



*Friends of  
Lorine Niedecker*

*Issue #13  
Winter 2011*

# *I was the solitary plover*



## Niedecker Research Room Opens at the Dwight Foster Public Library

The Dwight Foster Public Library reopened on February 1, 2011 in their newly renovated and expanded building. Part of this project was the creation of the Lorine Niedecker Research Room which was generously funded by the Knox family in memory of Jane Shaw Knox, Lorine’s first biographer.

“This space will provide both the needed storage for our archive and a wonderful place for researchers,” stated Ann Engelman, president of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker. “We are grateful to the Knox family for providing the funding and the

library board for including this space in their renovation.”

The new Niedecker room includes locking bookcases with glass fronts to house Lorine’s personal library. Archival file cabinets and drawers are storing the paper, photograph and media archives. There is additional space for display materials. Windows on the east side of the room provide natural light. The room is located on the library’s second floor off the exhibit hall in the historic part of the building.

### Niedecker or Neidecker, No Longer the Question

When even some people who admire Lorine Niedecker’s poetry call her Loraine it’s not surprising that she is often miscalled Neidecker. Lorine Neidecker, Loraine Niedecker--does it matter? Well, yes. Lorine herself would be

concerned: only ignorance of her poetry could be worse than not knowing the spelling and pronunciation of her name.

It’s true that sometimes Lorine’s German

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*I was the solitary plover*

*a pencil*

*for a wing-bone*

*From the secret notes*

*I must tilt*

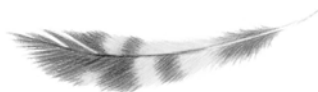
*upon the pressure*

*execute and adjust*

*In us sea-air rhythm*

*“We live by the urgent*

*wave of the verse”*



# *a pencil for a wing-bone*

last name appears as Neidecker ( NIGHdecker) rather than Niedecker ( KNEEdecker). This fact has given rise to three myths. 1) That Lorine changed her name from NIGHdecker to KNEEdecker in high school as a gesture of independence; 2) that Lorine changed her name from NIGHdecker to KNEEdecker because she preferred the euphonious rhyming of KNEE with LorEEN; and 3) that the spelling on her gravestone--NIGHdecker--was Lorine's finger flip at her KNEEdecker parents.

A few facts:

- California records state that Lorine's paternal grandfather was Charles Niedecker.
- Grandfather Charles's name on the marriage certificate to his second wife is Niedecker.
- Grandfather Charles's name on the Wisconsin censuses of 1895 and 1905 is Niedecker.
- Lorine's father's name on his birth certificate is Henry Niedecker.
- Lorine's father's name on his marriage record is Henry Niedecker.
- Lorine's name on her birth record is Niedecker.
- Lorine's name on her baptismal certificate is Niedecker.
- Lorine's father's name in the 1910 and 1930 censuses is Niedecker.
- Lorine's name on her 1928 marriage certificate is Niedecker.
- Lorine's mother's name on her death certificate is Niedecker.
- Lorine's father's name on his death certificate is Niedecker.
- Lorine's name on her 1963 marriage certificate is Niedecker.
- **LORINE'S NAME ON EVERY SCRAP OF HER PUBLISHED WORK IS NIEDECKER.**

So why the confusion?

One reason is that her father Henry's brother, Charles, changed his surname KNEEdecker to NIGHdecker. Though Charles eventually lived in Janesville, he is buried in Fort Atkinson and evidently his spelling of his name had local

influence. His granddaughter Mary Rockenfield declares (incorrectly), "It was never Niedecker, always Neidecker": But Charles Jr. was born Niedecker.

More important, in this southeastern Wisconsin region settled by Germans, NIGH names predominate: Hein, Heinz, Schneider, Heimstreet, Deinlein, Klein, Schmeiser, Stein, Gein, Feingold, Meintz, Steinmetz, Weiner, Zeigler, Zeitz. I realized this when, on three separate occasions, I asked for Lorine Niedecker records at the Jefferson County Court House. Each time the clerk said, "Let's see, you're looking for Loraine NIGHdecker?"

