

Willa Cather

Newsletter & Review



Fall 2004

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Stories from the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition: Twenty Years of Discoveries

In June 2004, the inaugural Scholars' Summit at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln assembled editors of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition to celebrate the Edition's important contributions to Cather studies. With six volumes in print and eight others in press or in preparation, these handsome books (available in both paperback and hardcover) have been honored by glowing reviews and by the Ralph Twitchell Award for Outstanding Contribution to New Mexico History, which went to *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Each volume includes an authoritative text, extensive explanatory notes, a historical essay and a textual essay, as well as a portfolio of illustrations, all prepared by noted Cather scholars. The Cather Edition is the only multi-volume edition of a woman writer's work to have earned the approval of the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions. Already these indispensable volumes are changing and broadening our understanding of Willa Cather's methods, sources, and art.

The Cather Foundation is proud to have been a cooperating partner in the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition from the beginning. In this issue we feature a portfolio of stories from Edition editors, sharing a selection of exciting discoveries from their research.

Introducing the Scholarly Edition

Susan J. Rosowski, General Editor
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

When posed with the question, what is a scholarly edition?, scholars most often reply as if from outside the edifice. Scholarly editions are the marathons of literary studies: notorious for their longevity, impressive by their presence on a library shelf. Like Gothic cathedrals, their aim is to serve a higher good by which the individual becomes subsumed within the communal whole in creating something to inspire future generations.

Now—after over twenty years serving as general editor of the Cather Scholarly Edition, I'm increasingly convinced that a far more useful introduction to an edition involves simply opening its "doors" and inviting others inside. And that is precisely what this special issue of the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* has done.

Each edition has its own story—always personal, idiosyncratic, and oftentimes downright quirky. It is the details of such stories—more than anything else—that tell what a scholarly edition is. Such is the premise of this special issue on the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition. Ann Romines has invited a sampling



Standing left to right: John Murphy, Mark Kamrath, Ann Moseley, Tom Quirk, Guy Reynolds, Kari Ronning, Ann Romines, Richard Edwards (former vice-chancellor of academics), Robert Knoll. Seated left to right: Charles Mignon, Susan Rosowski, and Paul Royster (former director of the University of Nebraska Press). Photograph by Dika Eckersley.

from our editors to represent the research that is creating the Cather Edition. The essays represent two basic kinds of editing: textual and historical. Textual editors establish an eclectic base text, "authoritative" insofar as we can determine, as well as lists of variants (or changes) in all authoritative states of the text. The aim is to provide such complete information that a reader could reconstruct the text through all its authoritative states, including manuscripts, typescripts, page and galley proofs, as well as first and subsequent editions during the author's lifetime.

(Continued on Page 27)



Cather Foundation Calendar

Summer 2005

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln & the
Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation
Present

The 10th International Cather Seminar 2005

Violence, the Arts, and Cather

June 18-25, 2005

Red Cloud, Nebraska &

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**Keynote Speaker: Terry Eagleton,
Critical Theorist**

"Violence, the Arts, and Cather" will be the theme of the 10th International Cather Seminar to begin June 18, 2005. This will be a joint-sited seminar based in the two prominent places of Cather's Nebraska experience—Red Cloud and Lincoln. The seminar will feature for the first time residency in Red Cloud as well as on the UNL campus and will celebrate the WCPM's 50th anniversary.

The seminar will open with three days in Red Cloud. While there, participants will stay in private homes; meals will be served in the elementary school and the Community Center. Locations for paper presentations, plenary sessions, and performances include the Opera House, the school, and the community center. The second phase of the seminar will be on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. Participants will be housed on campus and UNL classrooms, auditoriums, and galleries will accommodate presentations and discussions.

Papers on all aspects of Willa Cather's work, life, and times are invited for possible presentation. Diverse critical and theoretical perspectives are encouraged. Those focusing on the seminar theme are especially welcome. Interested contributors should submit abstracts of 500 words with a cover letter and brief résumé by March 18, 2005. Persons whose proposals are accepted will be expected to submit final papers by June 1, 2005. Papers should be 10-12 pages in length (double-spaced, 20 minute presentation time).

Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather's childhood home, and the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where Cather spent her undergraduate years, offer an ideal site for our focus on Cather.

Submit proposals by **March 18, 2005** to:

Susan Rosowski or Guy Reynolds
Co-Directors, International Seminar
Dept. of English, Andrews Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0693

For further information visit our website at
www.willacather.org or the UNL website at
www.unl.edu/cather or email Beth Burke, Cather Project
Program Coordinator, at eburke3@unl.edu.

Fall 2004

"Celebrating Willa Cather's Birthday"

Opera House Gallery Reception
December 3, 2004, 5:30 p.m.

Spring 2005

50th Anniversary of The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation

"The Cather Foundation: 50 Years of Preservation, Education,
and Celebration!"

Celebrated in conjunction with the
2005 Spring Festival

Premiere Performance of
"A Singer's Romance"

A Musical Adaptation of Cather's Short Story
Commissioned by the Cather Foundation
Written, Produced, and Directed by Jim Ford
Starring Ariel Bybee
April 29-30, 2005

Fall 2005

"Exploring the Caspersen Cather Collection at Drew: A Colloquium"

September 30-October 1, 2005
Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

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The Willa Cather Society

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Susan Rosowski: Introducing the Scholarly Edition

(Continued from Page 25)

What began as one of the obligatory but (we assumed) standard tasks of the project became one of its groundbreaking contributions. Two decades ago, convention had it that none (!) of Cather's prepublication texts had survived. As Charles Mignon indicates in his essay here, research for the project has uncovered the full range of prepublication forms of Cather's writing, from holograph notes toward outlines of a novel through multiple-revised manuscripts and typescripts, and proofs. Though we have no single text in all its variants, we have been able to reconstruct Cather's composition process from beginning to end. The "story" of the project includes many heart-stopping discoveries, some of which have meant stopping the presses—literally—to incorporate a recently discovered and extremely important revised typescript of *The Professor's House*.

Historical editors provide a biography of the text, so to speak: to retrieve and interpret the circumstances of its composition, production, and immediate reception plus to retrieve information relevant to understanding the text, to be provided primarily in the explanatory notes. In our editorial handbook we specified that volume editors would prepare explanatory notes to present "information relevant to the meaning of the texts. . . . For example, the identification of locations, literary references, persons, historical events, and specialized terminology." As with the textual editing, our aim for the explanatory notes sounds misleadingly straightforward. For as our volume editors soon realized, everything relates to everything in Cather, and the most apparently casual references resonate. Volume editors found themselves engrossed not only in census records and historical maps, but in recipes for jams and in stanzas of long-forgotten hymns and poems. Again, discoveries exemplified the thrill of scholarly research: a very smart, sophisticated scavenger hunt then ensued, as editors followed leads from the library to the field, and from a site (often the very place where Cather had stayed), to a volume, or record or item that the editor had first "met" in Cather's work. The one that kept me awake was a call from Ann Romines, who in her research on *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* had just hours earlier identified the prototype of Till. (See Romines essay to follow.) It's not simply that Till had, through Professor Romines's research, emerged from the records as herself; it is that the process confirmed what a scholarly edition offers.

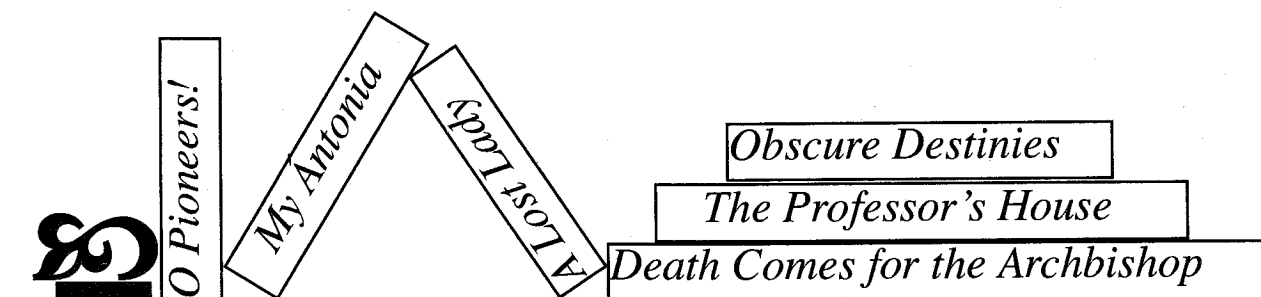
I speak now on behalf of all of us working on the project, to invite you to take a volume home with you and spend time with it. Read the text with its large font and wide margins; it is a different experience from a Norton anthologized version, surely. Cather knew what she was about when she specified production features that create a reading field. Then—only then—read the historical introduction and the notes; they will offer insight and teasers. And then, read the textual essay and apparatus, perhaps the most visually intimidating features of the volume. Lists of variants illustrate Cather's "novel démeublé" principle in action, for they often involve refining a phrase or deleting the extraneous. They suggest, also, the ballast that results from such refinement. Akin to Hemingway's iceberg principle, Cather's conceals so much more than it reveals. Cancelled portions of her text often have to do with detailing a character's actions or situation, enormously useful in interpreting what Cather did—and didn't—want in her final conception.

I have come to think of this special issue of the *Newsletter and Review* as an open door—an invitation to come inside the Cather Scholarly Edition, to become acquainted with it more personally through some of the stories that are now part of its living history.

Note

For further details, please refer to the following essay and to the individual volumes of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition: Susan J. Rosowski, Charles W. Mignon, Frederick M. Link, and Kari A. Ronning, "The Issue of Authority in Scholarly Editing: Editing Cather." *Textual Studies and the Common Reader: Essays on Editing Novels and Novelists*. Ed. Alexander Pettit. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2000: 30-51.

All of the Scholarly Editions are available at the Cather Book Store, 1-866-731-7304 or on line at www.willacather.org



Incident in St-Malo

John J. Murphy, Brigham Young University

Volume Editor, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*

No Cather novel is confined to its setting. Even the early Nebraska novels draw on faraway places and move characters halfway round the world to study, sing, or go to war. Always in transit herself, Cather set novels in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, New York, Quebec, and France. When David Stouck and I were asked to co-edit the *Shadows on the Rock* volume, we decided to go to France together on a research trip funded by our universities. Both of us were very familiar with Quebec City, Montreal, and the other locales of the novel's setting. In May 1997 we met in Paris, where we followed Cather's haunts, exploring Village St-Paul and Quai des Celestins, that part of the Right Bank from which Auclair and Frontenac hailed and to which they returned in memory in the novel.

