

JAMES D. HOUSTON: 1933-2009

FAMED AUTHOR DIES OF CANCER



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Author James Houston works in the study of his East Cliff Drive home in 2005.

Humanitas Prize-winner had made Santa Cruz his home since 1962, co-founded PacRim film festival

By WALLACE BAINE

wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — James D. Houston — one of California's richest literary voices who made Santa Cruz his home for 47 years — died Thursday of complications from cancer. He was 75.

Houston, past winner of the American Book Award and the Humanitas Prize, wrote vividly and warmly about California in his long career, from insightful essays on the state's magnetic sense of place to the fictional chronicle of the famous Donner Party journey in his celebrated novel "Snow Mountain Passage."

He lived with wife Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston in a historic redwood

home in the Twin Lakes area of Santa Cruz, a home he had written about glowingly, most recently in his anthology "Where Light Takes Its Color From the Sea." The grand old house with a view of the Pacific Ocean from its crowning cupola was — the Houstons discovered only after moving in — once the home of Patty Reed, who survived the Donner Party journey as a child.

The Houstons made a significant contribution in the popular awareness of the U.S. military's detention of Japanese-Americans during World War II with their collaborative book "Farewell to Manzanar," a memoir of Jeanne Houston's

PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOVELS

- 'Between Battles'
- 'Gig'
- 'A Native Son of the Golden West'
- 'Gasoline'
- 'Love Life'
- 'Continental Drift'
- 'The Last Paradise'
- 'Snow Mountain Passage'
- 'Bird of Another Heaven'

NONFICTION

- 'Farewell to Manzanar' with Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston
- 'The Literature of California'
- 'Surfing: A History of the Ancient Sport of Hawaii'
- 'Californians: Searching for the Golden State'
- 'The Men in My Life: and Other More or less True Recollections of Kinship'
- 'In the Ring of Fire: A Pacific Basin Journey'
- 'Hawaiian Son: The Life and Music of Eddie Kamae'

SEE HOUSTON ON A2

HOUSTON

Continued from A1

childhood spent in the Manzanar internment camp in California's Owens Valley.

If California was Houston's first home, Hawaii served as a close second. He and Jeanne were married in Honolulu, and the Houstons were frequent visitors. Jim Houston wrote widely on Hawaiian history and culture, and was working on a novel about Liliuokalani, the last queen of Hawaii, at the time of his death.