In Fort Atkinson newspapers, therefore, Henry Niedecker's name gradually began to be misspelled as Neidecker, as it was on a plat map in 1950. When his wife Theresa died in 1951, he did not protest when the stone carver misspelled the name Neidecker. The Jefferson County Union obituary also spelled Theresa's name Neidecker. In a 1951 document about well rights it's "Henry Neidecker" and in 1954 he too is Neidecker in a Jefferson County Union obituary. The misspelling could happen to Lorine too. In divorce proceedings against her first husband in 1942, the plaintiff is Lorine Neidecker Hartwig; and in a property document or two signed after Henry's death, Lorine is recorded as Niedecker, "also known as Neidecker."

These are, however, exceptions. Lorine was born Niedecker and wrote as Niedecker--though when she died in 1970 the Jefferson County Union neatly sidestepped the issue by calling her Mrs. Albert Millen.

Niedecker. Lorine. Maybe we need a movie titled Lorine's Nie.

Margot Peters  
Lake Mills, Wisconsin

Margot Peters forthcoming biography of Lorine Niedecker is scheduled for publication in the fall of 2011.

# From the secret notes I must tilt

## POETRY

### Red Dog

Comes in late November, early  
December, more than the snow  
it's the cold, bones aching, legs  
like lead, looking out the window  
for days, weeks, so few critters  
but you drag yourself up got  
things to do. His grandchildren  
waiting for Christmas, happy  
music on the radio, Al cuts a  
tree and she finds something to  
hang on the boughs: bits of birch  
bark, pine cones, cinnamon sticks,  
glass balls mother cherished, small  
poems, a letter from Cid and  
then they'll drive into town  
buy a stuffed red dog baby will  
love so much and never, never  
give it up. After the holidays they  
became routine he putters, watches  
TV, she writes and reads and writes,  
typing and what's finished put  
away, the undone hangs around  
like unanswered questions, requests  
unfulfilled, prayers that need an  
answer and the regulator never  
stops. Wound every night sprints,  
chains, weights and pendulum move,  
hands point out and the chimes, tick.

### Supper Club

Al said, "Let's get off this island.  
Go into town. Eat with the swells."  
It's just off the river, down the block  
from the creamery. Fair, buttered  
slips past lips warming every

inch it passes on the way to...  
Little red potatoes, green beans  
amandine, pork chops, chicken  
or was she hungry for some steak,  
blood red in the middle, a little brown  
outside. She would almost cry but  
small talk, sweet nothings drifted  
across the table and in the dim light  
she could see that face and love him.  
"Lori what do you want for dessert? I'm  
so stuffed I feel I might pop but you  
sweet heart have eaten like a bird. Get  
something sweet, I might take a bite."

Mike Michaels

Mike Michaels graduated from UWM, attended some workshops, stayed a few months at the Vermont Studio Center and for some reason has kept writing poetry. He's been published in The Massachusetts Review, The California Quarterly, Spire, The Journal of Kentucky Studies, Rivers Edge, The Wisconsin Review and The Tower. These poems are part of his larger piece titled "Woman of Water."



### Haiku

early morning news  
the blue heron lets us watch  
from a distance

first to fall last to fall  
---  
children scatter  
piled up years

# upon the pressure

high windows catch  
the sunset  
---  
hopes for peace delay the deadline

Gary Hotham

Gary Hotham lives in Maryland. He has been writing for a long time now and his poems have appeared in a variety of literary journals and magazines. His book *BREATH MARKS: Haiku to Read in the Dark* was published in 1999 and his latest chapbook, *MISSED APPOINTMENT: The Haiku Art* in 2007. Both books received a Mildred Kanterman Memorial Merit Book Award from the Haiku Society of America.



## Haiku Forbes

Irene Forbes, a potter and painter, died of ALS or “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” The farm she shared with her husband, Tom, is just outside of Washington, NC.

at first she wanted  
to crash her car fatally  
instead, she painted

curved like a sliver  
of moon, she lies dying now--  
he kisses her face

the hickory tree  
she once played in turns yellow  
and dies when she does

the kiln without fire  
paints dried-up on the palette  
the artist’s hand gone

a red, fallen leaf  
bird’s nest, spring light on birch trunks--  
three paintings are mine

Nancy P. Shires

Nancy Shires has published most recently in *Avocet*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Nomad's Choir*, and *Rockford Review* and has poems forthcoming in *Ilya's Honey* and *Solitary Plover*. A native of Ohio, she is now a North Carolinian and retired from East Carolina University.



