You know how advice is. You only want it if it agrees with what you wanted to do anyway. —John Steinbeck

From the Interim Director
Susan Shillinglaw

I am delighted to be at the National Steinbeck Center, delighted to edit this publication for our many supporters. Thank you, loyal members, for your appreciation of Steinbeck and of the Salinas center that honors him. For many years, the National Steinbeck Center has been an important institution for me, personally. Kim Greer made me Scholar-in-Residence in 2005, and I’ve loved that honorary title for the past 10 years. Now it’s time for me to earn my keep—put some energy behind those years of support and kindness. In particular, I shall miss Executive Director Colleen Bailey’s unflagging enthusiasm for all things Steinbeck and all things Salinas, but I’ll try to step gingerly into her stylish shoes.

This issue of the NSC newsletter has a new look—thanks to the Center’s long-time designer, Kim Osborne, with whom I’ve exchanged many emails in the past few weeks. The NSC staff graciously agreed to my request that each write something for this publication. What else could they say to a Director of one week? My goal was to issue news as soon as possible, so here’s where we are, three weeks into my tenure. I love the challenge of the position, and I hope to bring more Steinbeck programming to the Center this fall, focusing perhaps on a Thursday evening series called “Sweet Thursday.” I’ve always wanted to do that. Updates in future issues of “News.”

Let me close with Steinbeck, a sentence that inspires me in this venture: “I hold that man is largely an optimist, a scraper of starlight and that this, in practical life, is what has made his life better.” For “man” I edit silently, adding woman.

SAVE THE DATE: August 29
Mariachi Festival

THE 2016 STEINBECK FESTIVAL
will be held the first weekend in May, 6-8:
From Salinas to Sea of Cortez: Steinbeck on Land and Sea

Call 831.775.4721 for more information on our upcoming events.

JULY 11, 2:00-5:30 We’ll have a Rodeo booth set up in front of the NSC with Red Pony tattoos, games for kids, a Steinbeck photo op, a saddle on display (like the one that young Jody in “The Gift” was given by his father), and contests for prizes. The staff will be present in their cowboy boots and hats.
Mary Gamble has been digging around in Steinbeck archives since 1982, when she was hired by Steinbeck Library Director John Gross. She was hired as a reference librarian when there were three positions open, and John assigned Mary to the Steinbeck archives and local history—there she worked 20 hours a week for 16 years (in 1998 the Steinbeck archives moved to the National Steinbeck Center). In 1982, the collection consisted of “a lot of stuff.” The library had “The Pearl” manuscript, even though it had not been completely paid for. “I thought the photograph collection was really interesting, not only Steinbeck but the photos of the area—Salinas at the turn of the century.” Mary’s job in the Steinbeck archives included giving tours, working with scholars and students, buying material—and last of all accessioning.

Today she’s at the NSC conducting a thorough inventory of the city’s Steinbeck archive—all materials brought to the NSC in 1998. A week ago, I hired Lisa Josephs as a NSC archivist to work closely with Mary and create an online catalogue of NSC material donated since 1998. “She’s a born archivist,” gloved Mary.

Lisa is actually a scholar of linguistic anthropology who was, early in the summer, volunteering at the NSC. After moving to Salinas last October, she volunteered because she was looking for a place to “spend time, to build interesting and useful skills, and engage in local history. I hadn’t learned much about Steinbeck—except for Of Mice and Men and The Pearl in high school.”

“She’s a quick learner. Lisa has been working with Mary for a week: “Cataloguing,” she noted with satisfaction, “draws from archeological theory, the emphasis on material—the physical object—being so central. Because Steinbeck is relatively recent [from an archeologist’s perspective] there are relationships to still-living people that are embodied in the archives.”

“I’m also becoming interested in his handwriting. He has very consistent quirks. For example, the bar on his t’s floats above the t most of the time. A lot of the loops get flattened—the lower case e has not much to differentiate from an i. All his capitals are pretty—a pretty g, for example.”

For her part, Mary Gamble is “very happy” to have an assistant working on the NSC collection. “It feels good to be able to pass all this information on, and not have to worry about leaving tomes of information that no one would ever read.”

We’ll publish monthly archival updates!

A student researcher at the archives

Lisa Josephs

Megan Barnes, who spent two days in the NSC archives in late June, is a graduate student at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, working on her master’s degree. Her summer project is to steep herself in Steinbeck. “My university gave me a grant for the summer, a research grant. It is thankfully financing my being able to stay at home and read all summer and pay for my trip up here.” She is endeavoring to read the whole Steinbeck canon, beginning to end, skipping only those books she’s read already. “I’m trying for two books a week. So far, I’ve been on top of it. I have been reading two and starting a third each week.

