

Eugene O'Neill.

Foundation, Tao House



NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2011

AWARDS BANQUET TO HONOR THREE MEMBERS OF FOUNDATION BOARD

The Annual Awards Banquet for the Eugene O'Neill Foundation will be held on Wednesday, January 25 in the O'Neill Room of the Crow Canyon Country Club in San Ramon. The dinner begins at 6:00 pm.

The Awards Banquet draws attention to the many hours of dedication and service given to the Foundation by various members.

This year's honorees are:

The Open Gate Award: Florence McAuley and Robert Rezak

This award honors those who have served as directors of the Foundation and whose dedication and service have enhanced the memory of Eugene O'Neill.

The Artistic Award: Jack DeRieux

This award is presented to individuals who have been outstanding in their commitment to the Foundation's mission to provide artistic and educational programs focusing on Eugene O'Neill's contribution to the American Theatre.

The cost is \$70 per person. Reservations for the event may be made online (www.eugeneoneill.org) or by calling the Foundation office - (925) 820-1818.

PLAYWRIGHTS' THEATRE TO PRESENT O'NEILL'S THE STRAW AT DANVILLE MUSEUM, JANUARY 7 - 8

Eugene O'Neill's autobiographical play, *The Straw*, will be the winter offering of Playwrights' Theatre at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley. The staged reading, performed by professional actors in the Bay Area, will be presented on Saturday, January 7, at 8:00 pm and Sunday, January 8 at 2:00 pm. Eric Fraisher Hayes will direct.



Eugene O'Neill,
January 1, 1914

The Straw is set in a sanatorium not unlike the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium where Eugene O'Neill recovered from tuberculosis in 1912-13. It focuses on a romantic relationship between two patients—Stephen Murray, a budding writer preparing to leave the sanatorium, and Eileen Carmody, whose struggle with the disease is less promising. Their relationship is, for her, a “hope in hopelessness.”

Stephen Murray and Eileen Carmody bear strong resemblances to O'Neill and Kitty Mackay, a working-class Irish American girl with whom he had a flirtation during his stay at Gaylord Farm. She died of tuberculosis in 1915.

The Straw ran for 20 performances when it opened off-Broadway in 1921. While the critics received it reasonably well, it paled in comparison with other O'Neill plays of the early 20s—*Beyond the Horizon*, *The Emperor Jones*, and “*Anna Christie*.”

The Straw is presented by the Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House, in partnership with the National Park Service and The Museum of the San Ramon Valley. Admission is \$20. Tickets are available online at www.eugeneoneill.org or by calling 925.820.1818.

For more information about the play, see page 3.



Kitty Mackay, a fellow patient
of O'Neill's at TB sanatorium

FOUNDATION HOSTS PLAYGROUND WRITERS AT TAO HOUSE

Continuing its partnership with PlayGround, a Bay Area organization that supports the development of new plays, the Eugene O'Neill Foundation and National Park Service hosted 25 emerging playwrights at Tao House on Sunday, November 6.

Following a tour of the house led by Park Service rangers and docents, board member Dan Cawthon gave a twenty-minute presentation on *The Iceman Cometh* as background for this year's “prompt”—Pipe Dream. Members of the Foundation then served lunch to the guests in the Old Barn.



The following week, the O'Neillian “prompt” was posted. The playwrights were allowed only three days to write ten-page scripts on the topic. From those submitted, six were selected for staged readings by professional actors and directors at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre on Monday, November 14. At least three of the ten-minute submissions will be included in the Playwrights' Theatre offerings on May 6 in the Old Barn at Tao House.

FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS ASSESS O'NEILL'S MANY CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN THEATRE

Anticipating a year of exciting programs, the Eugene O'Neill Foundation Board attended a 3-hour retreat on Saturday, November 13, to reflect on O'Neill's contributions to the theatre and discuss ways to implement the Foundation's mission. Held in the conference room of the National Park Service offices at Tao House, the retreat was led by Board president, Gary DeAtley and attended by a majority of Board members as well as members of the Advisory Board.



