate when friends of conservation were in power, as well as a good lesson in how long ideas that seemed self-evident could take to be translated into law."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



Wallace was not only busy on the national front, he was also an activist on environmental issues at home. The Stegners joined many groups dedicated to maintaining or improving the local environment, including the Peninsula Housing Association, Page Mill Road Association, Committee for Green Foothills (founding President), Hidden Villa, Palo Alto Building Association, Los Altos Trail Club, State Scenic Highway Advisory Committee, Peninsula Open Space Trust, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

*"We were trying to save [our foothills] from county carelessness. The county seat was down in San Jose, a long way off, and nobody gave a damn about the foothills down there. The developers were doing pretty much as they pleased."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>8</sup>



Wallace and Mary often rode in the hills by their home.

The Stegners and others, concerned by builders' plans for housing developments in the foothills under county rule, fought for the incorporation of Los Altos Hills in 1956. Thus one-acre-minimum residential zoning was preserved and open trails were created.



A special friend of Josephine and Frank Diveneck, Wallace actively supported the Divenecks' Hidden Villa nature preserve, working farm, and camp for children of diverse backgrounds.

*"The Committee for Green Foothills was organized in 1960 to try to save for everyone some of the health that flows down across the green ridges from the Skyline, and some of the beauty and refreshment of spirit that are still available to any resident of the valley who has a moment, and the wit, to lift up his eyes unto the hills."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>9</sup>

The Committee for Green Foothills also thwarted Stanford's plan to develop a massive industrial park south of the campus and Palo Alto's intention to build homes for 50,000 people in the foothills to the west of campus.



Diligence for the preservation of the foothills continues today.



Wallace Stegner looking out over Black Rock Desert, part of his "geography of hope."

Wallace's famous Wilderness Letter is known all over the world.

*"[The Wilderness Letter] has been made into posters in half-a-dozen countries. It's in the Canadian parks, the Australian parks; it's in South Africa, in the Sinai Desert, [and] in a tree house in Kenya, with animals running down below."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>10</sup>

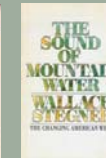




1965-1971

# Stanford: The Tumultuous Years

Wallace found the excesses of the 1960's in sharp conflict with the values he believed in and lived by. The political turmoil, when it erupted on campus, played a major role in his decision to retire early from teaching.



*"The year as a Stegner Fellow changed my writing life. I will always be grateful to Mr. Stegner for his trust and support."*

—STEPHEN DIXON<sup>4</sup>



Ken Kesey gained instant success with his book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Over the years, the Creative Writing Program nurtured many of America's best writers. But for Wallace, dissension with both colleagues and students began to grow in the 1960's. Perhaps best known was the jarring relationship between Wallace and Ken Kesey, a rising star from Stegner's Creative Writing Program. Kesey came to symbolize the counter-culture of the 1960's and his easy living philosophy was in direct opposition to Wallace's hard work ethic.

*"As soon as I took LSD, and [Stegner] drank Jack Daniel's, we drew the line between us right there. His dislike of what I was doing, what we were doing, was the kiss of approval in some way."*

—KEN KESSEY<sup>2</sup>



Stanford students at Frost Amphitheater, 1970.

*"Every year this teaching business gets more like being broken on the wheel. It seems to me the kids get progressively brighter and worse-educated, so that they need to be told more, and give you more hell while you're telling them."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>3</sup>

*"As a group they are reckless, they stampede toward the emancipated future like dry cattle scenting a water hole. To a puzzled elder, they often seem to throb rather than think."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>



At Stanford, as across the nation, peaceful anti-Vietnam War demonstrations took place.

*"We were both opposed to the war—very much so—but Wally didn't like the way students were trashing the campus, and he didn't like the fact that they didn't come to class. He decided he didn't have to teach, and he said there was no point in teaching when people weren't coming to class."*

—MARY STEGNER<sup>5</sup>



Although Wallace marched against the war, he was appalled that some students and outsiders used the unrest over the war to disrupt classes and destroy property.



At the same time that Wallace felt growing conflicts of personalities and beliefs in his academic community, he was witnessing unsettling changes in his environmental organizations as well. Feeling out of step with the times, in 1971 Wallace retired early from Stanford.

*"That ends it. I'm not going to do anything more. I'm washing my hands of this whole business."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>6</sup>

*"I don't really belong in the twentieth century. My demands upon life are nineteenth-century demands rather than twentieth."*

—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



*"All the Little Live Things" (1967) was his generation-gap novel about a retired literary curmudgeon repulsed by hippie cultists and drawn to a young mother's reverence for all life; it could stand as his bittersweet farewell to Stanford."*

—BAINE KERR<sup>8</sup>



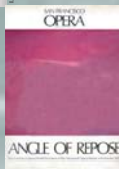
# 1971-1993 The Years of Fulfillment

The years following Wallace's early retirement from Stanford were some of his most productive. Writing critically acclaimed novels and essays, championing environmental issues, lecturing, and traveling filled his days.