“With reading all of his books this summer, I’m hoping to come across patterns. I’m starting in the research looking at the King Arthur legend throughout his works. I’ve made a spreadsheet and I am plugging in names, themes, and symbolism through each of the works.” At the NSC, she began her research with the extensive oral interviews in the archives.

Megan has been passionate about Steinbeck for a very long time, first reading his work in high school. “I love Steinbeck because, personally as a reader, he makes me think. So many books, modern, mass-produced books, are fun. They’re like candy, they’re fun, they taste good, continued on page 5
NSC Educational programs
Seán Rose

I started as the National Steinbeck Center’s new Education Coordinator in May, and in that short time I’ve already begun to see the impact our education programming has on students, teachers, and school communities.

Steinbeck Young Authors (SYA), our middle-school writing program which uses Steinbeck’s *The Red Pony* as the jumping-off point for students’ own creative and descriptive writing, directly engaged 4,600 students in the 2014-15 academic year. Over 120 of these students were chosen by their teachers to attend our ever-popular Day of Writing, where they were coached in the art of writing by community members and local professionals. The Center was packed for the end of year awards ceremony, with students eager to see their work printed in the annual *Gabilan Journal*, and to reconnect with their coaches and friends.

“...we want to engage new schools and districts as partners in this work, and see the impact of high-quality resources and programming continue to grow.”

Last month also saw the end of the pilot year of our Steinbeck and Ricketts Institute. We developed this initiative around Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*, as a cross-curriculum, project-based program that explores and encourages linkages between Science and English Language Arts, in line with the new Common Core Standards. Over 450 students, at six schools, took part this year. At the awards ceremony, students presented some of their projects. From the environmental impacts of cruise liners, to drinking water quality, and an exploration of the meaning of ‘home’, students and their teachers took inspiration from *Cannery Row* to make Steinbeck’s themes and concerns relevant to today. It was inspiring, and encouraging, to see the breadth and quality of students’ responses.

Looking forward to the 2015-16 academic year, we aim for these flagship education programs to continue to grow in scale, reach, and depth. Some schools have been on the SYA program almost since its inception, and that depth of relationship is important. At the same time, we want to engage new schools and districts as partners in this work, and see the impact of high-quality resources and programming continue to grow.

To learn more about our education work, or to express interest in joining these programs, contact Seán Rose - sean@steinbeck.org

“You can boast about anything if it’s all you have. Maybe the less you have, the more you are required to boast.”

—John Steinbeck
Random thoughts on horses, celebrations, and the Salinas rodeo

Susan Shillinglaw

John Steinbeck loved to ride horses. His father had a horse, Moonlight, and Mr. Steinbeck bought his son his own pony when he was about six. Steinbeck named him Jill, “part Shetland and part Cayuse and no great shucks for looks.” But young John rode that pony throughout his childhood and refused to sell Jill to the “lovely circus men” who came to Salinas each spring and “tried to buy my pony from me and offered fantastic prices. This would be whispered about for weeks and conferred a kind of holiness on both the pony and on me. Kids would pay a small sum just to stroke my pony on the neck.”

“Jill gave the restless boy freedom and unqualified loyalty.”

Steinbeck wrote those lines some thirty years after riding Jill, and perhaps he exaggerates his friends’ reverence for the pony. But Jill’s importance to young John was no exaggeration. Of childhood photos that survive, a good number show John next to his colt or on top of his pony, the most famous showing him with his younger sister Mary. Jill gave the restless boy freedom and unqualified loyalty. John rode Jill to the Davis Road crossing on the Salinas River, his favorite place to swim and hunt rabbits. Surely he rode often to his friend Max Wagner’s uncle’s ranch off San Juan Grade Road.

Max’s uncle, Mr. Hebert, was one of the founders of the Salinas Rodeo. In 1911, the rodeo moved to the grounds where there are today. Steinbeck was 9. The Steinbeck family had a box at the new rodeo grounds.

Maybe Max and John went to the rodeo together—more likely, they joined all Salinas youth who regularly attended the rodeo. When John Steinbeck wrote about the Salinas Rodeo in 1955, in an essay about his hometown for Holiday magazine, he did so with a kind of wry detachment:

And we had the rodeo in the summer to attract tourists.
This celebration had started as a kind of local competition. One’s uncles and even athletic aunts entered the roping contests. The ranchmen from the valley in the foothills rode in on saddles decorated with silver, and their sons demonstrated their skill with unbroken horses. Then gradually the professionals moved in and it became “show business.” A working cowman hadn’t time to attain the circus perfection of the professionals and soon even the wild horses and the Brahma bulls were imported, and cowboy clowns, who moved from show to show, took the places of the sons of Lynches and Abernathys and Bardins.

