

Marion Stegner brought us this article by Sam Whiting showing the sad news of the closing of Stegner's Studio

LOS ALTOS HILLS

## Closing chapter for Pulitzer winner's studio

By Sam Whiting  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Early every morning, Wallace Stegner made the commute from his kitchen across a deck to his writing studio. Coming through sliding glass doors, he'd light a wood stove, then a cigar. When he finished

"clearing out the pipes," he'd sit at his desk and two-finger his manual typewriter all morning long.

This routine at the Stegner home — on 2.4 sloping acres off Page Mill Road in Los Altos Hills — went on for almost 50 years, and won the author the Pulitzer Prize for "Angle of

Repose" and the National Book Award for "The Spectator Bird."

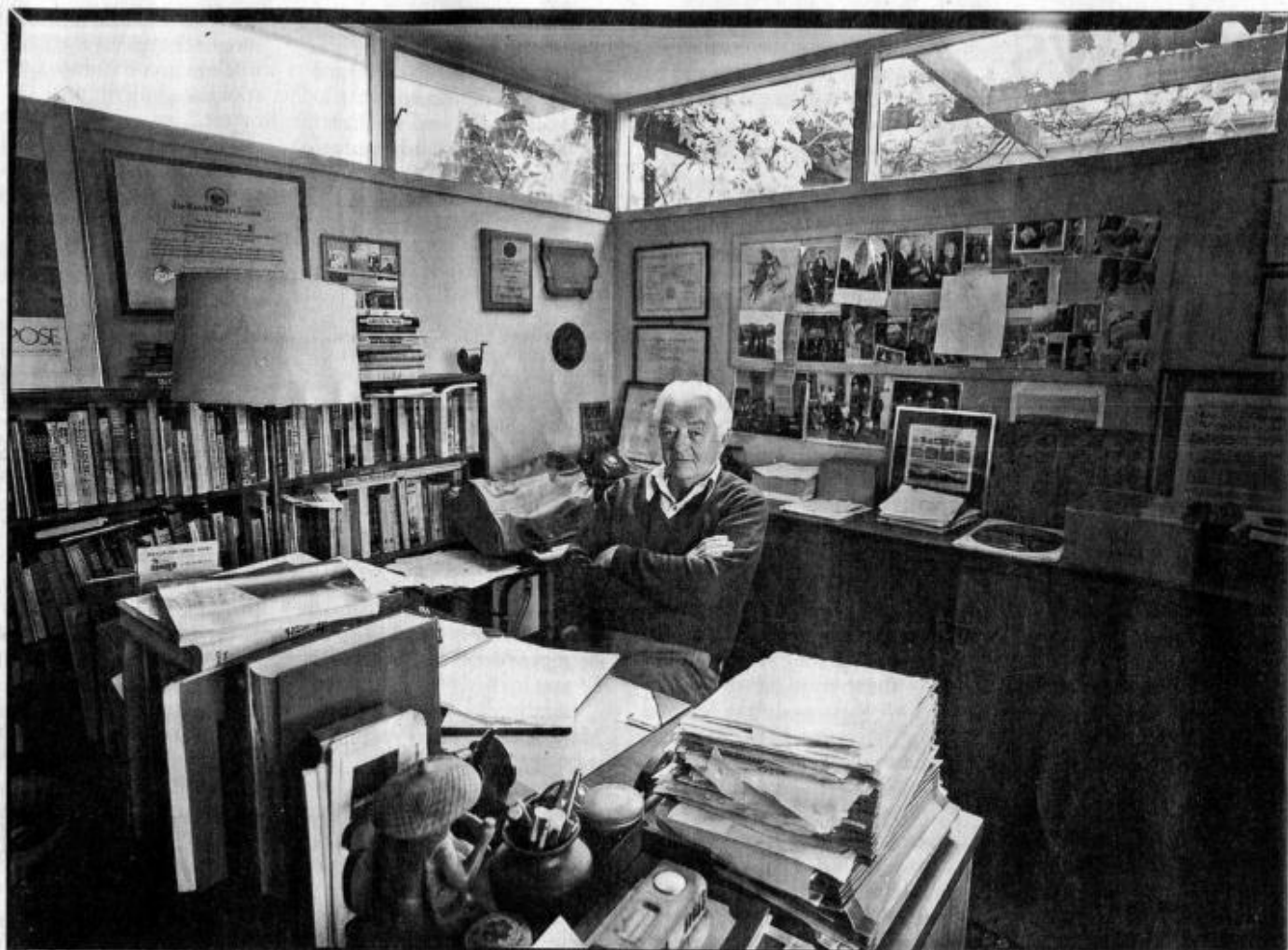
But now, 18 years after the famed Western novelist's death and one year after the death of his wife, Mary, the bulldozer is on its way to 13456 South Fork Lane.

