

8 spotlight

The Robert Penn Warren Tour

By Robert Stoddard

While most Guilco students headed home for some R and R over fall break, Andrew Stuart and Robert Stoddard hit the road in fine, Steppenwolf, "Born to Be Wild" style. The principle purpose of this mission was to hunt down and accost the Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Poet Laureate of the United States, Mr. Robert Penn Warren. As the elder statesman of Southern Literature in America, Warren could be called a living Faulkner. Stuart and Stoddard, both English majors, felt a call to encounter the legend face to face, and so they set out with copies of Warren's book, *All the King's Men*, in hopes of garnering the autograph of the literary master.

After a delay in Raleigh, which involved some interstate air travel by Stoddard, the twosome woke at 6:15 a.m. Sunday morning and strapped into a tan Tercel (loaded with cold-weather gear, camera equipment, and powdered donuts) and headed North. Both road warriors were wearing specially made T-shirts commemorating the Fall '86 Tour. The empty, Sunday morning interstate between Raleigh and Richmond was a blessing to Stoddard, who was a nervous wreck during much of the trip on account of the heavy, high-speed traffic encountered in most of the Northeastern Corridor.

After a restroom and fuel stop, the pair rolled their Japanese road machine toward D.C., and Baltimore, the last metropolitan monoliths of the South. These two rebels picked up unfamiliar vocal resonances at a McDonald's just north of Baltimore. Stoddard teased the counter-girls when he ordered his meal. "Ahhd laahk ub big Maak an' sum frahs." Stuart warned him not to hound the locals too much seeing as they were

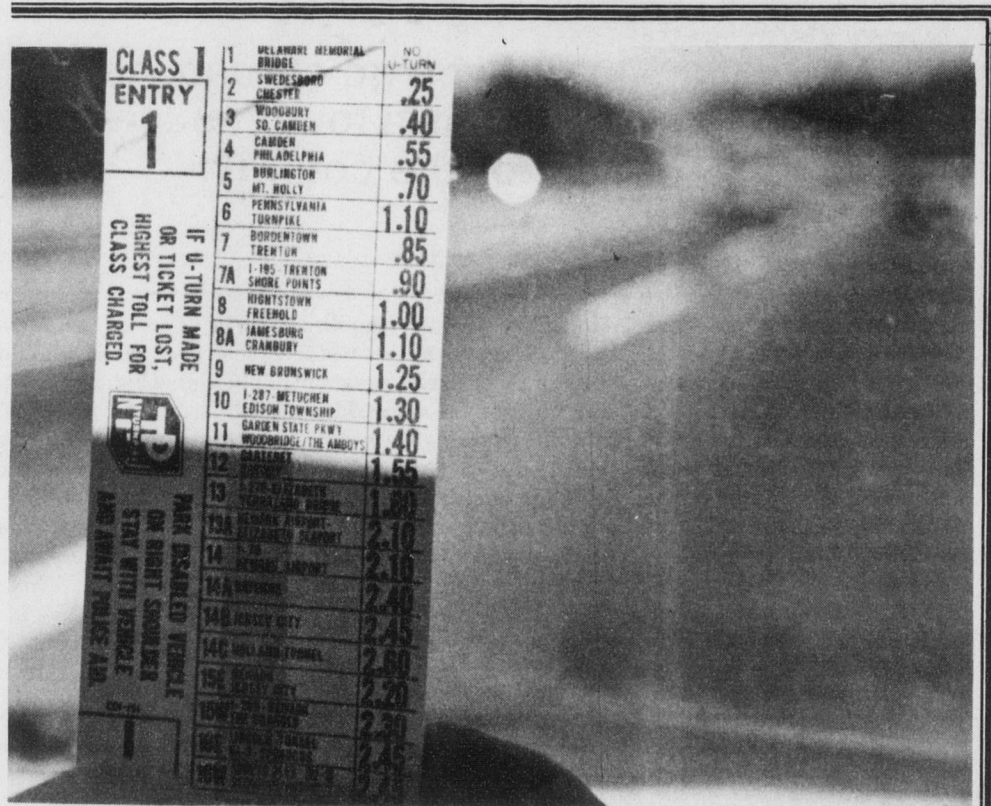
now out of the benevolence of Dixie.