But in fact, Steinbeck loved the Salinas Rodeo—nearly as well, I suppose, as he loved circuses throughout his life—a love sparked by the circus train that chugged into Salinas every spring. The circus, Steinbeck insisted in a piece he wrote for Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus program in 1954, is “our oldest and deepest rooted entertainment.” And a rodeo is not unlike a circus. Both offer entertainment of the highest order, drama and excitement and “mass emotion.”

“No matter how good a man is, there’s always some horse can pitch him.”
— John Steinbeck, The Red Pony
Steinbeck loved festive events. From 1963-67, he was chairman of the Sag Harbor Old Whalers’ Festival, presiding over a contest where participants harpooned a forty-two foot imitation whale that Steinbeck called “Mobilie Dick.” At the grand finale, Steinbeck insisted on fireworks—that he lit.

Back to where I began—horses. Steinbeck’s lifelong love of horses connected him to his Salinas childhood, to Jill, and to the rodeo. When he went to Stanford in 1919, he rode horses for the R.O.T.C. cavalry. In Pacific Grove in 1935, he traded one short story, “The Snake,” to the Monterey Beacon for the use of a horse for six months. And as late as 1964, he envisioned galloping in fields as he had as a youth. “I’m going to ride with the Galway Hunt this Christmas,” Steinbeck wrote to a friend as he was purchasing new riding britches. “Johnny Huston is co-master of the hunt. I’ll be sore for a couple of days but then I should do all right. I don’t really think one forgets.”

Galloping across Irish fields with John Huston was just another kind of celebration, a rodeo of sorts.

Student Researcher, CONTINUED

and you can put them back on the shelf...I read them, but when I read Steinbeck, I feel that I can’t just sit there, put it down, and be done with it. It makes me think about myself...When I read To A God Unknown, I got really emotional.... It made me think ‘Do I see God in nature?’”

“I love Steinbeck because . . . he makes me think.”

At Loyola Marymount, Megan discovered that in the past fifty years or so there have been over 700 Ph.D. dissertations written about Faulkner and only 120 about Steinbeck. “I grew up on the east coast. I’ve read Mark Twain, east-coast Americans like Melville.” On the east coast, she noted, “there are “nose[s] turned up at Steinbeck. There’s an elitist approach that I think is completely unfair. My life-goal would be to bring Steinbeck to a bigger audience.”

Megan hopes her summer research turns into a dissertation. “I’m really passionate about [the research],” she said, “and I’m willing to spend as much time - months and years” to “map” all the themes in Steinbeck’s work. At this point, her spreadsheet is “skeletal,” but, as she says, “I’m hoping to fill it out. It’d be awesome; the dream is to turn this into a book.”
One of the joys of working at the National Steinbeck Center is that we all wear different hats. On top of my responsibilities as a development & membership associate, I have worn the social media hat since January. I suspect the decision to put me in charge of all things #Steinbeck was largely informed by the fact that I am currently the Center’s youngest staff member. For a recent graduate with a B.A. in French literature, it has been an informative six months.

“...it has been really eye opening to see how people already interact with Steinbeck’s works online.”

For most nonprofits, social media marketing presents a (relatively) low-cost opportunity to disseminate information about their mission statement and programs, to join and place themselves within larger national and international dialogues, and to simply engage a wider audience. In practice, social media marketing represents a significant investment in staff time to continuously create and curate quality content.

This was the first big issue I had to tackle: the need to continuously create content for our outlets—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram—and most recently Periscope (real time videos). While my first few weeks on the job went over very smoothly, I soon began to question the sustainability of posting content germane to Steinbeck nearly every day across three platforms. Though I found some early success in posting quotations from different Steinbeck books, I was worried about how to effectively adapt Steinbeck’s prose for social media’s 140-characters-world without diluting its value.

While I still wrestle with the problem of condensing his work to fit the short info bits that people have grown accustomed to, I have realized that the question of sustainability was largely self-fabricated. As a classic American author, Steinbeck has more than passed the test of time and it has been really eye opening to see how people already interact with Steinbeck’s works online.

Ranging from travel agencies tweeting quotes from *Travels with Charley* to schoolchildren complaining about having to write an essay on *Of Mice and Men*, there’s always something being said about Steinbeck online. Literary purists might scoff at this type of interaction, but in many ways it represents a new and necessary phase in the author’s legacy, as a younger generation learns of his works.

As the National Steinbeck Center, we are delighted to use our social media platforms as a hub for all things Steinbeck. One of my most popular Instagram posts was an *East of Eden* iPhone cover. My *Travels with Charley* posts have also attracted a wide following. On June 26, 2016, artist Tim Youd began his week’s residency at the NSC, typing *Travels with Charley* on a typewriter similar to the one Steinbeck used. I posted a video of the original GMC truck with Youd typing at the kitchen table inside the camper.