"Actually I would like, and would always have liked, nothing better than to stay home and write novels and histories. I am a paper tiger."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>

First off the press after retirement was *Angle of Repose*, the Pulitzer Prize winning novel for 1972.



Poster advertising the short-lived opera.

San Francisco Opera Director Kurt Adler commissioned a Bicentennial opera based on *Angle of Repose*. When reviews panned it as too radical and atonal, it closed after only five performances.

"Unlike many novelists who write their best books at the beginning of their careers, Stegner's novels have gotten better and better. He has defied the cult of youth and triumphed with age."  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>2</sup>

"There's a broader rainbow of work from Stegner almost than was imaginable. He wrote short stories, novels, essays, history, biography, and a magical book we can't even classify."  
—WOLF WILLOW,<sup>3</sup>  
—IVAN DOIG<sup>4</sup>

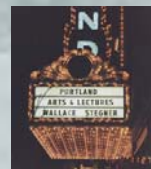
Wallace was recognized with awards and honors as the literary world acknowledged his talent.

Susan Heintzelman remembers Wallace as a frequent customer and willing book signer at her store in Los Altos. "Are you sure you can sell all these books? I don't want you to be burdened with copies that you won't be able to sell."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>5</sup>

"Not only did we sell all 200 copies of *Where the Bluebird Sings*, but several boxes more!"  
—SUSAN HEINTZELMAN<sup>6</sup>



Wallace at Kepler's Books, Menlo Park, for book signing of *Collected Stories*, 1990.



"Wally was far from resting on his laurels and spending all his time in wiseful recollection of a time more innocent. He couldn't have been busier during these years."  
—JACKSON J. BENSON<sup>8</sup>

"Here I am writing lectures and preparing seminars for the University of Colorado, and writing a literary speech for the New York Public Library, and writing another talk for the Dartmouth Bookstore and some Berkeley bookstore and the Stanford Bookstore...."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>7</sup>



Wallace's passport.

"Wallace's busy life also included extensive travel. *When I was on the Serengeti Plains a few years ago, I thought it was just like Saskatchewan.*"  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>9</sup>

His life-long involvement in environmental issues remained an unwavering commitment.



Wallace with Herb Greench, Bay Area environmental leader. The attached business card thanks the Stegners for their generous donation to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

"We can support such agencies as the Midpeninsula Regional Park District, which preserves land in large enough patches so that it makes a sort of railroad right of way for plant species to keep their toehold in, and provides a habitat for wildlife which increasingly has no place to go. Such a [preserve] is beyond price, and needs active protection."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>10</sup>



Wallace and Ansel Adams were featured at a Stanford environmental event, 1982.

Wallace Stegner paid Ansel Adams the ultimate compliment: "We work in different media, different symbolic systems of transference, but if I have any validity as an artist, I would like to be an artist of Ansel's kind. If I have any choice about what sort of man to be, I would like to be a man of Ansel's kind."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>11</sup>



The Stegner family clan in this early 1990's photo includes: (Standing in back row, left to right): Page (son), Mary, Sheridan (great-grandson), Rachel (granddaughter), Wallace, Lynn (daughter-in-law); (Middle row, standing): Michelle and Nicole (step-great-granddaughters); (Front row, kneeling): Shawn (granddaughter-in-law), Allison (granddaughter), Kerry (grandson-in-law).

"If I were to give my grandchildren my patriarchal blessing, I would tell them: Don't try to control the earth beyond the absolute minimum. Work with the earth, not against it. For the earth does not belong to you. You belong to the earth."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>12</sup>



"Most of all, I thank my wife, Mary, who for reasons known only to herself has put up with me for nearly sixty years, has planted and tended ideas in my head, has guarded my health and my working hours, has made me go back and improve the manuscripts I brought her looking for praise, and who remains the principal reason why I go on putting words on paper and taking an interest in a world that I am often inclined to disown in disgust."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>13</sup>



"The older you get, the more the relation of past and present grows on you, because you have more history to look at.... No matter how old you get, you don't feel old. You're still the same guy inside, and so there is a continuity there, within yourself. You can't ignore it."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>15</sup>

But as Wallace reached his late 70's, he was beginning to feel his years.

In reaction to his hip operation in Fall 1991: "Oh, I'm getting around fine, just need a stump puller to get out of the chair."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>14</sup>



Wallace Stegner, Acclaimed Writer on West, Dies at 84

"When my father died, there was not only a tremendous expression of condolence and sympathy to the immediate family but wide-spread media acknowledgment of a great public loss."  
—PAGE STEGNER<sup>16</sup>



Mary Stegner sitting on the Wallace Stegner memorial bench in the 1,000-acre Long Ridge Open Space Preserve on the western slopes of Skyline Blvd.

"Wallace Stegner's life was a gift to us all."  
—WILLIAM KITTREDGE<sup>16</sup>



"When I have wit enough to think about it, [I am] terribly proud to be a man and an American, with all the rights and privileges that those words connote; and most of all I am humble before the responsibilities that are also mine. For no right comes without a responsibility, and being born luckier than most of the world's millions, I am also born more obligated."  
—WALLACE STEGNER<sup>1</sup>