Director's Column: Theodore Roethke House Receives Literary Landmark Designation

The childhood home of Theodore Roethke, Saginaw's Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, recently received the prestigious Literary Landmark designation. The Theodore Roethke House, located at 1805 Gratiot Avenue in Saginaw, joins a distinguished group of historic literary sites that includes the homes of William Faulkner, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway and Tennessee Williams, among other well-known writers.

The opportunity to nominate the Roethke House as a Literary Landmark came about through Zahnow Library's affiliation with the Michigan Center for the Book. The goal of the Center is to promote an awareness of books, reading, literacy, authors and Michigan's rich literary heritage. In addition to promoting a variety of literary events, it also seeks to identify and establish Literary Landmarks in Michigan.

Theodore Roethke's home was an obvious choice. Roethke drew much of the inspiration for his poetry from his childhood experience of working in his family's floral company. He wrote of his poetry, the greenhouse “is my symbol for the whole of life, a womb, a heaven-on-earth.” Beginning in 1941 with Open House, the eminent poet and teacher published extensively, receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 for The Waking, two National Book Awards and the Bollingen Prize, among an array of honors.

A wide selection of books by and about Roethke can be found in Zahnow Library. We also have a unique videorecording, In a Dark Time (PS3535.O39I53), which actually pictures him reading from his works in his home and discussing poetry with his students in a classroom setting. His ‘presence’ in our library can even be seen...
in the intriguing greenhouse sculpture in the northeast corner of the first floor that features the bust of Roethke surrounded by figures and images that symbolize his life and his poetic themes. A photo and description of the Theodore Roethke Memorial Sculpture can be found on our web site at http://www.svsu.edu/library/roethke.html.

It was truly a pleasure to meet and work with Mary Ellen Roethke, cousin of Theodore, and the other members of the board of the Friends of Theodore Roethke Foundation in the process of applying for the Literary Landmark designation. A public celebration of the award is being planned for early this summer. Zahnow Library's involvement in securing this national recognition for the Roethke House strengthens its ties to the Saginaw community and advances our outreach and public service goals.

-- Linda Farynk, Library Director
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