One of our destinations outside Paris was St-Malo, the port in northeastern Brittany that Cather visited with the McClungs while writing *Shadows*. This was the home port of explorer Jacques Cartier, who "discovered" Canada in 1535, as a mosaic in the floor of St-Malo's cathedral informs us. We arrived in the city on a sunny afternoon. It was an exhilarating sight. The old walled area extends into the English Channel on a sandy peninsula, and the surrounding bay was deep blue and dotted with boats of all sizes, many of them with sails. The buildings are tightly packed within high granite walls topped by a promenade. One

of our tasks was to trace the authenticity of the she-ape story Captain Pondaven tells his guests (among them Cécile and Jacques) during the dinner he gives on his ship, *Le Faucon*, a historical ship like all those mentioned by Cather. (We discovered this fact in St-Malo in a catalog by Roger Martin Desgreves, *Navires de Saint-Malo, 17e-18e siecles* [1992]). I had concluded during my work on the *Archbishop* that there is a source for almost every detail in a Cather text and had gotten over the terrible emptiness of trying to research something that might be entirely made up.

David (whose French is much better than mine) asked several locals if they had ever heard the she-ape story, but no one had. The city library was closed for the day, so we visited the museum of local history for information on the ships that crossed the Atlantic to Canada in the seventeenth century. I was wandering alone among some ship models when David ran in from another room to say he had found something. There in a corner stood a life-size sculpture of a monkey carrying a human baby. The tablet on its pedestal reads as follows: "This female monkey cradling an infant was carved out of granite in 1774 to commemorate an actual local event. In oral folklore the she-monkey became a figure used to frighten children and also an arbitrator in disputes among fish merchants. Until 1944, she adorned a house in Fishmonger Square." Although we still had no story, we now had a source. We went to Fishmonger Square, which like most of St-Malo has been restored, since the city (a Nazi headquarters during World War II) was severely bombarded by the allies in August 1944.

There happened to be a very elderly woman at our hotel (probably the proprietor's mother) who dispensed jam and toast each morning. Perhaps someone this old might remember. We were in luck. "Oui," she said, "They would tell children that story to make them behave. However, I was a good child, and they never had to tell it to me." With the help of a kindly librarian, we found several versions of the story in old books (see H. Harvut, *Notices sur les rues, ruelles, promenades, quais, places, et fortifications de la ville de Saint-Malo* [1884]), although all followed the same narrative pattern. A she-monkey is discovered near the eaves of a house feeding a baby rubbish from her perch. In an effort to rescue the baby, a human mother demonstrates with her own baby how to place a baby in a cradle. The monkey gets the idea and does the same, and the stolen infant is retrieved. Cather makes the story a Marian miracle: "an image of Our Lady stood in a little alcove under the eaves. Into this recess the beast thrust the baby and left it there. . . ."

The episode as Cather recreates it reveals much about the process of her fiction: the use of a historical source or fact as the germ of an incident and then the altering of it to fit a context or develop a theme (in this case one of miracles). Also, Cather moved back by at least a century an event that took place in 1774. There are many statues of Mary in alcoves along the streets of St-Malo, and not far from the market where Cather saw the monkey sculpture is the Virgin of the Grande Porte, St-Malo's major shrine to Our Lady.



LA MOUNE of St-Malo. Photograph by David Stouck.

Behind the Obscurity: Real People in *Obscure Destinies*

Kari Ronning, The Willa Cather Scholarly Edition
Volume Editor, *Obscure Destinies*



Charles Wiener. Photograph courtesy of the WCPM/NSHS.

For years I read the Webster County newspapers—the *Red Cloud Chief*, the *Webster County Argus*, the *Commercial Advertiser*, and shorter lived papers like the *Republican*, the *Nation*, the *Golden Belt*, and others. When I returned to the microfilm reading room at the Nebraska State Historical Society after the weekend, I would be anxious to find out what had happened in the county in 1886 or 1892 or 1905 while I was “gone.” People whose names I saw often in the papers became increasingly real. New connections between Cather’s characters and the inhabitants of Webster County became apparent. An obituary confirmed that Red Cloud’s long-time laundryman Peter Hansen was the prototype for *My Ántonia*’s Mr. Jensen. Frequent references to a Kentucky-born county judge, George O. Yeiser, and his orphaned nephew, Dillard Bedford, caused them to emerge as clear prototypes for Judge Pommeroy and his nephew, Niel Herbert, in *A Lost Lady*.

As historical editor of *Obscure Destinies*, I was particularly interested in references to Charles and Fanny Wiener, whom Mildred Bennett had identified long ago as the prototypes for the cultivated Mr. and Mrs. Rosen in “Old Mrs. Harris.”

The energetic businessman seen in the newspapers seemed very different from the philosophical and unworldly-seeming Mr. Rosen, the only unsuccessful member of his family. Wiener brought new business and advertising methods to Red Cloud to promote his men’s clothing business in the brick store he built and his branch in Wymore. He instituted a satisfaction guaranteed or your money back policy for his made-to-measure clothing, and his advertisements often note that prices were marked in plain figures, eliminating the haggling and invisible markups that were still a feature of retail sales. He offered drawings for prizes, or premiums, like an enamel clock or tickets to the circus, with purchases of varying amounts. He had contests with prizes in goods to those who could guess the number of seeds in a large squash or the number of beans in a jar in his store window. (Willa Cather’s cousin, Kyd Clutter, won the latter contest.) He was a civic-minded citizen as well, who donated uniforms to the volunteer firemen; participated in Republican party politics, the GAR and other fraternal organizations; and served as mayor of Red Cloud and as a county commissioner during the depression of the 1890s. But Wiener was not simply a booster businessman; the side that Cather shows is implicit in his membership in the Red Cloud Reading Club, along with Charles Cather, Dr. McKeeby, Judge Yeiser and others important in Willa Cather’s life. When he sold out on leaving Red Cloud, books and bookcases were prominently listed among his goods.

Both Charles Wiener and his French-born wife, Fanny, were popular socially, attending card parties, picnics, and dances with the Charles Cathers and the rest of Red Cloud’s social elite. Fanny Wiener showed a playful side we might not suspect in Mrs. Rosen when she went to a masquerade dressed as a schoolgirl. More typical are her civic and charitable activities. She worked to strengthen the women’s departments at the county fair and organized the women’s auxiliary board to represent the women of Webster County at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. When inter-denominational squabbling among the church women’s groups threatened Red Cloud’s fragile social safety net, Mrs. Wiener organized the non-denominational Red Cloud Benevolent Society to help the poor.

The Wieners, like the Rosens, were childless, but they too had many nieces and nephews who visited them, like the Sammy whose left-behind sweater is such a comfort to Mrs. Harris. Family was important to them, and some younger relatives lived with them for extended periods: Ed Wiener kept a newsstand in town, and nephews Alex Adlesheim and Adam Franks clerked in Wiener’s store. Mrs. Wiener, like Mrs. Rosen, frequently traveled to Sioux City, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, to visit family.

“Old Mrs. Harris” ends with the death of Mrs. Harris, who is based on Cather’s grandmother Boak who died in June of 1893. Her story, like Rosicky’s, is “complete and beautiful” (61). As Cather knew, however, other stories go on. Though there is no hint of this in the story of Mrs. Rosen, Mrs. Wiener’s life went on a bit longer. She died a few months later in Chicago while with her family in September of 1893. Charles Wiener stayed in Red Cloud a few years longer, but the death of a brother in New York in 1897 gave him the opportunity to move there to join some of his family. Years later Cather renewed her friendship with him when she too went to New York; she attended his funeral when he died circa 1911.

Clearly, Cather chose the elements of the lives and characters of the people she knew that were important to her and to her story. By knowing the rest of the story, we can see what she chose and understand better why.



Reporting on “the Rhine [V]oice”: James Gibbons Huneker as Fred Ottenburg in *The Song of the Lark*

Ann Moseley, Texas A&M University-Commerce
Volume Editor, *The Song of the Lark*

Although the prototypes for many of Willa Cather’s characters are well known, Fred Ottenburg in *The Song of the Lark* has either remained a mystery or has been too easily explained. The general interpretation has been that Cather based Ottenburg on Fred Otte, Jr. one of Cather’s students in Pittsburgh and a lifelong friend. According to John March, Otte’s main resemblance to Ottenburg is that he “loved music” even though he “was not a musician” (552). This tenuous musical connection and the similarity in the names Fred Otte and Fred Ottenburg are not, however, sufficient evidence to make Fred Otte a clearly credible source for Fred Ottenburg.

As will be shown in notes for Parts III and IV of the forthcoming Scholarly Edition of *The Song of the Lark*, the initial characterization of this “beer prince,” the “son of the big brewer in St. Louis” (266), may have been based on William J. Lemp, Jr. (1867-1922) and Peter Busch (1869-1905), the sons of two prominent St. Louis brewing families. However, the primary source for Fred Ottenburg was probably James Gibbons Huneker (1857-1921), the influential and prolific musician, essayist, and journalist known as the critic of the seven arts. The key to Huneker’s role in Cather’s novel is his relationship to Olive Fremstad, the primary prototype for Thea Kronborg. Mary



Olive Fremstad
Olive Fremstad as Valkyrie. *Die Walküre*,
Bayreuth, 1896. Huneker Collection,
Dartmouth.

Watkins Cushing, Fremstad’s secretary and companion, reports that from the “very beginning” of Fremstad’s career, rumor “linked her name romantically with that of James Huneker, . . . and she could still be teased about him for years after she retired” (182). Arnold Schwab believes that Huneker may have known Fremstad as early as her 1891 New York debut (86-87), but the telling moment is the relationship that developed when Huneker saw Fremstad’s performances in the Wagner Festival

at Bayreuth in July of 1896. Even though Fremstad’s roles as a Rhine Daughter and Valkyrie were minor ones, Huneker singles her out in his column for *The Musical Courier*, praising her “auburn hair” that “died the River Rhine with its warm color” (5 Aug. 1896) and declaring that as Flosshilde she represented America well (5 Aug. 1896 20). Deciding to stay for the second series of the Ring, he asks “is it Bayreuth, Wagner, the Rhine Daughters or the Valkyrie that make me anchor here, despite the fair blandishments of Paris?” (12 Aug. 1896 17), and when he must leave he admits, “I have left my heart in Bayreuth” (19 Aug. 1896 19). Set beside these broad hints, extant letters from Fremstad to “My dear, dear Jim” or “My darling hotheaded Jim” written during the fall of 1896 clearly suggest not only that an affair occurred during the Bayreuth Festival but also that Fremstad was still in love.