The travelers burned up I-95, swept along at 80 mph with the hell-bent-for-death Jersey drivers. Speaking of Jersey, Stuart and Stoddard soon found themselves in the grip of the grip fo the infamous turnpike. "There were tools out the ying yang," said Stuart. "We thought we were going to have to take out a loan to pay for them all." Stoddard was impressed with the Jersey rest stop areas at which a McDonald's was conveniently provided for motorists.

By Sunday afternnon, the trusty Toyota was being piloted through a traffic jam on the New York City bypass. Both students had trouble figuring out why there was a traffic jam on Sunday afternnon, but their main concern was to get away from the exist signs for Harlem before they had their car spray-painted with graffitti. In addition to the treacherous road conditions wrought with potholes and unexpected speedbumps that taxed Stuart's evasive driving prowess, Stoddard (riding shotgun) was bewildered by illogical New York road signs such as this one, "Reduce Speed - Get Ticket."

Fortunately, the "Big Apple" was not a radio wasteland and Stoddard located a Latin American station for cultural enrichment. The radio turned out to be a fine traveling companion, though there was no country music to satisfy Stoddard and not enough Stones for Stuart. The pair estimated that by the trip's end, they had heard Eddie Money wail about wanting to be taken home upwards of thirty times.

Connecticut yielded a welcome change of scenery and pace for the two, as traffic thinned and fire maples beckoned the students down country roads. Darkness fell



on the pair before lodging had been found and Stuart recalled great frustration as they searched for a motel. "We were wandering around like a brunch of yahoos, then of being lost, we nearly hit a deer." "We finally checked into the Sheraton Waterbury about 8:30 that night after fourteen hours of driving," said Stoddard. Stuart and Stoddard conned the desk clerk (ala. Eddie Murphy, "Beverly Hill Cop" style) into reducing the \$98.50 room charge down to \$52.

Domino's Pizza delivered to the ritzy hotel and dinner was quickly arranged by phone. The pizza bill came to \$10.98 and Stoddard gave the delivery man \$11. For unknown reasons during the day, Stoddard had declined to get out of the car at several rest stops. In his resulting delirium, he told the Pizza Guy to "keep the change." Stuart braced himself for any possible violence from the Domino's employee stemming from Stoddard's second breach of politeness to the host Yankees.

The next morning, Monday, the men drove from Waterbury, CT down to Fairfield, just west of New Haven. Robert Penn Warren's home address had been obtained by Stoddard prior to the start of break. Acting on a tip from a Guilford student who was a neighbor of Warren, Stuart and Stoddard were on the lookout for "a covered garage," purported to be the Warren residence. Unable to locate the house after driving around the author's neighborhood for more than an hour (despite asking for directions), the Guilco faithful were frustrated and despondent. Then suddenly, they found themselves on Redding Road and moments later they passed address 2495--the home of THE MAN!

Excitement was running high between the two as they parked the car just down the road from the Warren home (so as not to appear intruding upon the actual grounds.) Stuart and Stoddard each clutched a treasured copy of *All the King's Men* and checked to

see that he had a pen, tucked into a pocket. In spite of their frenzied emotion, they teid to walk non-chalantly past the Warren mailbox and up the gravel drive. Sure enough, the house was a converted garage.

Stoddard poked the doorbell and the sounds of a small dog barking issued from within. Accompanied by the yelps, was another voice telling the pooch to quiet down. as the chain was heard being removed from the front door. The red front door opened and the travelers beheld an elderly, kind-looking man restraining a small black Cocker Spaniel. "She's harmless," he said spritely.

"Good Morning, sir. We're looking for Mr. Robert Penn Warren," Stoddard spoke up.

"That's him!!" whispered Stuart, as the gentleman released the dog to his wife, who had just appeared.

"Now what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Warren.

"We're students from Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina and we'd like you to auto-

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