"It sent a bolt of sadness

through our hearts because there are so many wonderful memories associated with it," says Lynn Stegner, wife of Page Stegner, the only child of Wallace and Mary Stegner. "The part that kills me the most is Wally's study. It's a separate building with a rare

*Stegner continues on A6*

### FROM THE COVER



Courtesy Leo Holub estate 1982

Author Wallace Stegner did much of the carpentry on the Los Altos Hills studio where he wrote most of his major books.

## Final chapter for novelist's studio

*Stegner from page A1*

blue oak tree in front of it. I'm hoping they don't tear it down because he treasured that tree."

The tree's fate is not determined, but the studio's is. It will be scrapped, along with everything else, and that might be the most regrettable loss to the Peninsula's literary history since Ken Kesey's cottage on Perry Lane in Menlo Park met a wrecking ball in the 1960s.

Lynn Stegner says the family attempted to save the place by working out a deal with Stanford University, where students in the graduate creative writing program are known generically as Stegner Fellows.

"We tried to sell it to Stanford at a reduced price to make it some kind of adjunct to the writing program," she says, "but they said that they'd just turn around and sell it at the market value." This is customary for real estate donated to Stanford.

So the estate sold it on the open market in 2005. The price was \$2.2 million for a late-1940s, 1,800-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath main

house plus a one-bedroom cottage plus the writer's studio, all low-slung and economical, in an Eichler style. Because the place has lasted this long, there was hope among preservationists that the buyers, Yew Nam and Wan Lei Yong, had plans to live in it as is.

These hopes faded when word got around that the Yongs had refused to allow a PBS affiliate to film at the property for a documentary on Stegner that aired in 2009, the centennial of his birth. According to members of several town committees, the Yongs are pleasant if indifferent to Stegner and his legacy. Neither the Yongs nor their architect, Raymond Neal of HKS Architects, returned calls.

#### No preservation law

The property lies within the town of Los Altos Hills Open Space Conservation Area and is subject to site-specific review by the town's Open Space Committee.

The committee has recommended that steep portions of the lot be preserved as open space but that gates and lights along part of the drive-

way not be allowed. If the Yongs decline the recommendations, the matter will be referred to a planning commission hearing, which will slow things. If the Yongs agree to the recommendations, the plan will be fast-tracked to the required public hearing within 10 days of notification. Demolition and construction permits will follow.

"It sounds like a bad idea. Wallace Stegner was a great man, and that is an interesting house he left," says Les Earnest, a 45-year resident of Los Altos Hills and secretary of the history committee. "I don't see any reason to tear it down, other than to build a mansion, of course."

Like the Stegners, Earnest had not heard that the Stegner place is destined for demolition, and said he plans to attend the public hearing and protest it.

"That place should be recognized as a historical site," says Earnest, who often drove up the steep driveway to visit Stegner in his studio to discuss town politics.

There is no ordinance for historic preservation in the strictly residential town. Earnest knows he

is in a losing battle, and Mayor Ginger Summit would agree with that.

"We don't have any laws against it," says Summit, who speculates that Stegner himself wouldn't have approved of all the fuss. "He tried to maintain a level of anonymity, which he did very successfully. I know he didn't like the town much. We wanted to name a path for him, and he said no."

#### Secluded environment

Maybe that's because Stegner was here 10 years before it was a town. According to the biography "Wallace Stegner: His Life and Work" by Jackson Benson, he bought the property after he was hired as a full professor of English at Stanford in 1945. There was an oak forest and nothing else — no electricity, no road and no water.

Stegner did much of the carpentry work himself. When it was finished, he could stand outside at night and "not see a light," says Benson, who was allowed to watch Stegner work, several weeks a year for six years, while writing his biography.

"Just about every major book that he wrote was written in that study," Benson says.

To this day you cannot see the Stegner studio from any paved surface, public or private. The only way to see it would be to trespass up through poison oak.

Stegner saw his studio for the last time in March 1993, when he went to Santa Fe to accept an award. There, he sustained fatal injuries when his rental car was broadsided. He died April 13, 1993, at age 84.

While Stegner was alive, the town path that he didn't want named after him got put in anyway, without a name. It starts on Three Forks Lane where the narrow path alongside Matadero Creek near the Stegner property. Mary Stegner once told Les Earnest that her husband came to enjoy walking on it.

So a year ago, Earnest finally got done what the writer wouldn't allow. He got that trail named the Wallace Stegner Pathway, marked by wooden signs at both ends.

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