Although Cather would later deny that Fremstad was the source for Kronborg (Letter to Ferris Greenslet, 15 Feb. 1937), overwhelming evidence proves otherwise. First, Edith Lewis’s description of Cather’s astonishment at Fremstad’s appearance at the Metropolitan Opera to finish the leading soprano role in *Tales of Hoffman* on the evening of the same day she had been too hoarse and exhausted to give an interview (91-92) provides the source for Thea’s last-minute appearance as Sieglinde. Second, 17 of the 26 letters that Cather wrote her friend Elizabeth Sergeant during the incubation and composition of *The Song of the Lark* in 1913 and 1914 include comments—often effusive ones—about Fremstad, and Cather’s 7 Dec. 1915 letter about her pride in Fremstad’s first reaction to the book clearly implies Fremstad’s operatic career as a major source for the novel. Third, significant similarities exist between Cather’s references to Fremstad in her article “Three American Singers” and descriptions of Thea in the novel. And, finally, important parallels exist between the careers and lives of Kronborg and Fremstad, including the parallel relationships of Kronborg/Ottenburg and Fremstad/Huneker.

As Cushing reports, Cather and Fremstad developed a “rewarding friendship which lasted well into the years when Miss Cather’s own work began to make demands for which she had to conserve her energies” (243)—a friendship close enough to allow confidences on which Cather drew but which she never actually broke. The famous singer “came to Bank Street a number of times for dinner”; Cather “often had tea with her at



James Gibbons Huneker, n.d.
Dartmouth College Library.

her apartment” (Lewis 92), and Cather visited Fremstad in Maine in September of 1913 and June of 1914. In addition, Cather could have heard about Fremstad and Huneker from Cushing, who admits to becoming Cather’s “staunch disciple” (244) after her Maine visits, and she may have even run into Huneker at Fremstad’s dressing room, where he was often a visitor during this time (142). A music and drama critic herself, Cather was no doubt familiar with *The Musical Courier*, which ran Huneker’s “The Raconteur” column from 1889 to 1902 (Ward 81-82), and she may have even seen—or looked up—his reports of the 1896 Bayreuth Festival. This last conjecture is supported further by a comparison of Huneker’s description of “the three *Rhinedaughters*, . . . of whom our Olive deserved the crown” (5 Aug. 1896 20), being “miles away from her companions in beauty of voice, plasticity of pose and artistic singing” (12 Aug. 1896 17), to the text of the novel. Ottenburg praises Thea’s German performance as one of the Rhine daughters in similar terms: “She simply was the idea of the Rhine music. . . . And at the end, again: two pretty voices *and* the Rhine voice.”

At least two other significant similarities exist between Huneker and Ottenburg. Huneker’s well-known penchant for drinking excessive amounts of German Pilsner beer (Schwab 228)—a habit that eventually led to his death from kidney disease—may be reflected in the scene in Chapter V of Part VI, in which Ottenburg is clearly drunk. And finally, Ottenburg’s inability to marry Thea because of a previous marriage is also paralleled by Huneker’s situation; for when he and Fremstad had their romantic encounter in Bayreuth, he was unhappily married to Clio Hinton Huneker, whom he divorced in 1899 (Schwab 83; Carnes 163). Apparently unable to tell Fremstad the truth directly, he informed her indirectly through a story entitled “The Last of the Valkyries,” published in the *Courier* on August 26, 1896. The fickle and unfaithful protagonist of this story, set during the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, dallies not only with a lovely American singer but also with a Roumanian *femme fatale*, and after being exposed to both ladies returns to America to marry the socialite Edith Vicker. One even wonders if this Edith Vicker is one of the sources for Cather’s Edith Beers, the socialite who entraps Ottenburg and makes it impossible for him to marry Thea Kronborg.

The discovery of James Huneker as the major source for Fred Ottenburg is important for several reasons. First, it confirms that Cather employed in the novel even more details from Fremstad’s life than critics have previously realized. It also reveals that Cather not only used specific journalistic sources such as *The Musical Courier* but also that even after she left *McClure’s*, she herself was a quiet but integral part of New York’s journalistic intelligentsia, a group that included H. L. Mencken as well as Huneker. And, as will be explained further in the Historical Essay for the Scholarly Edition of *The Song of the Lark* and an upcoming article in *Cather Studies*, Vol. 8, the rapid pre-publication revision of Part VI of the novel that Cather made between April 15 and April 22 of 1915 (Letters to Ferris Greenslet) drew heavily on information she already had—information that clearly included a knowledge of the Fremstad/Huneker affair.

Note

¹Although their observations have gone virtually unnoticed, two critics have previously suggested a connection between James Gibbons Huneker and *The Song of the Lark*. In 1998 Mark N. Grant wondered “whether Fremstad told Cather about Huneker, and whether Huneker was a model for any of the characters in *The Song of the Lark*” (114); and in 2001 Jonathan Goldberg asserted that Huneker “is fictionalized [as Fred Ottenburg] in *The Song of the Lark*” (56) before providing his own psychosexual interpretation of character relationships.

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Claude Wheeler and Pinocchio: Cather's Allusive Method in *One of Ours*

Richard C. Harris, Webb Institute

Volume Editor, *One of Ours*

Cather scholars have long been aware of the frequent use of allusion in her fiction. Much Cather criticism of the last several decades has involved a further exploration and new appreciation of her knowledge of high, or "high-brow," art—the "great works" of Western literature, "classical" music, painting, and sculpture. In her 1922 novel *One of Ours*, however, Cather not only used this type of allusion but also employed references to popular culture to enrich her text. Her reference to the children's story *Pinocchio*, amid all the other allusions to the Bible, to Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, and many other great writers, is only one example of the fascinating variety of allusion in the novel.

In a 1925 interview Cather commented that Claude Wheeler, the hero of *One of Ours*, was "an inarticulate young man butting his way through the world" (Bohlke 78). In an earlier letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Cather had said she was amazed that a young man like her cousin, G. P. Cather, the prototype for Claude, could have turned his life around so completely as G. P. had done after he joined the Army in 1916 (8 Mar.? 1922). Cather family papers now at the University of Nebraska as part of the George Cather Ray Collection have provided much new information on G. P. and demonstrate clearly that, prior to the war, the soldier who was cited for valor before his death at Cantigny in late May 1918 had been a failure at almost everything he had tried. His "misfortunes," as he called them, had in most cases been the result of his own impulsive or irresponsible actions.

At the end of section VIII of the first part of *One of Ours*, Cather describes Claude as a young man of twenty-one who is convinced that there is "something wrong with him . . . that his energy, instead of accomplishing something, was spent in resisting unalterable conditions, and in unavailing efforts to subdue his own nature." He dreams of doing something "splendid" with his life; he imagines that "in a flash he would be transformed from a wooden post into a living boy" (103). Given the actual life of the prototype for Claude Wheeler, it is appropriate that Cather would have alluded to a popular story that also focuses on a young character who is variously described as a fool or failure, someone who, like G. P., needed to grow up: learn to act responsibly, find a focus and direction for his life, and dedicate himself to a more acceptable or more admirable course of action.

The Story of a Puppet, or the Adventures of Pinocchio by C. Collodi (the pen name of Carlo Lorenzini) first appeared in Italian in book form in 1883. The first translation into English appeared in 1892. Ten editions of the book were published between 1910 and 1920. In a recent edition of the book, Maria Cimino notes that while the original book edition of *Pinocchio* was illustrated, it was

not until the first appearance of the large edition of the story, with illustrations by Attilio Mussino, in 1911, that "the book came into flower" ([ii]). There were several particularly popular editions published in 1916, just two years before Cather began writing *One of Ours*.

Alison Lurie has pointed out in a recent article in *The New York Review of Books* that Collodi's original story is quite a bit darker and more complicated than simplified print editions of the story or the Disney film version that are better known today. The gist of the story, however, has remained essentially the same. Pinocchio is a prankster, a "rascal," "an ungrateful boy." Though he is warned that if he doesn't change his ways he will grow up to be a donkey, for much of the story he persists in his desire simply to eat, drink, sleep, play and wander around. He is very much like the traditional *picaresco*; like Cather's cousin, G. P., he is constantly trying to escape bad situations, many of which he himself creates. Only after much suffering and several close encounters with death does Pinocchio realize that it is time for him "to grow into a man as everyone else does" (190).

Cather's allusion to this classic children's story, then, not only provides yet another context in which to see her character Claude Wheeler but also indicates how complex Cather's

creative imagination was. A few pages before this reference she alludes to Charles Dickens' novel *Bleak House* and to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetic work *Idyls of the King*; a few pages after the allusion to *Pinocchio*, she mentions "Flemish portraits of young women," thus suggesting works of the great Renaissance painters Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyke. Readers of Cather's fiction, long accustomed to identifying references to "high art" in her works, can also appreciate her use of a wide variety of more commonplace sources as well.

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Cover, 1916 edition of *Pinocchio*. Courtesy of Richard Harris.

Street Pianos and *Alexander's Bridge*

Tom Quirk, University of Missouri

Volume Editor, *Alexander's Bridge*

Annotating is a necessary and sometimes tedious piece of work that is nevertheless essential to preparing a scholarly edition. Every once in a while, though, a stray item catches you by surprise, and you find an allusion containing a world of suggestion. In the instance cited below, Cather's veiled reference to a poem popular in the early years of the twentieth century has implications about other allusions, her method of composition, and, perhaps the type of novel she was trying to write.

In chapter VII of *Alexander's Bridge*, Hilda Burgoyne and Bartley Alexander take a carriage ride out to Kew and Richmond and then back into London. Toward the end of their carriage ride, Alexander observes, "How many street pianos there are about to-night! The fine weather must have thawed them out. We've had five miles of 'Il Trovatore' now. They always make me feel jaunty" (121). Actually, the reference to "Il Trovatore" has a good deal less to do with Verdi's opera by that name than it does with Alfred Noyes's very popular poem "The Barrel Organ" which includes this stanza:

Verdi, Verdi, when you wrote *Il Trovatore* did you dream
Of the City when the sun sinks low,
Of the organ and the monkey and the many-coloured stream
On the Piccadilly pavement, of the myriad eyes that seem
To be litten for a moment with a wild Italian gleam
As *A che la morte* parodies the world's eternal theme
And pulses with the sunset-glow?¹

The weather, the time of year, the sunset light, the bustle and tramp of the crowd, and of course the music of street pianos Cather describes have their analogues in Noyes's poem. Perhaps more important is the fact that London is characterized as the land of lost love and where "dead dreams go." A London laborer, for example, "stares into the sunset where his April love is fled./ For he hears her softly singing and his lonely soul is led/ Through the land where the dead dreams go." Not only does Bartley ask Hilda to sing for him in chapter four, but his search, through her love, of his own dead dream of youth and expectancy is mirrored in this and other passages in the poem.

