

Meet Iowa's Poet Laureates

Mary Swander (2009, 2011)

Ms. Swander received her M.F.A from the University of Iowa Writers Workshop. She is a professor of English and a Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences Emerita at Iowa State University. She is the Artistic Director of Swander Woman Productions, and the Executive Director of AgArts, a non-profit designed to imagine and promote healthy food systems through the arts. Her latest book is a collection of essays called *The Sunny Side* from Route 3 Press.

Her most recent book of poetry is *The Girls on the Roof* (Turning Point/Word Tech, 2009), a Mississippi River flood narrative. Currently, Swander is also touring her plays *Vang*, a drama about recent immigrant farmers and *Map of my Kingdom*, or *Who's Going to Get the Farm?* Swander's play *Farmscape* has been performed throughout the U.S. with a special performance for Secretary Vilsack at the U.S.D.A. Ice Cube Press published the play with a collection of essays in 2012. Swander has published scores of other books, essays, magazine articles and commentaries in such places as: *The Nation*, *National Public Radio*, *National Gardening Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Poetry*. She is best known for her narrative poem *Driving the Body Back* (Alfred Knopf), and her memoirs *Out of this World* (Viking) and *The Desert Pilgrim* (Viking).

Ms. Swander has won numerous awards including an Iowa Author's Award (2006), a Whiting Award (The Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, 1994), a National Endowment for the Arts grant for the Literary Arts (1986), two Ingram Merrill Awards (1980, 1986), the Carl Sandburg Literary Award (The Chicago Public Library, 1981), and the Nation-Discovery Award (*The Nation* magazine, 1976).

Robert Dana (2004, 2006)

Robert Dana was appointed Iowa's second poet laureate in 2004. A native of Boston, Dana came to Iowa to attend Drake University following his stint as a radio operator for the US Navy in the South Pacific during World War II.

In Des Moines, he worked as a sports writer for the Des Moines Register before receiving a Master's Degree from The University of Iowa's Writers Workshop in 1954. After receiving his MA, Dana served as Poet-in-Residence and as a professor of English at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon. He continued to serve in that position for 40 years, retiring in 1994.

Dana has published more than a dozen collections of his poetry. In addition, his work has appeared in such publications as *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The American Poetry Review*, and *The Iowa Review*. His poetry collection *Starting Out for the Difficult World* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. He also received two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships in 1985 and 1993.

Marvin Bell (2000, 2002)

Marvin Bell was elected Iowa's first Poet Laureate in 2000, serving two terms in that position. He was born in New York City on August 3, 1937. He earned a Bachelor's Degree from Alfred University, a Master's Degree from the University of Chicago, and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa.

Bell is the author of several books of poetry including *Mars Being Red* (2007), *Rampant* (2004), *Nightworks: Poems, 1962-2000* (2000), *Ardor: The Book of the Dead Man, Volume 2* (1997) and *A Marvin Bell Reader: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1994).

Bell taught in The University of Iowa's Writers Workshop for more than 30 years where he was the Flannery O'Connor Professor of Letters. In a 2004 interview with *Voices from the Prairie*, Bell said this about being Iowa's Poet Laureate: "Nobody needs a poet laureate for their physical survival. Their psychological-emotional/spiritual survival is another matter. The appointment of a poet laureate is recognition that there are poets among us and poetry has value."