## Prairie Tether

It comes out of the milkweed tantrums  
moving low with the earth smoke  
caught in the lowlands...  
slithers through bounty as the grace of the prairie.

It hovers over a world of firs and woods  
a shadow that weaves the fibers of  
raw landscape, the way a waterfall seeks the quiet  
percolating springs steadily dripping to the river level  
out into the sand, then over the stones.

*All of this earth* I cannot hold in one breath  
or record in the wavy lines the wind left in my palms.  
*This* universe is like my mother’s shawl...  
...that covered me when she was cold...  
and now warms my ancestry forever.

*This* place is where the engine of bone marrow  
secretly adapts the swift blood flowing  
through the rivers of arteries to transformed veins  
rushing to the very surface of my breath  
...only to force my awe to exhale!

Elaine A. Barrett

Elaine writes fiction and not, along with poetry from Madison. Her poetry and prose has over the years appeared in the *Wisconsin State Journal*; previous (*Madison*)\_*Mature Lifestyles Newspaper*; and *UCLA's American Indian Culture and Research Journal*; she was also a 2 year contributor to Madison's *NorthSide News*.



# execute and adjust

## Tibetan New Year

“If you circle / the habit of  
your meaning, / it’s fact and  
no harm done.”

(Lorine Niedecker)

Augustine hung up on lust  
(it gets the best of  
us) and Dr. King too.

Today take a Tibetan  
New Year vow skillfulness  
in all things. Maybe

the woodfrogs hear my  
plea. Maybe circle the  
meaning of my habit.

## Slaughter Sanctuary

“I talk at the top / of my white  
resignment.” Lorine Niedecker

*Weep a deep trickle* write  
at the top of my lungs,  
spleen, watch

the careen of syllables  
as they cascade out my ear.  
Here (Ilalqo) the body  
battered as it can be.  
The condensery still  
a sanctuary in Slaughter.  
Frog rattle. Freight train  
whistle. Energy makes a scaffold  
holds up the stars.

Paul Nelson

Paul Nelson lives in Seattle, Washington. He says: “(These poems are) part of a poetry postcard project I helped create. In most of the pieces I used Lorine Niedecker’s series of poems written on calendar pages both as epigraphs and as entryways for poems of my own, each one written to a specific participant in the poetry postcard series. That she was from the Midwest, like me, is certainly part of the kinship I feel. Her dedication to her craft is

another part of what I find inspiring about her life and work, along with the absence of self-promotion. But the subtle turns in her verse, the sensuality and dedication to place are all part of what makes Niedecker unique and important to me.



## Two Poems From The Forest

Go into the forest. It is very early, the forest is in the process of waking up, insect wings move soundlessly, the song takes shape in birds’ throats, drops hang nearly bursting with a membrane of slower time. A small, almost invisible tree parts silence in two. When the light lifts its baton only half the forest joins in, one part always belongs to darkness.

In early spring light advances, the fog is torn apart in the forest, but is still grey. Even when the wind is calm the trees start dancing, shaking their short skirts so that the snow slips away. Suddenly they stand green and naked in the cold. The sight makes the heart beat, slowly. The heart is a bear’s lair in a forest far away.

Hanne Bramness

Hanne Bramness is a Norwegian poet and has been a passionate reader of Lorine Niedecker’s work for many years. These are translations from Norwegian. She has just finished a new book of meditations on photographs - some of which are pictures from Black Hawk Island, also some by LN herself.



# *In us sea-air rhythm*

## **Elm Snow, Cherry Crow**

Do five make a murder?  
Crows, that is-  
the five black crows that came swooping  
through my yard,  
alighting in my cherry tree, cawing jubilantly  
at the sight of the red, ripe fruit.

The big, Shiva-armed elm  
dances in the wind,  
lets loose a blizzard of seeds.  
They swirl like summer snow,  
collect in drifts on the green grass.

The crows fly off, each with a pilfered ruby  
in its beak,  
black wings against the blue.  
There is no murder here.  
Only ripe cherries, elm snow.

Timothy Walsh, Ph.D.