Sometimes ignorance is a scholar's chief asset. Had I known what a "street piano" was, I should never have gone searching around for a definition of it. As a consequence, I would not have stumbled across a poet I had never even heard of before. Moreover, Cather's veiled reference to "The Barrel Organ" seems to have less to do with communicating some significance to the reader than in identifying, perhaps only to herself, an appropriateness of a somber theme and mood to an otherwise happy outing on a gloriously-sunny day. In turn, one begins to suspect that there are sub-intentions (perhaps unconscious ones, perhaps merely personal to the author) operating in the *Alexander's Bridge*.

Work Cited

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Note

¹This poem was widely reprinted, but Cather may have read it in Noyes's *Poems* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1904).



A street singer and street organ grinder. A commercial postcard, London, c. 1903, by Holmfirth, Bamforth & Co. From the Reg Hall Collection.

Finding Till: An Editor's Romance

Ann Romines, The George Washington University

Volume Editor, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

When I agreed to serve as volume editor of the Scholarly Edition of Cather's last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, I was immediately beset by anxieties. The editors who had gone before me had unearthed prototypes and precedents galore in Cather's fiction, and then they had shown how she had subtly transformed these historical and personal materials into brilliantly singular fiction. *Sapphira*, I knew, was a veritable land mine of prototypes. This was Cather's first novel set in her Virginia birthplace, a site where her family had been rooted for five generations. Furthermore, Cather had written to her friend Viola Roseboro' that the novel was so much built from old family and neighborhood stories that she wasn't herself sure of what her own contribution to it was. If she were not sure, how in the world could I be?

As I began my research in earnest, I developed another editorial disease:

obsession. So many threads to trace—and all of them became fascinating, at least to me! As I became more familiar with the Back Creek neighborhood—in books, maps, stories, and on the country roads of Frederick County, Virginia—more family members and local landmarks leapt to life in the novel's pages. A double curve in an old road (surveyed by Cather's great-great-grandfather Jeremiah Smith) became "The Double S," both a

major locale and the typographic signature of the novel. Sidney Sophia Cather Gore, one of Willa Cather's favorite great-aunts, became the novel's anti-slavery postmistress, as she was in life, while her father, Willa's great-grandfather James Cather, took a cameo role as Mr. Cartmell, in a crucial discussion about slave-owning, and her youngest son, one of Cather's mentors and a favorite cousin, had a brief walk-on, delivering a letter.

As I pored over census records, local histories and genealogies, Cather's transformations of her materials became more apparent, too. In the novel, *Sapphira* dies in 1857; and upon her death, her husband Henry immediately frees her slaves. But the prototype for Henry, Willa's great-grandfather Jacob Seibert, still possessed his full complement of slaves when he died in 1858. His wife Ruhamah, prototype for *Sapphira*, inherited those slaves, and they were never manumitted, until the Emancipation Proclamation made slavery illegal in the state of Virginia. Unlike *Sapphira*, Ruhamah lived on after the Civil War; she died, an old woman, only six weeks before Willa Cather's birth in December, 1873.

As I was drawn deeper and deeper into the multiplicitous layers of *Sapphira*, many of my anxieties were replaced by admiration of this spare book's depth and complexity. But one major anxiety remained. Slavery is a central concern of this novel, and many of the characters are enslaved African Americans. In a letter to Langston Hughes, Cather said that the novel's African American characters had prototypes too, mostly people she had known as a child, in Virginia. Writing to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, she specifically mentioned "Aunt Till," a family servant (and former slave) who, with Willa's maternal grandmother, had told the white child the stories that grounded Willa Cather's knowledge of antebellum Virginia. White friends, neighbors, and servants were numerous among the prototypes I had been piling up in my multiplying

notes. But none of these prototypes was African American. Because of Virginia's prohibition of literacy for slaves, written records of family history among nineteenth-century slave families are rare. There are no official marriage records, since slaves were not permitted legal marriage, and birth and death records are spotty, if they exist at all. Besides—if I were to find "Till," I had only a name to go by. And surely "Till" is a nickname?



The Mill House, Till's workplace as slave and servant. Photo by Lucia Woods, Copyright 1973.

At first, the Federal Census, which I had found such a valuable source of other information, offered no help. For in the 1850s, when the novel is set, slaves were not enumerated in the census at all. But then I learned that a separate slave census was taken in Virginia in 1850 and 1860. If "Till" were in Frederick County as a slave during those years, she was most likely owned by the Seiberts, prototypes for *Sapphira* and Henry. And sure enough, I found this listing, in the ornamental handwriting of the census taker, who happened to be Willa Cather's great-grandfather, James Cather: Jacob F. Sibert (another great-grandfather) owned five slaves in 1850. The oldest was a man, age 45, black. The next-oldest was a woman, age 35, mulatto. The three additional slaves were all young females, aged 16 and 10 (both black) and 8 (mulatto). Only one of them, the 8-year-old, could have been the child of the mulatto woman. Could these two be "Till" and her daughter Nancy? The fictional Nancy (whom Cather claimed was also a real person whom she remembered from childhood [letter to Alexander Woolcott]) was 16 in 1856; this girl would have been 14 or 15. Close!

Exhilarated by this new information, I sped onward to the microfilm for the 1860 slave census. There was no listing for Jacob Seibert; he had died in 1858. But in the Back Creek district where the Seiberts resided (and where large-scale slaveholding was uncommon) was a listing for Jacob's surviving wife, Ruhamah Seibert. With seven slaves, she was the fourth-largest slaveholder in the district. The oldest black man, 45 in 1850, was now 55. The oldest mulatto woman, 35 in 1850, was now 46. There was one other female slave, a girl of 8; a black man of 21, a mulatto boy of 14, and a black boy of 8. And there was a male mulatto baby, only a month old. None of the slave children who appeared in the 1850 census was enumerated in 1860. And indeed, if "Nancy" had been there in 1850, she would have been gone by 1860, for, in the novel, the date of her escape to Canada was 1856, and Cather asserted that the escape was based on fact.

With this slave census information, I now actually had the beginnings of a picture of the slave community on the Seibert mill farm in the years between 1850 and 1860. But something crucial was missing: names. In the slave censuses, this essential marker of human identity is accorded only to owners, not to slaves. Slaves were property. And property is often inventoried when its owner dies. So my next stop was the Frederick County Courthouse, where I found Jacob Seibert's will and the February 1859 inventory of his estate. Among farm equipment, stock, and household goods (furniture, quilts, carpets, looking glasses and spinning wheels), were listed nine slaves.

1 col. man Tom-----	\$278
1 col. woman Matilda-----	\$300
1 col. woman Jane & child-----	\$1000
1 col. woman Ann-----	\$900
1 col. girl Lucretia-----	\$300
1 col. boy Pierce-----	\$500
1 col. girl Amanda-----	\$250
1 col. boy Elec [or Elie?]-	\$300

The total value of Seibert's nine slaves was \$3828, and the total value of his inventoried property was \$4453.34, so his slaves were by far his most valuable asset. He left them, with the residue of his estate, to his "beloved wife," Ruhamah.

The inventory is full of useful information—but for me its most important feature is the names. Surely the first two (and presumably oldest) slaves listed are the same two who appear in the slave censuses. And the woman is *Matilda*, a name that is sometimes shortened to "Tillie"—or "Till"!

If this is indeed Till, what happened to her after Emancipation? According to Cather's account in *Sapphira's* Epilogue, in her childhood "Aunt Till" was still living, as a free woman, in her former slave cabin on the property the Seiberts had owned, and she worked and visited at Willow Shade, Cather's childhood home. So I returned again to the microfilmed Federal Census. In 1870, I found the household headed by Ruhamah Seibert. At the end of the entry, after white family members, three African Americans were listed. Thomas Parrott was 75, black, and a miller by occupation. Matilda Jefferson, 58, and Amanda Jefferson, 13, were mulatto domestic servants.¹ *Matilda Jefferson!* Surely this is the "Matilda" of the inventory, the oldest woman slave of the slave censuses. In the novel, "Till" has a husband. His name is "Jefferson." As I read

and reread this name, I burst into tears at the microfilm reader. Surely, at last, I had found Till.

For me, that moment was the culmination (so far) of an editor's romance, a romance that led me from Cather's pages to accretion of miniscule clues on microfilm to a moment when I can see, at last, how the historical record (partial as it is) and the novel come together. Beyond satisfying my personal curiosity, why does this matter? As I've said before, in locating prototypes in *Sapphira*, I and other scholars have been able to identify other storytellers who made major contributions to this book that was, as Cather said, largely made from family and neighborhood stories. Two white women who were major sources became characters in the novel: Grandmother Rachel Boak as "Rachel Blake" and Mary Ann Anderson as "Mrs. Ringer."² By identifying Matilda Jefferson as "Till," we are able to acknowledge an actual African American woman who made a major contribution to Willa Cather's last novel and to recognize a significant part of *Sapphira's* history that was formerly obscured. Thus we see more fully how a storyteller who had been a slave, owned by Willa Cather's ancestors, became a part of Cather's creative process and importantly influenced her last novel.

Is there more to discover about Till and the other African American characters in *Sapphira*, who were one of Cather's major concerns as she wrote to friends at the time of the book's publication? I suspect that there is—and the very thought makes my heart beat faster and has me longing to get back to the microfilm reader!

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Notes

¹This listing also seems to confirm that Thomas Parrott ("Tom" in the inventory) was the eldest male slave in both census entries. Since his occupation is "miller," he seems a likely prototype for the miller Henry Colbert's chief assistant and "steadiest hand" in the novel, Sampson. Thirteen-year-old Amanda Jefferson is probably the "col. girl Amanda" inventoried in 1859, and her last name indicates that she is Matilda's daughter.

²Edith Lewis identifies Mary Ann Anderson as the prototype of Mrs. Ringer (10-11); Cather identified her grandmother Rachel Boak as prototype for Rachel Blake in her letter to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, as well as others.

Cather's Intentions and the Mediated Texts of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

Charles Mignon, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Textual Editor

This will be a note prepared from the point of view of a textual editor on some details of Cather's intention for the text of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* both before and after she published it. The text was mediated (produced in collaboration with others) as she prepared it in typescript with Edith Lewis (her partner and a copy-editor at J. Walter Thompson) for publication, and then after Alfred Knopf received it for copy-editing. Cather and Knopf agreed to sell the book in America and England, and this agreement had an effect on how the text was presented to its readers. My discussion will also throw some light on Cather's process of composition. But before I can develop these ideas, I want to provide some background as to what, exactly, textual editors do, and why what they do might be important.