Responses regarding O'Neill's importance to the American theatre included the following:

- ~ Before O'Neill, the American theatre was dominated by vaudeville and romantic melodrama. Influenced by Strindberg, Ibsen, and other modern European playwrights, O'Neill created a theatre in America that touched the deepest stirrings of the human soul.
- ~ His Expressionist plays experimented with innovative theatrical techniques - integrating lights, sets, and sound into the structure of his plays.
- ~ His plays celebrated those who are disenfranchised from society, seeing a tragic nobility in their struggle to affirm life.
- ~ He was among the first to explore interracial marriage onstage.
- ~ He wrote leading roles for African American actors.
- ~ Influenced by Freud, he wrote plays about the power of the unconscious mind over human actions.
- ~ His plays exposed the hold of materialism on the American soul.

Gary DeAtley then asked the participants to consider why these contributions are important to our work, who our audiences are, the sort of programs we provide to reach our audiences, our resources, and which venues we should use.

The discussion was long and lively. Following lunch, participants were asked to rank the ideas that had emerged in the discussions and consider how they could be used when planning our programs for 2012: *Student Days*, *Studio Retreat*, *Artist Days*, *Playwrights' Theatre*, and the *Eugene O'Neill Festival*.

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

By Tom Leatherman, *Superintendent*
Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site



Sue Fritzke, new deputy superintendent

Almost a year ago, when I was selected as the Superintendent for the National Historic Site, the deputy superintendent position was left vacant. After much deliberation, Sue Fritzke has been selected as the new deputy superintendent, beginning her duties in early November.

Sue started her federal service in 1982 in the Peace Corps, serving 2.5 years in Ecuador. She began working for the National Park Service in 1985 in Interpretation and Fire Management in Yosemite National Park. Upon completion of her Master's research at Mount Rainier National Park, she continued in Resource Management at Redwood National and State Parks and Yosemite National Park.

Sue has been at Golden Gate National Recreation Area for the past 8 years, serving as the Natural Resources branch chief for vegetation and stewardship. She has worked on a number of interdisciplinary teams to develop and implement the park's Fire Management Plan and a variety of infrastructure improvement and restoration projects.

"I'm excited to participate in furthering the connections of these parks to the communities they reside in," she commented. "I look forward to working with the management team to implement these relationships to take these parks into the second century of the National Park Service." Her primary office will be in Richmond, California, but will be spending time at all four of the National Park sites located in Contra Costa County.

NO RESERVATIONS NEEDED FOR 'OPEN SATURDAYS' AT TAO HOUSE

Every Saturday, year round, the Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site is open for tours – WITHOUT RESERVATIONS!! The park shuttle greets visitors at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley three times a day, at 10:00, 12:00 and 2:00, to take them up to Tao House in the Danville hills. Rangers and volunteers in the house provide informal tours and provide information about Eugene O'Neill and his life in the San Ramon Valley.

A great escape during the holiday season for visiting family and friends, the site provides and opportunity to learn about America's most accomplished playwright and the inspiration he gained from his time spent at Tao House. For more information visit www.nps.gov/euon or call 925-838-0249.



THE STRAW IS SEQUEL TO LONG DAYS JOURNEY INTO NIGHT By Robert Dowling

One of Eugene O'Neill's earliest full-length plays, *The Straw* is second only to *Long Day's Journey into Night* for its autobiographical content. Written in the winter of 1918-19, *The Straw* premiered on November 3, 1921 at the Lyceum Theatre in New London, Connecticut, and then moved to Greenwich Village on November 10, 1921. "*Anna Christie*," for which O'Neill received his second Pulitzer Prize, opened that same month.



Tuberculosis Patients at Gaylord Farm Sanatorium, 1913. O'Neill is third from right.

The Straw recounts O'Neill's actual experience at the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Wallingford, Connecticut, from Christmas Eve 1912 to June 3, 1913, after the 24-year old O'Neill had been diagnosed with tuberculosis, then known as "consumption," or the "Great White Plague."

The Straw can thus be read as a sequel to O'Neill's greatest tragedy, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, in which his most

autobiographical character, Edmond Tyrone, first discovers that he has contracted the killer disease. Other than their names, the only real discrepancy between *The Straw's* protagonist Stephen Murray and Edmond Tyrone is that Stephen is somewhat older than Edmond—30, O'Neill's age when he created the character.

