

## **For Immediate Release, October 19, 2015**

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### **Poets Turn Out for Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival**

The sixth annual Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival was held this past weekend at the Dwight Foster Public Library in Fort Atkinson. The Festival hosted over 100 visitors, 75% of them from out of town. "Festival visitors enjoyed downtown Fort Atkinson and our Farmers Market," said Dot Kent. Nancy Shae noted, "The Poetry Festival partnered with the Farmer's Market and Café Carpe this year. Poetry seemed to be everywhere." Dot Kent and Nancy Shae were the co-coordinators for the Poetry Festival this year.

Forty five years after her death, the influence of Fort Atkinson poet Lorine Niedecker continues to grow. Scholars, poets laureate, writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians and poetry lovers from across the state gathered to share their appreciation for one of America's finest poets.

David Wilk of Connecticut presented new information about how Lorine's legacy began to be documented. He first encountered Niedecker's poetry as an undergraduate at Yale University and published a volume of poetry and literary criticism pertaining to Lorine in 1975. Five years following her death it was the first publication about her and her work. There was little known about her. His foresight at capturing what was known helped document what was available at the time and provided the start for other researchers to follow. At that time she had published seven books, three in the U.S. and four in Britain.

"There are very few poets whose work I have come back to over and over again. Her poetry meant so much to me then, and still does today," said Wilk. In his Festival remarks, Wilk described the relationships Niedecker developed through correspondence with publishers and fellow poets: "Her correspondence reads like poetry."

Karl Gartung, whose Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee co-sponsored Wilk's appearance at the Festival, stated "David made me aware of Lorine Niedecker's work, and I shared my enthusiasm with Tom Montag." Wisconsin poet Montag went on to write a book of poetry "That Woman" inspired by Niedecker. Along with others, Gartung and Montag produced a Centenary Celebration in 2003, one hundred years after Niedecker's birth. Study groups and scholarly monographs, and a growing interest in Niedecker's poetry followed.

In 2011, noted biographer Margot Peters researched and wrote a full length book [Lorine Niedecker, A Poet's Life](#). For this year's Festival, Peters spoke about Lorine Niedecker's mother Daisy, the few known facts of her life, and the incorporation of her language and point of

view in many of her daughter's poems. Although she became deaf, due to unknown causes while Lorine was still a child, "she was forthright and poetic in her speech." Lorine Niedecker's longtime associate, the poet Louis Zukofsky, reinforced Lorine's practice of writing down, word for word, her mother's utterances and incorporating them into her poems.

Ann Engelman, Chair of the Board of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker and co-creator of the Festival said "We are connecting the dots. By coming together and sharing what we know about Lorine's life and work, we come to greater and greater appreciation of her poetry."

In Fort Atkinson, a group named the Solitary Plovers (from a line in one of Niedecker's poems) meets regularly to read and discuss Lorine's poems. For the Festival, Door County poet Nancy Rafal lead a lively rendition of one of Niedecker's best known longer poems, "Wintergreen Ridge". UW Madison scholar Steel Wagstaff was quick to point out the literary and botanical references in the poem, and the still timely ecological and feminist perspectives. According to Wagstaff, "although she lived in almost total obscurity -- nearly blind, on the brink of poverty, working a series of anonymous, largely menial jobs -- she produced a body of rich, highly condensed, extraordinarily perceptive poetry."

The Festival also included two sessions of Wisconsin poets reading their own work. According to Tom Montag, "The Saturday open mic reading was the best I have ever attended. The poems were all publication quality." Four award winning Wisconsin poets, Fabu of Madison, Cathryn Cofell of Appleton, Lisa Vihos of Sheboygan, and Nick Demske of Racine lead Round Tables discussing the poetry writing process with groups of interested poets and readers.

The Festival concluded with a packed audience for Wisconsin Poet Laureate Kimberly Blaeser's talk "Gesture and Silence in the Poetry of Place". Surrounded by an exhibit of her photography and picto-poems, Blaeser eloquently addressed the transcendent experiences available in the natural world, the human imagination, and the poetic connection between artist and audience. The exhibit, entitled "Ancient Light" will be up in the Jones Family Gallery on the second floor of the Dwight Foster Library until the end of the month.

Research librarian at Dwight Foster and Festival co-creator Amy Lutzke reported, "people came from 28 different locations in Wisconsin" to attend this year's Festival "the best one yet". The Festival is hosted annually by the Friends of Lorine Niedecker, and sponsors include Wisconsin Humanities Council, Dwight Forster Public Library, Hoard Historical Museum, Café Carpe, Velvetten Rabbit Bookstore, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, Woodland Pattern Book Center and Daily Jefferson County Union.

The mission of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker is preserving and expanding the legacy of Lorine Niedecker. The organization offers access to archives, educational materials and a semiannual newsletter. For more information [www.lorineniedecker.org](http://www.lorineniedecker.org)