The Cather Scholarly Edition is a critical edition, which means that, using the editors' critical judgments, it is an edition that constructs texts that come closer to some desired standard than any of the existing texts happen to do. One important standard of scholarly interest leads toward a text intended by the author. No existing text, say, of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, fully reflects Cather's intention because there are differences between versions of it as it was created and also between versions of it after it was published in its various editions. For example, you have a first handwritten draft that differs from Cather's first typing just as her retyped typescript differs from a later professionally typed version produced by her secretary, Miss Bloom. (Cather *always* revised the last draft she produced, whether in hand or in her own typing, and then went on to correct Miss Bloom's typescripts.) A final typescript would be carefully prepared for the publisher.

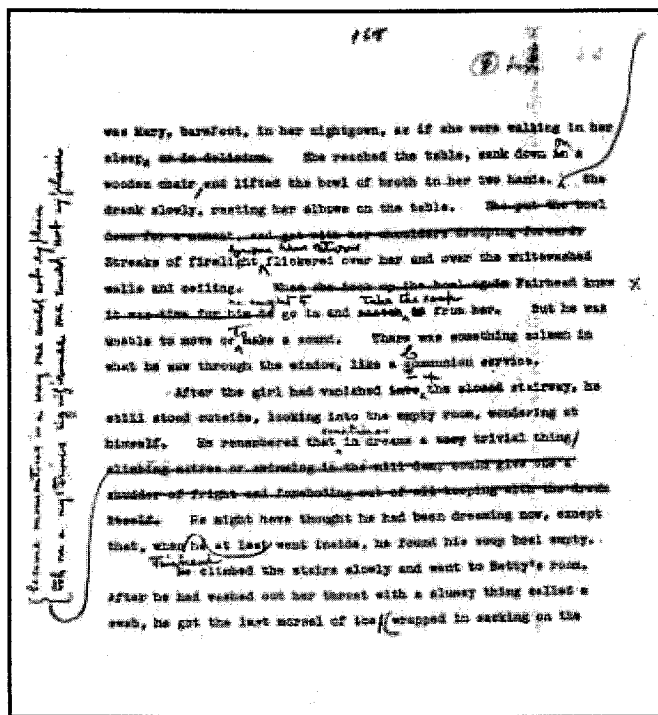
The various appearances of a text (separate settings of type) show variations in the text between one version and another. The work of discovering the variations at each phase of composition is accomplished by collation, a detailed comparison of two texts and a recording of the differences, i.e., the variants. Mostly on the basis of the collations, all collected together in a conflation, the editors determine which preserved text is most authoritative and what alterations (emendations) are required to bring it closer to a text intended by the author.

After making these decisions, the editor must discuss the rationale for choosing a copy-text and for making the emendations and go on to provide a List of Emendations and a List of Rejected Variants. There is a great deal to be learned from studying a Rejected Variants List, for it is there one can see the evolution of the text at any point in the process of composition.

As the editors were collecting materials to edit *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, an anonymous donor presented us with eight excerpted portions of this narrative, one of which was a fifteen page typescript professionally typed by Miss Bloom and corrected by Cather and Lewis. This typescript actually reveals *three* texts: the uncorrected professional typing produced by Miss Bloom, that text revised by Edith Lewis, and that text revised by Cather herself. A page from this corrected typescript (see illustration) will show these three hands; the page opens up in a dramatic way a late phase of Cather's process of composition.¹

Lewis's involvement may be seen in a set of marginal notations where she is making corrections in her own handwriting, and in this case also presenting alternatives to cancelled matter, and copy-editing the text. Our focus in the illustration is on the two lines of notation written vertically in the left margin of a typed page (numbered "168" in Lewis's hand):

"{became momentous in a way one could not explain
{took on a mysterious significance one could not explain" (Cather TS7, 168, corrected)"



This portion of a late corrected typescript of *Sapphira*, which was professionally typed, shows one of Cather's corrections ("from the stove" in line 6) and Lewis's cancellations (lines 14-16), with a set of marginal alternatives in the left margin, as discussed by Mignon. Courtesy of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition.

These lines are marked as alternatives to material cancelled in the text. They occur in the narrative in chapter three of Book Eight, "The Dark Autumn," where Fairhead sees Mary drink the broth (259. 27-28 in the first edition).

What makes this marginal notation interesting is the form it takes as lines of parallel alternative. In each of the earlier stages of composing, Cather adopted the practice of providing interlinear alternatives to material she cancelled in her text, interlinears that were handwritten in the holograph draft as well as typed in the typescript drafts. And Lewis's notations follow Cather's regular practice.

Where did these alternatives come from? This touches upon the exact nature of their partnership in proofing. Did they consult while they read

proof together? Or did they read separately in solo proofing? One answer lies in Cather's usual practice. We suggest that, in reviewing this particular page of *corrected* typescript and faced with the choice Lewis presented her there, Cather would have chosen one of the alternatives for the final version she prepared for Bloom to type in order to provide copy for the Knopf copy-editors. Her choice is more likely to have been made *before* the

next typing, for it is very unlikely that she would have presented a Knopf copy-editor with such an unfinished substantive choice. This suggests that Lewis was solo copy-editing.

Cather's next opportunity to realize her intentions in revision was galley proof. In the galleys—the publisher's second mediated treatment of the text (copy-editing being the first)—we find evidence that Cather had adopted the second reading of these two marginal alternatives in the final typing submitted to Knopf, the step leading directly to copy-editing before the galleys were produced. All this comes from a study of the variants in the corrected typescript, the galley, and the first edition text. So, this kind of study can be important because it gives us a dramatic picture of Cather's process of composing, a process that is actually made up of a number of products (typescripts) themselves revised for subsequent typing.

The publisher's first mediated treatment of the text came in the Knopf copy-editing of Cather's final corrected typescript for the galley setting. This copy-editing reflected Knopf's house-style, which was itself influenced by his agreement with Cather that the book was to be marketed in America and Britain. What this meant is well set out by James L.W. West III in his Introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (xlvi–xlix). Knopf followed the common practice of adopting an anglicizing house style (more hyphenated compounds, anglicized punctuation and spelling), mainly because “books typeset and manufactured in the U.S. could qualify automatically for copyright in Great Britain.” And to be successful in the British market “the American text had to look sufficiently ‘British’ to satisfy the audience on the other side of the Atlantic” (West xlix). Thus, the copy-editor's programmatic treatment of accidentals (spelling, punctuation, word-division, capitalization, and italicization) in preparing the text of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* for a British audience involved changes that were determined

largely by marketplace considerations—considerations upon which Cather and Knopf had agreed.

These details of Knopf's mediation show that *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* was “a socialized or domesticated text, the product of a collaboration between author and publisher” (West xlii). And we should also add Cather's longstanding collaborations with Lewis and Bloom to this mediation: there was some “domestication” present in the pre-publication preparation of corrected typescripts for eventual publication by Knopf, also mediated. These examples show that Cather accepted the help of others in producing a text for her reading audience. The disposition of the variants discovered in collation in both cases I have discussed here—one very specific example and one programmatic practice—adds to our understanding of Cather's practice as an author and editor of her own work.

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Endnote

For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see C.W. Mignon's “Willa Cather's Process of Composing,” forthcoming in *RALS*.

Memorial Services Held in Red Cloud for Helen Cather Southwick



Services were held at historic Grace Episcopal Church in Red Cloud on August 15, 2004, to celebrate the life of Helen Cather Southwick, Willa Cather's niece.

Helen Cather Southwick was born June 15, 1918, to James D. and Ethel M. (Garber) Cather in Red Cloud. The family later moved to Kearney. In 1931 they moved to Long Beach, California. Helen graduated from high school there and attended Long Beach City College for two years. She returned to Red Cloud in 1939 to care for her grandmother and attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she met and later married Philip Southwick of Friend on September 1, 1942. The couple lived at Champaign, Illinois, and Plainfield, New Jersey, before settling in Pittsburgh, where Helen worked as a school librarian at Fox Chapel. Philip died in 1992 and Helen moved to Midway, Utah, close to her son Jim.

Helen was a long-time member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation Board of Governors Advisory Board, where she maintained many close friendships. She published an article entitled “Willa Cather's Early Years, Origins of a Legend” in the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. Because of her close connections to her Aunt Willa, Helen was able to provide first-hand information to the Cather Foundation and scholars throughout the country about the life and times of Willa Cather. She also donated to the Cather Foundation and the University of Nebraska valuable artifacts relating to the life of Willa Cather. Helen died on August 3, 2004, in Salt Lake City at the age of 86. She is survived by one son, Jim, of Charleston, Utah, one brother, Charles E. of Long Beach, California, and one grandchild, Mary. Following the Memorial Service, Helen was buried in Andrews Cemetery at Friend, Nebraska.

Connections to Red Cloud and Grace Episcopal Church ran long and deep in Helen's life. She spent much of her time in her early years visiting in the Red Cloud and Kearney areas. Besides her Cather relatives, she was, through her mother's family, related to the early governor of Nebraska and founder of Red Cloud, Silas Garber. The Garbers and the Cathers were early members of Grace Episcopal Church. Silas Garber and the Garber family were fictionalized in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*. Helen had requested that the family bring her “home” to Grace Episcopal Church in Red Cloud for her memorial service as it seemed to be the place with which Helen most closely associated herself.

Stephany Thompson and Fritz Mountford: A Conversation about the Red Cloud Opera House

Fritz Mountford, Hastings College

Editor's Note: Fritz Mountford, currently Professor of Music at Hastings College and a member of the WCPM Board of Governors, grew up in Red Cloud, as son of two of the WCPM founders. Here he talks with Stephany Thompson, who also grew up in Red Cloud, about the past, present, and future of the Red Cloud Opera House.

Forty years ago there was a narrow window of childhood when it was an adventure to sneak up the back stairs of the Coast-to-Coast store in Red Cloud. Of course there were other second-story destinations above main street—the labyrinth of “Jaycee rooms” in the south block and, in the north block, above “the show building,” a dusty display of stuffed birds and match-stick historical dioramas—but they couldn’t hold a candle to the top floor of the Coast-to-Coast store. Unlike any other place we had discovered, that room spanned the entire double width of the hardware store, and it had a stage!

“This,” we told each other solemnly, “used to be the Opera House.” “Opera House”—to us, the very words were thrilling. By the time we were kids, the Opera House had been closed for years and years, but even so, “culture” never really left Red Cloud in the backwater. Our lives were filled with a colorful progression of home-grown entertainments: pageants and exercises all over town, summer band concerts in the park, piano recitals in the basement of the Congregational Church, and fashion shows and musical “revues” in the high school gym.

