

Taylor Caldwell:

Fast typing, epic scope yield big payoffs

One of the most prolific authors of the mid-20th century came to Buffalo as a girl from Manchester, England, and called Buffalo home for most of her life.



Taylor Caldwell (1900-85) authored more than 40 “intricately plotted historico-romantic melodramas, liberally peopled with schemers and rogues,”¹ including “This Side of Innocence” (1946), “The Balance Wheel” (1951), “A Prologue to Love” (1962), “Captains and the Kings” (1972), “Bright Flows the River” (1978) and “Answer as a Man” (1981). Her novel “Dynasty of Death” was unique as a saga about an entire family, and drew on Lackawanna steel mill clans for inspiration. Her novels sold more than 30 million cop-

ies and “delighted her legions of fans but drew the contumely of critics for their outsize characterizations, empurpled prose and increasingly far-right political views.”²

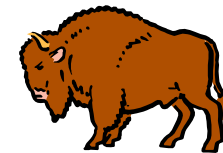
From 1918-19 she served in the U.S. Naval Reserve, from 1923-24 she worked as a court reporter in the State Department of Labor in Buffalo and from 1924-31 she was a member of the Board of Special Inquiry at the Department of Justice. She graduated from the University at Buffalo in 1931 and lived and wrote for many years not too far from what is now the South Campus, on Middlesex Avenue. An oft-quoted story says that when writing, she’d sit down at her typewriter in her kitchen at night with a bottle of scotch nearby, and write until the scotch was gone.

It would be difficult to argue that Caldwell had the most altruistic of

motives in mind when she wrote: “Her most ‘lyrical prose’ results, she says, ‘from the anticipation of big checks from my publishers...My best work has been done...when I had a new car, a new home, a trip, or a mink coat in mind.’”³ Nor would she be the best role model for young writers: “I never rewrite, don’t even read over what I have written. I just send it off in installments to (the publisher).”⁴

Her writing “was considered so ‘masculine’ and ‘forceful’ that...her editor at Scribner’s suggested she drop her first two names – Janet Miriam – and adopt Taylor Caldwell as her pen name.”⁵ Yet after her death she was remembered fondly by fellow writer Jess Stearn: “I never saw anybody that was warmer and more generous and encouraged people. She was always very humorous.”⁶

Caldwell received the National League of Pen Women Gold Medal in 1948 and the Buffalo Evening News Award in 1949. Her memoir, “Growing up Tough,” was published in 1971. She was living in Connecticut at the time of her death, but her final resting place is uncertain. Her second husband is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in a sarcophagus on which is engraved her name and date of birth, but her bones do not lie there. Her fourth husband told the Buffalo Evening News in 1980 that he thought she would prefer cremation with her ashes scattered at sea.⁷



Another Buffalo Connection

Taylor Caldwell dined frequently at the former Cloister restaurant on Delaware Avenue in Buffalo - the back wall of which once was part of Mark Twain’s home.



“Learning should be a joy and full of excitement. It is life’s greatest adventure; it is an illustrated excursion into the minds of the noble and the learned.”

Taylor Caldwell