



## ***CATHER FOUNDATION MEETS NEH CHALLENGE!***

**T**he Cather Foundation announced today that the organization has raised the final \$220,000 to meet a National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant. These funds will give the Foundation a \$1,100,000

endowment to support the Red Cloud Opera House and Cather Foundation. The final \$220,000 of a total of \$825,000 was donated during the months of June and July through three large gifts and numerous smaller gifts. The NEH grant contribution of \$275,000 brings the total to \$1,100,000.

Interest from the \$1,100,000 Red Cloud Opera House Endowment will fund cultural and educational programming and provide funds for a part-time archivist and maintenance of the facility.

“This NEH challenge has been confronting us for over six years now,” said Executive Director Betty Kort. “We are grateful to hundreds of people in Nebraska and across the United States for their generous gifts during the challenge period.” This summer, with slightly more than \$220,000 left to raise, two families directly related to Willa Cather herself generously gave two equal gifts representing half of the remaining goal. Another anonymous gift of \$100,000 completed all but a small portion of the \$825,000 goal. “We expected this fund drive to go down to the wire, but we were confident that the goal would be met,” said Kort.

Early in June, James and Angela Southwick donated \$50,000 to the Endowment. James is the son of Helen Cather Southwick, niece of Willa Cather. The Southwicks have also donated numerous archival items during the last two years, including personal clothing and jewelry owned by Willa Cather.

A second \$50,000 gift arrived shortly thereafter from Jim and Trish Schreiber. Trish is the granddaughter of Willa Cather’s brother Roscoe. According to Kort, neither family knew of the other’s intentions. “We are so pleased that members

of the Cather extended family have contributed so generously to the Endowment. Funds from the endowment will be used to perpetuate the work of the Foundation.”

“The National Endowment for the Humanities went out on a limb for us,” said Kort. “We understand that they have never extended a significant NEH Challenge Grant to so small an organization as the Cather Foundation. It is difficult for small organizations to find contributions on a three to one basis sufficient enough to meet such a significant goal.”

The Cather Foundation is a literary organization founded fifty-one years ago. Headquartered in Red Cloud, Nebraska, where Cather spent her childhood years, the organization preserves and promotes the life, times, sites, and works of Willa Cather. The Foundation has grown into a national and international organization and boasts the largest number of historically designated buildings devoted to one author in the United States. In 2003, the Foundation opened the newly restored Red Cloud Opera House and began producing cultural and educational programming on a regular basis from the 1885 stage of the restored Opera House. The completed NEH endowment will help to fund these efforts.

According to Charles Peek, President of the Cather Foundation Board of Governors, “The Cather Foundation’s success in meeting the NEH Endowment Challenge marks a new stage in our evolution as a society. We can all celebrate this success because it took the efforts of many to achieve, but certainly we need to thank our Executive Director, Betty Kort, and our Development Committee and its chair, Jane Hood. What an adventure it will be to explore the new opportunities this will provide for us to expand and pursue our mission as a foundation.”

The Cather Foundation was given three years to complete the goal, but had to request extended time to meet the challenge. According to Kort, the final deadline was July 31, 2006. “With over \$220,000 to raise, we knew we had our work cut out for us. But we never doubted for a moment that we could meet the challenge with the help of our dedicated membership,” Kort said.