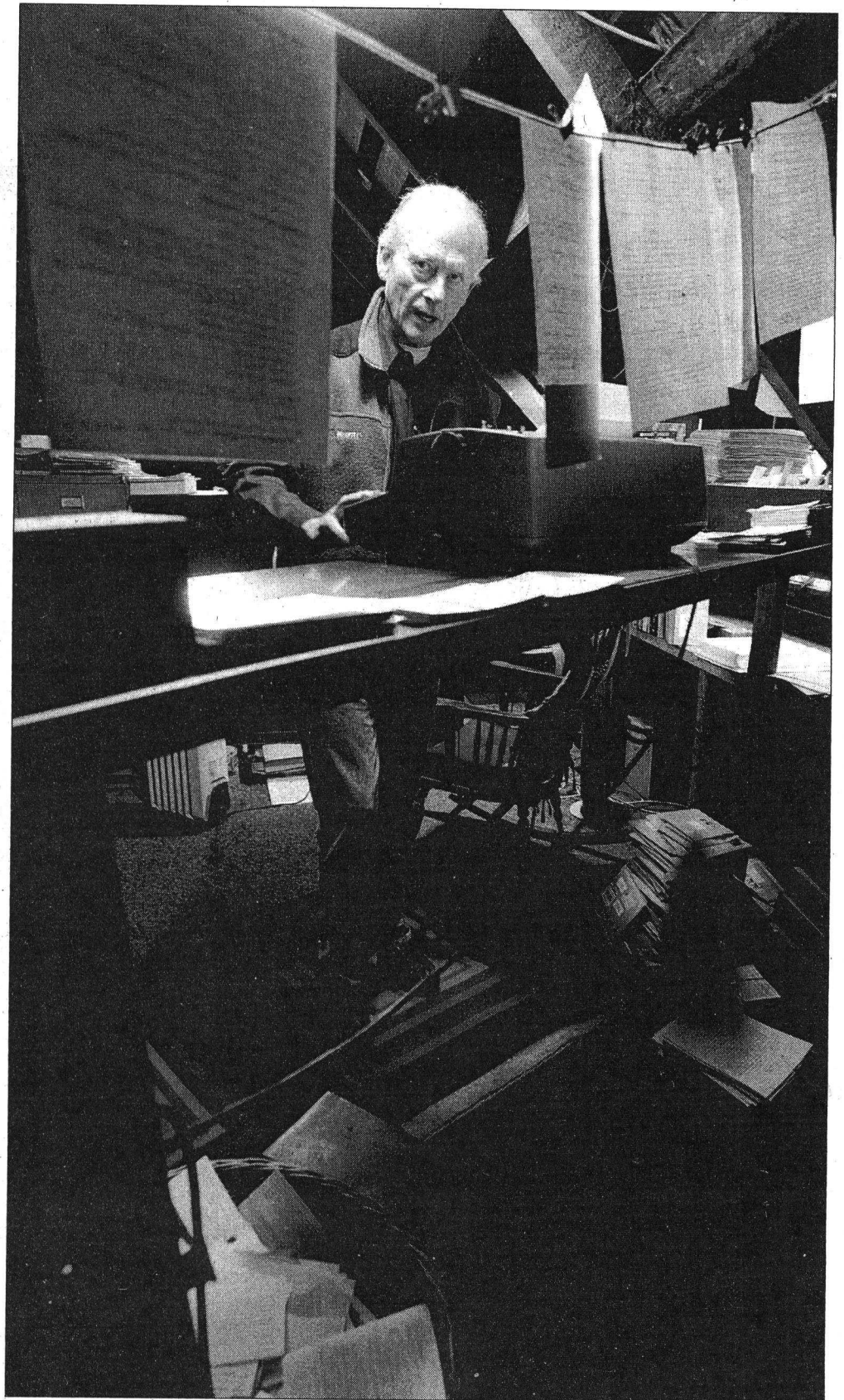
Houston was one of the co-founders of the Pacific Rim Film Festival in Santa Cruz in 1988, a festival inspired by the Hawaii International Film Festival.

"Jim Houston had a perception of the Pacific Rim as a region of the world, a region of the mind and as a region of humanity that no one else had in quite the same way," said Santa Cruz author Geoffrey Dunn, a longtime friend. "He served as a translator to the general public when it came to Manzanar, to Hawaiian culture and music, and to Hawaiians."

Houston was born and raised in San Francisco, and graduated from San Jose State University, where he met his future wife. The Houstons moved to Santa Cruz in 1962, to the same house where Houston died Thursday. It was in the attic of that house where Houston did most of his writing, an output of work that included eight novels.

Besides his literary work, Houston had an abiding interest in both film and music. He collaborated as a screenwriter on films about Hawaiian culture, as well as the television film adaptation of "Farewell to Manzanar," of which he was awarded the Humanitas Prize.

In his early years in Santa Cruz, Houston played stand-up bass and guitar regularly in local folk and bluegrass bands. He was especially fond of Hawaiian music, and collaborated often with close friend Eddie Kamae, a legendary figure in Hawai-



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Famed author James Houston, who lived in Santa Cruz, died Thursday at the age of 75.

ian music history. He had collaborated with Kamae on the film "Sons of Hawaii" and later wrote the book of the same name.

He taught writing at

a number of universities including UC Santa Cruz and his alma mater, San Jose State, where he returned on the 50th anniversary of his graduation to

become a visiting professor in creative writing.

He is survived by wife Jeanne, and children Cori, Joshua and Gabrielle. Services are pending.