But once upon a time, we knew, “real” performers used to come to Red Cloud. In the old days, we said, they used to come on the train. They came from far off places, we said, like Chicago and New York City and probably even Europe, to put on their shows in our Opera House.

It was still and hot and dark up there. The tall windows that would have looked out toward the alley had been covered over years before, but the peeling paint let in just enough light to suggest what the Opera House had used to be. Oh sure, some time in its devolution from center of world culture to store room a gaping hole for a freight elevator had been cut through the stage floor, and half the auditorium was filled with the bare two-by-fours and plywood walls and ceiling of the back rooms of the Morhart’s makeshift upstairs apartment. Yes, it smelled of dust and machine grease and sweeping compound, but among the boxes of bicycle tires and lawn mower parts there were ancient painted scenery flats up there, and the extravagant signatures of probably famous people were scrawled on the backstage walls.

You can imagine the thrill when, a year ago last spring, I found a phone message from Stephany Thompson that said simply, “The Opera House is ready; call me.” For other Cather fans around the world, the opening of the Cather Center in Red Cloud was important because it meant, at long last, a place for hospitality, office space, gallery space, even storage space. For me

it meant, after all these years, the reawakening of Red Cloud’s pioneer *performance* space! Only a few weeks after Steph’s phone call, my college choir marched up onto the renovated stage to perform one of the first inaugural-season concerts in the “new” Red Cloud Opera House. Since then, the auditorium has been filled with song and drama and dance and discussion and laughter and love.

Stephany Thompson came to the Opera House with a B.A. in Fine Arts in Dance from the University of Nebraska/Lincoln. As Program Coordinator, she is responsible for planning, preparing, and presenting a year-round kaleidoscope of events. Recently, I talked with her about her challenging job.

Fritz Mountford: First, maybe you could explain the relationship between the Opera House as a theatre and the Cather Foundation.

Stephany Thompson: Opera House events are simply an extension of the educational outreach mission of the WCPM. We used to sponsor local study groups and lectures and readings, of course, as well as tours and discussions and performances at the annual Spring Conferences. Along the way, Cather-related performances and conferences expanded to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, and now around the world. Programming at the Opera House is part of that tradition.

FM: Obviously, you host events during the Cather Festival each spring, but your calendar is year-round.

ST: We knew that we wanted the Opera House to be a living, active center of culture in Red Cloud, so we’ve been experimenting with a wide variety of performances. In the first season we hosted plays produced by the Theatre of the American West, and by the Traveling Lantern Theatre Troupe, and a University of Nebraska production of a 19th century opera, “The Bohemian Girl.” In little pioneer towns, the term “opera house” really had little to do specifically with “opera.” The idea was to attract a variety of cultural events to pioneer communities.

In addition, we hosted a series of “Open Door Lectures,” everything from nationally known sculptor Anne Truitt to local writers. Non-theatrical concerts included The Hastings College Choir, folk musicians, an intimate cabaret-type revue, and the Irish music of The Wild Clover Band. Variety acts have included a comic magician, a revue called “Free Beer & Chicken,” and we hosted a lecture by Teddy Roosevelt, as well as plays by the local community theatre, and a children’s theatre workshop presented by the Theatre of the American West.

FM: In a recent issue of the *N&R*, we read a “want ad” for a Steinway grand piano.

ST: The piano in the Opera House came out of the old Masonic Temple in Red Cloud. We are making do with it for local performances, but the mechanical action of the keys and pedals and the tone-quality aren’t that great. In the 1970s Yehudi



Cast of *Steel Magnolias*, Spring 2004. Photograph by Stephany Thompson.

Menuhin's sisters (who, as children, had been friends of Willa Cather) came to Nebraska, but had to perform their concert in Lincoln because we didn't have a performance space, nor pianos worthy of world-class artists. Well, now we've got the performance space, but all the booking agents we've spoken to tell us that great performers would love to come to Red Cloud but we need to have a world-class instrument. So we put the call out for a Steinway concert grand, or a gift that would allow us to pursue leads on a piano that would meet the requirements of the finest performers.

FM: For someone who doesn't happen to have an extra Steinway sitting around collecting dust, do you have other needs?

ST: As you remember, bits and pieces of the original Opera House scenery have survived. During our first season, Charles Davies, director of the Theatre of the American West, built and painted additional "legs" to match the original "Woodland" scene. It looks great and is an essential addition for us! Our research reveals that every opera house had three or four "stock" sets of scenery, an exterior, an interior, an Italian street scene, etc. Charles Davies has offered to re-create the missing pieces to match what we've got at a cost of about \$1,000.00.

FM: That doesn't seem like a lot for scenery for the stage of an opera house. What are the actual dimensions of the Opera House stage?

ST: The Auditorium seats a maximum of 180. In Cather's day the seating was wooden kitchen chairs nailed to boards to form rows; we've got portable chairs of a more contemporary design with wooden backs, but with padded seats. Without any scenery in place, the height of the performing space, from stage floor to ceiling, is twelve feet. With the proscenium scenery in place, the width of the stage is about twenty feet.

FM: Tell me about your plans for a Film Festival.

ST: Our first idea was simply to be able to offer Saturday

matinee movies to involve children and young people in Red Cloud and surrounding communities in the programming of the Opera House. The problem is that the projection equipment out of the old "show building" long ago disappeared, and at any rate would be entirely out of date for our current and future needs. We have pursued bids for a state-of-the-art projection system and screen that would allow us to show the premiere of

the PBS American Masters film on Cather, for instance, but also an ongoing film festival. Like everything we've accomplished in fifty years, we need the spark of imagination to motivate supporters to underwrite the project.

FM: Are local volunteers important "behind the scenes" at the Opera House?

ST: Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the Opera House! They have adapted their skills well to a performing arts facility and approach every situation with grace. We are truly blessed by their professionalism.

FM: Are there other directions where you hope to expand in Opera House programming?

ST: We are expanding our schedule to include

contemporary dance. Of course, I have a special place in my heart for this medium, but I also feel that our audience will enjoy a diverse palette of entertainment. Our stage is very small and not conducive to full dance companies, but we are already negotiating with dance professionals to bring smaller pieces and even some original projects. I'm excited about the possibilities.

FM: So, tell me, Steph—are you enjoying your job?

ST: I was thrilled at the prospect of being involved with the Opera House re-opening. As a dancer growing up in the small town of Red Cloud, I performed in spaces less than ideal for my art. Now I have the opportunity to reach out to the youth in this town and let them know that it's noble to pursue their creativity and their art. We see examples of this every day in our events and gallery exhibits. Who knows, someday it may even lead someone to become program coordinator of an opera house!



Stephany Thompson, Opera House Program Coordinator. Photograph by Barb Kudrna.

Festival Cobbler: A Recipe from Red Cloud

Edith Lewis remembered that when her friend Willa Cather "went home to Red Cloud for her vacations, she spent a great deal of time working with Margie [Marjorie Anderson, the Cather family servant] in the kitchen; making pies and cookies and puddings from old Virginia recipes." Obviously, the Cather family had a long and delicious tradition of desserts. That tradition is still honored in Red Cloud, and at last May's Spring Festival banquet, diners were delighted by the "assorted cobblers" served for dessert by the Red Cloud Women's Chamber. Thanks to Lu Williams, the Chamber has agreed to share the cobbler recipe with us. We think you'll find it much quicker and easier than the desserts that Willa Cather and Margie Anderson prepared—but no less delicious!

Fruit Cobbler Cake: Spring Festival Banquet 2004

1 20 oz. can crushed pineapple in natural juice, undrained
1 box yellow cake mix

1 21 oz. can cherry pie filling*
1 stick butter or margarine, cold
½ cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread pineapple, with its juice, in a greased 9"x13" cake pan. Spread pie filling evenly over pineapple. Crumble dry cake mix evenly over the top. Sprinkle with chopped nuts. Cut chilled butter or margarine into small pats and layer on top of cake mix. Bake for 45-55 minutes, until top is nicely browned. Cut into squares and serve warm, topped with a dab of Cool Whip or whipped cream. Serves 8-10.

*For cherry pie filling, one may substitute peach, apple, or blueberry filling. All four were used at the Festival Banquet. (Cherry is best! AR)

Willa Cather's Smith College Connections: Ten "New" Cather Letters at Smith College Libraries

Melissa J. Homestead, University of Oklahoma, and Anne L. Kaufman, Milton Academy

In the course of our research on Edith Lewis's years at Smith College, we discovered ten Willa Cather letters in Smith College library collections that do not appear in Janis Stout's *Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather* and which do not appear to have been consulted by Cather biographers. Nine of the ten letters attest to Cather's multiple connections to Smith College people (students, alumnae, and faculty) and events over the course of several decades. Endowed by Sophia Smith, whose will specified that her estate be used to "furnish my own sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our colleges for young men," Smith College accepted its first students in 1875. By the turn of the century, Smith and six other private, academically competitive Northeastern women's colleges (Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, and Barnard) were known as the "Seven Sisters." Lewis, who graduated from Smith in 1902, is Cather's most obvious and long-running connection to the institution, but in years subsequent to Cather's first meeting with Lewis and their shared residence in New York, three members of Cather's biological family also attended Smith. Her younger sister Elsie Cather graduated from Smith in 1912 (transferring from the University of Nebraska in 1910); her niece Mary Virginia Auld (daughter of her sister Jessica) graduated in 1929, and Virginia Cather (daughter of her brother Roscoe) graduated in 1933.

The earliest, undated letter (autograph, signed Willa Sibert Cather) is addressed to poet Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937). Branch was an 1897 Smith graduate, and her papers are in the Mortimer Rare Book Room there. During her college years, Branch edited the *Smith College Monthly* and was a protégée of English professor Mary Augusta Jordan (later an important influence on Edith Lewis). Branch's career as a nationally published poet began in 1898, when she won a *Century Magazine* contest for the best poem by a college graduate. A New York resident during the first decade of the 20th century, she was a successful poet and playwright and was deeply involved in settlement work. Houghton Mifflin, which published Cather's *April Twilights* in 1903, published three volumes of Branch's poems during this decade, *Heart of the Road* (1901), *The Shoes That Danced* (1905), and *Rose of the Wind* (1910). The contents of Cather's letter to Branch and its origin from 82 Washington Place date the letter to the period from 1909 to 1912, when Cather lived at that address with Lewis and worked at *McClure's Magazine*. In the letter, Cather explains that a special delivery letter from Branch arrived a week late, while a second note arrived at *McClure's* after Cather had left the office. She expresses her regrets at not being able to attend a function that evening, but invites Branch to tea at her home the next Monday, where a Miss Bunner [?] and some others Branch knows will be in attendance. In a postscript, she reveals the probable origin of their acquaintance, a "good afternoon" at Annie Adams Fields' house. Annie Fields' importance to Cather during this stage of her career has long been recognized, and this letter reinforces the need for continued study of their connection. While adding Branch's name to the cast of characters in Cather's literary networks, the letter reminds us of Cather's continuing identity as a poet during this period.