O'Neill experienced a self-professed intellectual and psychological rebirth during his convalescence at Gaylord. Over a year after his release from the sanatorium, he wrote to its superintendent David Russell Lyman that "if, as they say, it is sweet to visit the place one was born in, then it will be doubly sweet for me to visit the place I was reborn in—for my second birth was the only one which had my full approval." While there, he began reading many of the authors and specific playwrights who would become some of his greatest literary influences—including writers from the Irish Literary Renaissance, John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats, and Lady Gregory, who all wrote for the Abbey Theatre, and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg. He read the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Kayam, and Francis Thompson's epic poem, "The Hound of Heaven," was sent to him later by a strict Irish Catholic nurse at Gaylord in the futile hope that the poem might bring back the young apostate's faith in the church. Less famously, he conducted a long flirtation with a working-class Irish-American girl named Kitty MacKay, the model for Eileen Carmody in *The Straw*, who died of tuberculosis in 1915.

From Robert Dowling's *A Critical Companion to Eugene O'Neill: A Literary Reference to his Life and Work, Vol. I Facts on File, August, 2009, p.445.*

STUDENT DAYS WELCOMES BUDDING HIGH SCHOOL ARTISTS TO TAO HOUSE

Plans are underway for the twenty-first season of Student Days, an educational program of the Eugene O'Neill Foundation and the National Park Service. Since its inception, Student Days has attracted over 2,000 students to Tao House from more than thirty area high schools.

The mission of Student Days is to bring students with serious interests in photography, writing, drama, and art to the setting where O'Neill created his most powerful work.

Dates for Student Days, 2012 are:

- Art: Thursday, March 1
- Drama: Saturday, March 3
- Photography: Wednesday, March 7
- Writing: Thursday, March 8.

Students are welcomed to the site with a light brunch followed by an interactive tour of Tao House led by an interpretive ranger from the National Park Service. The tour is designed to introduce students to O'Neill's life story and his



significant impact on world theatre. Following the tour, workshops, led by professionals in the respective art forms, give students the opportunity to learn more about their chosen artistic interest. They then apply their new knowledge in the creation of a work that may later be displayed at Tao House.

During the lunch break, students are treated to a live performance of scenes from O'Neill's plays. By the end of the day, students leave Tao House with a deeper appreciation of their respective art forms and an assignment to complete and polish their work for exhibit.

There is no charge to those attending Student Days. They are underwritten by individuals and organizations with an interest in providing students equal access to artistic and cultural experiences. Applications for the program can

be obtained from their high school teachers, or career centers. They can also be downloaded from the Eugene O'Neill Foundation website: www.eugeneoneill.org.

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Executive Board

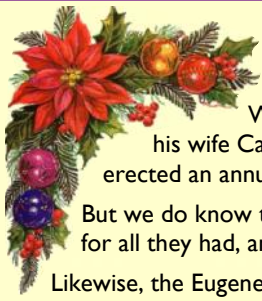
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Dear Friend of the Eugene O'Neill Foundation,

We have no record of a major snowstorm at Tao House when Eugene O'Neill and his wife Carlotta lived in Danville in the late 1930's. It's also unlikely that the O'Neills erected an annual Christmas tree or hosted a New Year's party for their neighbors.

But we do know that that Gene and Carlotta took time out at the end of the year to be thankful for all they had, and to plan for the year ahead.

Likewise, the Eugene O'Neill Foundation doesn't have a big year-end celebration, but we are grateful to our members and friends who have helped the Foundation present educational and community programs throughout the past year. It's also time to plan for the months ahead.

We hope you'll include the O'Neill Foundation in your year-end giving plans. A modest donation to the Eugene O'Neill Foundation will be a great value to us as we schedule **Playwrights' Theatre** and **O'Neill Festival** productions for 2012. Your help also makes possible our educational programs for high school students during **Student Days** and the **Summer Studio Retreat** for aspiring playwrights.

The last three years have been difficult financial times for most non-profits. The Eugene O'Neill Foundation, too, must rely on its members and friends for their financial support. Although we work closely with the National Park Service at the O'Neill National Historic Site, we receive no direct government funding for our programs. Our contributors make what we do possible.

Please include the response slip below with your year-end gift. Or, visit us on-line to make a special contribution (www.eugeneoneill.org). A gift of \$25 or \$50 or even more can be of major assistance as we plan for 2012.

As always, we appreciate your help, and send out best wishes for a wonderful end to 2011 and good vibes for 2012.

Gary De Atley
President, Eugene O'Neill Foundation

Gary Schaub
VP Development, Eugene O'Neill Foundation

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Reservations for tours of Tao House: 925.838.0249

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P.O. Box 402 Danville CA 94526-0402



Sculpture of Eugene O'Neill by Jon Hair,
unveiled at Tao House September 10, 2011