



Walden West (North Coast Books)

August Derleth

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Among the state's most luminous assets is August Derleth, the internationally famous author of more than 150 books, many celebrating the Midwest and its people. *Walden West*, reissued here for the first time since its original publication in 1961, is considered by many to be Derleth's masterpiece.

Derleth was a chronicler with his ear uniquely attuned to this northern region. In his Sac Prairie Saga, of which *Walden West* is the crowning volume, he captures the essences of midwestern village life with his distinctive combination of narrative and prose-poetry. The book is a seamless series of anecdotes, meditations, character sketches, evocations of the landscape, and celebrations of its human and animal life. In sections such as "The choir of the frogs," and "Oh, the smell of the grass," and "Mrs. Opal Kralz" we meet, in all their small-town particularity, rich symbols of America's rural origins and experience. In other sections—"The voices of the wind are endless in their variety" and "If there is one winter voice informed with wildness"—we are treated to the music of the land. And in others still—"Millie Pohlmann," "Old Mrs. Block," "The Buchenau Women"—we sample the inimitable melody the people bring to their places. In all cases it is a feast.

Derleth himself called *Walden West* "an exposition on three related themes: on the persistence of memory; on the sounds and odors of the country; of Thoreau—the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." But one also comes away from these pages with a sense of the comedy and lyricism of the American rural experience, of the rootedness of its people to their land, and of the miraculous, teeming variety of the land itself. It is a gift to us all that the book is now available again.

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