Portrait of Mary Ellen Chase, Professor of English, Smith College, May, 1933. Photograph by Eric Stahlberg. Smith College Archives.

The second letter, dated November 23, 1929 (typed, signed Willa Cather), is to Mary Ellen Chase (1888-1973), novelist, memoirist, and Smith College English professor. Chase was born and raised in Blue Hill, Maine, and received a bachelor's degree from the University of Maine in 1909. After several years of high school teaching, a long illness, and a subsequent convalescence in Montana, she enrolled in graduate school at the University of Minnesota and received a Ph.D. in 1922. After serving four years as Assistant Professor at Minnesota, she was offered an associate professorship at Smith in 1926 by President William Allan Neilson. At Chase's urging, Neilson also hired Chase's companion and colleague at Minnesota, Margaret Eliot MacGregor, as an assistant professor. By 1929, Chase had published four books for adults (in addition to earlier books for children and college textbooks, one co-authored with MacGregor), an academic study, *Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel* (1927), two novels about life in small-town Maine, *Mary Christmas* (1926) and *Uplands* (1927), and a book of autobiographical reminiscences, *The Golden Asse, and Other Essays* (1929). Cather's letter suggests that Chase and MacGregor met Cather and Lewis on Grand Manan Island during the summer of 1929. Responding to a letter from Chase, Cather declines an invitation from Chase and Neilson to speak at Smith under the auspices of the English department on the grounds that she almost never lectures and would not, in any event, have time in her schedule during the upcoming winter because she will be traveling to Pasadena to be with her invalid mother. She reports that before going west, she hopes to visit Northampton in order to see her nephew at Amherst (William J. Auld, a 1931 Amherst College graduate) and her niece (Virginia Cather) at Smith. She also wants to see Chase and MacGregor while in Northampton to discuss Chase and MacGregor's "Grand Manan prospects," if a tidal wave that hit the island the day before had not washed away her and Lewis's house and Chase's and MacGregor's hopes. She thanks Chase for sending her a copy of the *Golden Asse*, which is a nice size to fit in her suitcase for her Western trip. Finally, she surmises that Virginia, whom she sees frequently, was nervous when Chase invited her to tea. (In November 1929, Virginia was a freshman; her cousin Mary Virginia Auld had graduated in May.)

Chase's brief reminiscence of her meeting with Cather on Grand Manan, published in the *Massachusetts Review* in 1962, has long been a source for Cather biographers, but Chase herself has received little attention as a Cather acquaintance. Although it is not clear whether Chase and Cather maintained or deepened their friendship after 1929, the connections between the women at the time of this letter bear further investigation.

Like Cather, Chase was deeply influenced by Sarah Orne Jewett, whose *Country of the Pointed Firs* describes the same landscapes and history as many of Chase's novels, although Chase's novels are considerably darker than Jewett's. As a birthday present when she turned 13 on February 24, 1900, Chase's father arranged for her to meet Jewett, an event she recalled nearly 70 years later as a crucial one in her decision to become a writer and to write about Maine. This recollection appears (among other places) in Chase's introduction to a 1968 edition of *Firs*. (Perhaps as a gentle rebuke to Cather, she presented the 1896 edition of the novel as Jewett intended it, with additional Dunnet Landing stories appearing at the end of the volume rather than incorporated into the text of the novel, as was the case in Cather's 1925 edition of *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*.) In addition to their shared admiration of Jewett and their careers as "regional" novelists inspired by her, Chase's scholarly work on Hardy's serialization of his novels doubtless held interest for Cather, who admired Hardy as a novelist and serialized all of her novels of the 1920s in magazines before book publication. Finally, their personal lives connected them, with (as the letter implies) Chase and her companion hoping to emulate Cather and Lewis in the building of a summer cottage together on Grand Manan (and with Cather and Lewis welcoming the plan). After

Macgregor's unexpected death in 1932 at the age of 40, Chase shared homes in Northampton and Petit Manan Point on the Maine coast with Eleanor Shipley Duckett, a Smith professor of Classics. The Smith College Archives holds a large collection of Chase's papers, but this letter from Cather to Chase is part of the Hampshire Bookshop Collection in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, donated by the bookstore's owner, Marion Dodd (Smith class of 1906).

A series of letters in the Smith College Archives from Cather to Annetta I. Clark (Smith 1904), secretary to the President and Board of Trustees of Smith College, documents the college's granting of an honorary degree to Cather. In the first letter dated March 7, [1931] (autograph, signed Willa Cather), writing from the Grosvenor Hotel, Cather thanks the Trustees for inviting her to be present at the Smith commencement in June and to receive an honorary degree, but she declines the honor because she long before accepted an invitation to receive an honorary doctorate from Princeton, and the scheduled events overlap. She asks that her explanation be kept confidential. Despite the absence of a year on the letter, Cather's 1931 honorary degree from Princeton definitely dates the letter to 1931. Subsequent letters document Cather's acceptance of a second invitation in 1933. On March 1, [1933] (autograph, signed Willa Cather), Cather wrote from 570 Park Avenue to Clark accepting an invitation to attend commencement and receive a degree on June 19. On May 20, 1933 (typed, signed Willa Cather), Cather declined the college's offer of a suite at Ellen Emerson House (a dormitory in the residential quadrangle), explaining that George Whicher had made reservations for Cather and Lewis

in South Hadley, the town in which Mount Holyoke College is located. (Cather first met Whicher, an English professor at Amherst College, and his wife, Josephine Whicher, an English professor at Mount Holyoke, at Bread Loaf in 1922.) She also asked the college to provide a gown for her and promised to send measurements from a tailor. On May 22, [1933] (autograph, signed Willa Cather), she forwarded the measurements. Finally, on June 14, [1933] (autograph, signed Willa Cather), she confirmed that she would don the cap and gown at the Smith College Library, and informed Clark that Whicher had changed her reservations from the South Hadley Inn for a suite in the Mount Holyoke Faculty House.

While this series of letters is not particularly rich in detail, it nevertheless draws attention to Cather's multiple connections both to Smith and nearby liberal arts colleges. By declining the 1931 invitation and accepting in 1933, Cather



From left to right: President Neilson, Willa Cather, Maria Hall, H.B. Houghton at the 1933 Smith College Commencement. Photographer unknown. Smith College Archives.

received an honorary degree at the same commencement ceremony at which Virginia Cather received her B.A. Visiting Smith with Cather, Lewis missed her 30th reunion by one year. By staying at Mount Holyoke, Cather and Lewis visited the alma mater of Frances Amanda Smith Cather (Cather's "Aunt Franc"), who graduated from the school in 1870, when it was still a seminary rather than a baccalaureate institution.

(Cather once improbably described her Aunt Franc as a graduate of both Smith and Mount Holyoke, but, as previously noted, Smith did not admit its first students until 1875; her aunt taught in Vermont from 1870 to 1871, in Winchester, Virginia from 1871 to 1873, and then moved to Nebraska with her new husband, George P. Cather.)

Two letters from Cather to Smith College French professor Marine Leland illuminate Cather's engagements with the French language and French Canadian culture. In the first letter (typed, signed Willa Cather), Cather responds to a letter from Leland proposing to translate one of Cather's works into French. The letter bears the date September 4 without a year, and Cather does not specify which work Leland has proposed to translate. However, considering Leland's status as a pioneer in the scholarly study of French Canadian language and culture, Leland almost certainly proposed to translate *Shadows on the Rock*, first published in August 1931. (Chase, a colleague and close friend of Leland's, may have alerted her to the subject matter of the novel, which Cather was writing on Grand Manan in 1929.) Cather praises the spirit of Leland's proposal but urges her not to undertake a translation without making business arrangements first with a French publisher, who would then be in a position to negotiate with Cather's American publisher. Cather also reports that *My Ántonia* was translated into French several years earlier and that three more books are currently being translated. In a letter dated January 31, 1942 (typed, signed Willa Cather), Cather applauds Leland's "cause" and explains her own belief that North America does have a French language and literature. She illustrates her

Willa Cather's Smith College Connections

(Continued)

point of view with an anecdote about tourists trying to speak French to French-Canadians but being unable to understand them because they drop syllables. She reports her pleasure in hearing the old-fashioned French of city dwellers in Quebec, but she admits that she herself cannot understand French-Canadians in remote areas. Finally, she likens this dropping of syllables to the speech of people in the U.S. Southern states. The second half of the letter presents an extended anecdote told her by Thomas Masaryk, President of Czechoslovakia, who described to Cather his pleasure in overhearing the conversation of French-Canadian soldiers in London during World War I. He likened their linguistic constructions to those used during the reign of Louis XIV and Louis XV. She closes the letter by thanking Leland for the information about a new branch of the Modern Language Association, and then adds a P.S. asking Leland not to share the indirect quotation from Masaryk's letter because Masaryk is dead and cannot grant permission. This second letter suggests that Cather felt that the cultures represented in *Shadows* and her more recently completed *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* were deeply connected. It also suggests a continuing thread between *Shadows*, *Sapphira*, and her incompleting Avignon novel. The College Archives holds the first letter to Leland, while the Mortimer Rare Book Room holds the second.

Finally, the Mortimer Rare Book Room has a relatively brusque letter to a Mr. Wallack dated February 16, 1932, a letter apparently donated by an alumna manuscript collector. (No one named "Wallack" ever served on the Smith faculty.) Cather curtly tells Wallack that he should consult the authorized edition of *April Twilights* published by Knopf in 1923 to find out whether she herself made a change to a poem, any changes she made in the

1903 edition having been followed in the later edition.

The importance of these letters lies in their immense potential. As Cather scholarship looks ahead to map productive ongoing approaches to her work through the twenty-first century, exploring connections to literary networks and cultural studies will assume greater significance. Among these, surely, are Cather's interest in French Canada, the development of a set of links among *Alexander's Bridge* and *Shadows on the Rock*, her Canadian novels, and the Avignon fragment, and the existence of a stronger connection to Mary Ellen Chase and all she represents in terms of New England intellectual life. The presence of these letters among the Smith College holdings suggests, too, that the ongoing link to the college provided by Edith Lewis ought to be considered in a new light.

