Here's my belated report written after reading Robert Laxalt's ms of THE FRENCH HOTEL.

I think we should publish it, if for no other reason that we've published reprints of Laxalt books which, though good, are not, in my view, as good as this one. That's my logical argument.

Second, I think this book provides an insight, through fiction, into the early days of what turned out to be one of Nevada's most influential families. It is probable that Robert Laxalt's legacy will outlast his little brother's, life and art being what they are and politics being what it is. Nonetheless, in the short run, Paul is the star and, for contemporary audiences, having the clues provided in the ms to his early context would be interesting to a lot of readers and, maybe, even useful to some. In the long run, having the same thing for the early life of Bob himself will probably turn out to be more useful to more people. I mean, we can't predict things like literary longevity, but Nevada, not having many writers, tends to hold on dearly to the ones it has. And I'm convinced SWEET PROMISED LAND will be around for a long time. That's my historical argument.

Third, except for a few things which, if I were Bob or Bob's editor, I would change, I think it is a good book. I would, for example, drop Chapter 4 in Part II, the apparent dream chapter, which doesn't, however, seem to be a dream. I know he is inclined to this sort of thing; we've seen it in other books, but I think it's way out of place in this book (I mean I don't think it belongs at all), and jarring to the gentle, reminiscent, straight-forward, almost informational nature of the rest of the utterance. It strikes me as "art" whereas the rest of the book strikes me as art. Like all of us, I think he falls astray when he begins to inject Meaning into his work, with a capital M, forgetting what he knows, that the Meaning (with a capital M) is mostly there when it doesn't appear to be. I know the fault, having ruined more books than one by doing the same thing.
I think the girl who has sex with the main character in the hayloft during a game of hide and seek appears too conveniently and then disappears too quickly from the narrative, making her presence in the book seem tacked on rather than organic. I also think the French Hotel itself plays too little a part in the book after the family moves from it to the big house in the nice part of Carson City and the father and uncle head for the high country with the sheep. It does return in order to burn down, of course (cf the fire, as you pointed out, in THE MAN IN THE WHEATFIELD), and a couple of the great characters from the hotel show up later in the book, as well, but essentially the hotel is out of it after the move. That's too bad, as far as I'm concerned, and I think Bob may have given in to the demands of his memory over the demands of the aesthetic construct itself to the detriment of the construct. Of course, at this point I'm just rewriting his book the way I would have written it.

Still, taken as it is, I like it (same Chapter 4, Part II), and I think we could publish it to profit and some acclaim. The fact is that when Bob is just writing straight narrative, description, and dialogue, I think he is wonderful. Nonetheless, I still think the positive whole is greater than the sum of the negative parts. That's my aesthetic, case-on-its-own-merits argument.

I vote yes.