If you haven’t done so already, make sure to follow us on:

Facebook: /nationalsteinbeckcenter
Twitter: /steinbeckcenter

**Landscaping**

David Butler

The National Steinbeck Center has just completed a major landscaping maintenance project. Overgrown plants have been trimmed, weeds have been removed and new ground cover has been laid. Thanks to the City of Salinas for their hard-working crew, which did a fantastic job of cleaning up the grounds. The Center is very visible as it is located in the heart of Old Town and is bordered by several hundred feet of curbing and sidewalks on two major streets running along the North and West sides. Across Center Street on the East side is now the recently completed Taylor Farms building which is a welcome addition to Old Town.
In December, the National Steinbeck Center will sponsor the second Salinas Valley Comic Con, held at the National Steinbeck Center and in Monterey from December 18-20. Might John Steinbeck be interested in such an event? John Steinbeck addressed his love of comics in 1952 when he wrote the introduction to Al Capp’s *The World of Li’l Abner:* “Well, one of the symptoms or diagnostics of literature should be, it seems to me, that it is read, that it amuses, moves, instructs, changes and criticizes people.”

He went on to describe Al Capp by saying, “I think Capp may very possibly be the best writer in the world today.” Al Capp started his professional comic strip career at the age of 19 with his character *Colonol Gilfeather.* In 1934 Capp created *Li’l Abner,* reaching an audience of 15 million readers, and within the comic created the Sadie Hawkins dance which is still celebrated today.

For last year’s convention we anticipated 200-300 guests, and ended up with over 2,000 people attending. With the great turnout, and praise from all who attended, we are now in the midst of preparing Salinas Valley Comic Con 2015. I am currently hard at work bringing in new vendors, more artists and creating compelling programming that attendees of all ages will enjoy. Stay tuned as we will be announcing the first guests soon!

**A kick-off party** will be hosted on December 18 at the National Steinbeck Center. The party will consist of the 2015 SVCC Costume Contest, plenty of dancing, and the chance to meet new friends! Tickets for the opening night party are free with the purchase of any Salinas Valley Comic Con ticket, while supplies last.

The vendor and exhibitor floor will be open on December 19 and 20 at the Monterey Marriott. The floor will be a bevy of activity with vendors selling items featuring your favorite characters. Attendees will have the chance to meet amazing comic artists like Dark Horse Comics’ Ace Continuado, *Squid Row* creator Bridgett Spicer, and former head writer for *Nickelodeon’s SpongeBob SquarePants* Steven Banks.

If you would like to be one of the first to hear news about the convention, make sure to get your tickets for *Pop Cinema—The Art of Storytelling.* Guests at each screening will be the first to hear what’s new with Salinas Valley Comic Con. We have some great screenings coming up, including a double-feature of *Batman* (1989) and *The Dark Knight* on November 6th at 5:30 PM. Tickets for this can also be purchased on our EventBrite page:

www.eventbrite.com/e/salinas-valley-comic-con-tickets-13974635511

For more information, visit www.steinbeck.org.
NSC Volunteers!
Diane Arellano

The National Steinbeck Center celebrates its 17th anniversary on June 27th. We would like to recognize all the volunteers who have supported us through the years. Through the giving of their time and knowledge, they make guests feel welcome, educate students about the works of John Steinbeck, assist in acquiring grants, create memorable events and festivals, and make wonderful ambassadors in representing the National Steinbeck Center.

As our current Volunteer of the Year, Rosalie Gray, said when accepting the award, “I really enjoy volunteering at the Center and the best part is meeting all the interesting people from around the world.” Rosalie is one of fifteen docents who began when the National Steinbeck Center opened in 1998. Other docents also celebrating seventeen of service are Stasia Bevier, Marion Browning, Ellyse Burke, James Hage, Roseann Kalich, June Laarss-Payne, George and Joann McKay, Imajean Mikkelsen, Lynn Pearlman, Carol Robles, Diane Silveira, and Karla and Marvin Wolf. Roseann Kalich has been a part of the National Steinbeck Center in more ways than her volunteer work as a docent: “I worked on a quilt which was used in an exhibition at the Center, and the produce label of my grandfather’s company was enlarged and now hangs in the rotunda.”

Be part of the excitement as we enter a new year. Share your passion for John Steinbeck and the history of the Salinas Valley by volunteering as a Museum Greeter or Tour Guide. We provide the training and a fun place to meet new people, while you provide an outgoing personality and the willingness to learn about one of America’s great writers. For more information on volunteering at the National Steinbeck Center contact Diane Arellano at 831.796.3833 or diane@steinbeck.org. The next training session will be held in early August.