My poems and short stories have been published widely. I have two collections of poetry out--Wild Apples (Parallel Press 2004) and Blue Lace Colander (Marsh River Editions 2008)--as well as a book of literary criticism, The Dark Matter of Words (Southern Illinois Univ Press 1998).



## **December** *Seven Haiku*

December sunlight  
Even young silver maples  
lie down long at noon

Like a pale nuthatch,  
afternoon walks up then down  
the wall, pokes in cracks

Skies darken, warmth fails.  
Cardinals, sparrows, juncos  
huddle like lovers

House sparrows scatter.  
Cooper's hawk making a bit of hay  
while sun shines

Last cutting of hay  
tucked in for a winter's nap  
in white plastic wraps

Vole trails wind to each  
leaky birdfeeder. Under the deck,  
nests of grass.

Little mouse toenails  
click across tiles. Snap. Sorry,  
no soliciting

Mary Linton

Mary Linton is a wetland ecologist and poet from Fort Atkinson. As far as she is concerned, a day mucking about a fertile wetland could not be better spent. Her poetry has appeared in *Appalachia*, *Aethlon*, *Blueline*, *Builder*, *Country Feedback Magazine*, *Friend's Journal*, *HUMMINGBIRD*, *Poetry Motel*, and *Seeding the Snow*.



# *"We live by the urgent wave"*

## NEWS

### **Friends of Lorine Niedecker Launch New Web Site**

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker have revamped the [www.lorineniedecker.org](http://www.lorineniedecker.org) site. It retains much of the earlier content of photos, poems, biographical information, a destination map and news & events.

However, the new site also incorporates a searchable database of materials aimed at helping researchers and Niedecker fans alike. It also includes an Archive Item of the Month feature. "Our goal was to keep the site fresh and attractive while providing better access to the large body of information about Lorine that the site contains," said Amy Lutzke, a member of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker board.

"We knew we wanted a database feature," Lutzke said. "The database is searchable and will assist scholars and the curious worldwide. Fort Atkinson has been a destination for researchers and we feel this will give them even more reason to come and explore. For those that can't make the trip, the information is now more available."

Our new Web site has a place for Current Lorine information. If you see a reference, article, reading or project that relates to Lorine Niedecker, please let us know."



### **Niedecker Painting Found**

While reviewing archive files I came across a picture of Jenny Penberthy making a presentation in 1996. At the podium in front of her was a painting of Lorine's cabin when it was green. I had not seen the painting and wondered where it was. There was a note indicating the artist was Fred Wurzbach of Palmyra, WI.



I located a phone number that I hoped was current. It was. Fred told me he had sold a painting to a Whitewater lawyer who intended it as a gift to a priest. On further investigation we found the priest loaned it to a professor in Milwaukee who was a Niedecker fan. That professor turned out to be the late James Liddy. After he died, the location of the painting was lost.

I thought that was the end of it. About a month later, this is no joke, I got a call from the lawyer, who knew the priest, who knew the professor; the painting was found. The question, "Were we still interested in the painting?" YES! Several weeks later the painting was delivered to the library and donated to the Friends of the Lorine Niedecker collection. We continue to be amazed at Lorine's circles that keep coming back to us. The picture is hanging in the Niedecker Study Room in the Dwight Foster Public Library. Many thanks to those who helped us with the sleuthing.

Ann Engelman



### **Poetry Festival**

The 2011 Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival is scheduled for October 14, 15 and 16. Watch for the schedule in the summer Solitary Plover and on [www.lorineniedecker.org](http://www.lorineniedecker.org).

The Solitary Plover is issued twice yearly, in winter and in spring. Sign up for the email version on our Web site.

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker is a non-profit corporation. There are no staff, just devoted volunteers. Our goals include preserving and expanding the legacy of Lorine Niedecker, as well as, offering educational materials, access to archives, a semiannual newsletter and events as time and resources are available. We are supported through donations and grants.

## ABOUT US

*Friends of Lorine Niedecker  
102 E. Milwaukee Ave  
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538*

**Third Thursday**  
a poetry event

Thursday, April 21 from 6 - 8 pm

Featured poet: Bruce Dethlefsen, WI Poet Laureate

Open mic

Dwight Foster Public Library  
209 Merchants Avenue  
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538

Sponsored by the Friends of Lorine Niedecker