A Note on Sources

For the history of the Seven Sisters Colleges, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experiences in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984). On Anna Hempstead Branch, see Mary Hughes Brookheart's article in *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 3:406-408, and Julian T. Baird's article in *Notable American Women* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1971), 1:226-228. No print sources begin to do justice to the lives of Chase, MacGregor, and Leland, so most of the information on these women has been gleaned from their faculty files and papers at the Smith College Archives. For a basic survey of Chase's life and work published before her death, see Perry D. Westbrook, *Mary Ellen Chase* (New York: Twayne, 1965), as well as the March 1962 issue of the *Colby Library Quarterly* devoted to commemorating Chase's 75th birthday. Two more recently published books—Elienne Squire, *A Lantern in the Wind* (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1995) and Evelyn Hyman Chase, *Feminist Convert: A Portrait of Mary Ellen Chase* (Santa Barbara: J. Daniel, 1988)—do not clearly document sources and are highly unreliable. Information on Frances Amanda Smith Cather and William J. Auld was obtained from the Mount Holyoke College and Amherst College Archives, respectively. On Aunt Franc, see also Cather's letter to Mariel Gere, 1 Aug. 1893, Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Archives.

Revisiting the *Newsletter and Review*: A Conversation with Dolores and Virgil Albertini



Virgil and Dolores Albertini.

This year, the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* celebrates its forty-seventh anniversary. The first issue, a two-page mimeographed sheet, appeared in summer 1957. Already there was much news to report from the WCPM's founder, Mildred Bennett, and her busy "kitchen cabinet," the board members who convened around Mildred's Red Cloud kitchen table. Since then, in 152 issues, the *N&R* has expanded into the tri-annual 24-

page publication that you are reading today. In those issues, we can see the WCPM expanding into a major Educational Foundation that oversees the largest group of historic sites devoted to an American writer and sponsors a growing slate of local, national and international events

celebrating the "life, time, and work of Willa Cather." We can see Cather scholarship growing in volume, influence, and sophistication, as most of the current important names in Cather scholarship appear in the pages of the *N&R*—names such as John Murphy, Susan Rosowski, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Marilee Lindemann, Janis Stout, and Joseph Urgo—to mention just a very few. And, with local news of Cather events in Red Cloud, we can see how closely the work of the WCPM is still linked to Cather's beloved "home town" in Nebraska.

However, almost none of us have had the opportunity to read through a complete run of those 152 issues. And there has been no index to help us plumb all the historical and scholarly resources of the *N&R*. Now two indefatigable scholars and friends of the WCPM have come to our rescue: Dolores and Virgil Albertini, a retired librarian and professor of English at Northwest Missouri State University, have compiled a Table of Contents of issues through summer 2004. (Virgil is also a member of the WCPM Board of Governors and the official bibliographer of the *N&R*.) Their work has produced an invaluable tool; with it in hand, we can easily access the contents of the *N&R* since 1957. Recently the Albertinis talked with me, by e-mail, about their Table of Contents.

Ann Romines: Why did you decide that this project was important enough to deserve so many hours of your time? Did someone twist your arms?

Virgil and Dolores Albertini: For years, Cather people had talked about indexing the *Newsletter* and believed it to be worthwhile, and with the “gentle” (almost demanding) urging by Don Connors [longtime Board of Governors member], we consented. Don knew, too, that Dolores’ research skills as a librarian could be put to good use. Katy Cardinal had begun the project with the decade of the 90s. We revised the 90s and then began working through all those decades.

The Table of Contents gives scholars and interested readers alike much easier access to the varied pieces relating to Cather from the *Newsletter*’s inception in 1957 to the present time. It offers a quick scan of each issue and eliminates the researcher’s having to thumb through each issue to find sources. And just browsing through the Table of Contents also gives one an historical perspective of the Foundation.

Ann: You must have noticed lots of changes in all those years of issues. What were some of the most important ones?

Virgil and Dolores: Good question. It was hard to identify changes in so many issues! However, here are several. For many years the *N&R* offered mostly general news, announcements, portraits of people, obituaries, regional and local news, building dedications, spring conference news, and the like. The first literary issue was introduced in spring 1972, edited by Bernice Slote. This was the forerunner of introducing scholarly articles to the *N&R*, many written in subsequent issues by well-known Cather scholars. Special literary issues appeared in the 80s, a notable one edited by Chinese scholar Jean Tsien featuring essays by eight Chinese writers.

Many editors served throughout these 152 issues, beginning with Miriam Mountford [kitchen cabinet member and mother of current Board of Governors member Fritz Mountford], who served until the spring of 1960 when she and Bernice Slote alternated until fall, 1977. Then Ann Billesbach and Bonita English took turns until Mildred Bennett took the reins until her death in 1989. Guest editors were also introduced—beginning with John Murphy, in 1987. John succeeded Mildred as editor until 1998, when John Swift, Merrill Skaggs, and Ann Romines took over, alternating as issue editors.

Ann: What have been some of your favorite features? Any interesting re-discoveries?

Virgil and Dolores: Of course there have been many, such as the photographs highlighting the renovation and completion of the Opera House, Spring Festivals, and Festival speakers like Julie Harris and David McCullough. Random snapshots are interesting, and also the human interest stories and certain facts about people are amusing. For example, discovering that Don Connors has been coming to Red Cloud since 1959 and that Bruce Baker can teach Cather to third graders makes for entertaining reading. And then there are the instructive and enjoyable essays. We could enumerate many, but ones that remain in our memory include Mellanee Kvasnicka’s article on “Paul’s Case’ in the Classroom” (summer 87), Marilyn Arnold’s “Poor Pitiful Professors” (winter 91-92), Ann Romines on Laura Ingalls Wilder and Cather (summer/fall 97), and Mark Madigan on Cather and Dorothy Canfield Fisher (spring 2000). The “Object Lesson” features are noteworthy and that would include Katy Cardinal’s account of the woodblock print of the gnarled

apricot tree (winter/spring 2000). The history of this woodcut and the mystery of whether the two artists (Cather and Gustave Baumann) ever met in Santa Fe are intriguing.

Ann: How would you like to see the *N&R* develop in the future?

Virgil and Dolores: Along with the essays by graduate students and senior Cather scholars for critics and readers, we’d like to see more focus on regional and local news, people, places and events directed toward the general reading public. More eminently readable essays like Tim Bintrim’s and Mark Madigan’s commentary on “. . . Charles Reinhart’s Grave Restored Through Cather’s Writing” (Fall 02) and the continuation of the informative “Object Lessons” would be neat.

Ann: Now that your indexing project is complete to date, do we dare to hope that you’ll continue it, as new issues of the *N&R* appear?

Virgil and Dolores: Yes, the arduous and time-consuming part (all those 152 issues!) is finished. Keeping current will be a simple matter.

Ann: Thank you, Virgil and Dolores!

Note: If you or your library would like to purchase a copy of the valuable research tool compiled by the Albertinis, please contact the Cather Foundation toll-free at 1-866-731-7304 or contact our website at www.willacather.org.



The Executive Director’s Report

In mid-August, I was invited to talk about Cather and homesteading to a group of over forty people sitting around a campfire at Homestead National Monument in Beatrice, Nebraska. Having just had a long phone conversation with BYU Professor John Murphy, I was thinking about Cather’s universal appeal as it relates to homesteading in Nebraska.

In *My Ántonia*, Cather talks about the “materials out of which countries are made.” Obviously the people that come to inhabit a place—in this case the 19th century European immigrants who came to Nebraska—are among the *materials*. I asked myself, what if Mr. Shimerda’s neighbors had asked him to play that violin he carried around? What if Grandpa Burden had found a way to engage Mr. Shimerda in intellectual conversation? What if Mr. Harling had sent Ántonia to school along with his own children?

How well do we know the *materials* of our country? How well do you and I know our neighbors? Cather suggests that knowing your neighbors’ backgrounds leads to understanding. This kind of understanding can eliminate misery for our neighbors and ultimately for us.

I began my talk around the campfire by asking questions about our neighbors in America as well as people in far away places like Iraq and Afganistan—some of our global neighbors. We had a good discussion—Cather always provides those opportunities.

At the next Spring Festival, we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Cather Foundation, and we will ask participants to talk about why people, not just in Nebraska, but all over the world, read *My Ántonia*. I hope you will be among those joining us to provide many answers to this provocative question.



Give a Holiday Gift!



When you give a holiday gift to the Cather Foundation, you give a gift that keeps on giving to the thousands of people who visit Red Cloud or use the Foundation's educational resources.

This year it is particularly important that you put the Cather Foundation on your gift list. The National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant requires that we complete our commitment to raise \$825,000 dollars by July of 2005. We have no time to waste. Your holiday gifts, large and small, will count toward completing this commitment.

You might want to use your gift to the Cather Foundation as an opportunity to honor someone who loves good literature, to remember a friend or relative who has died, to celebrate an occasion that is special to you, or as a very special holiday gift for someone who is dear to you.

Your tax-deductible contribution to the Cather Foundation will provide educational programming, tours of sites important to

Cather and her writing, programming in the Opera House, the Spring Festival, restoration and maintenance, publications and research, and the list goes on. Please do your part to support these vital activities.

We extend our hearty thanks to those individuals and institutions who have contributed to the Foundation's work since our last report in the Fall 2003 *N&R*.

*The following is a listing of those contributing to the Cather Foundation October 16, 2003 to August 19, 2004. The listing does not reflect pledges—only monies received to date (excluding sales). We are also grateful for those donations under \$50.00, as every donation is important to us. Some donations may include payment on a pledge or grant this year to date. Those gifts including such a payment are denoted by an *.*

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The *Newsletter and Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters to the Managing Editor. Scholarly essays should not exceed 2500-3000 words; they should be submitted on disk in Microsoft Word and should follow *The MLA Style Manual*.

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Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography*.

**WILLA CATHER
PIONEER MEMORIAL
& EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
(The Willa Cather Society)**

Founded 1955 by Mildred Bennett

Mrs. Bennett and seven other founding members of the Board of Governors defined the Foundation's mission, which has evolved into these

AIMS OF THE WCPM

To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with The Nebraska State Historical Society.

To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.

To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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Red Cloud Opera House Schedule

“Jittering Spooks” —Mystery Thriller

Theatre of the American West
October 7 at 7:30

PBS— “The Road is All”

—A Biography of Willa Cather
Sneak Preview, American Masters Series
October 16 at 2:00 and 7:00

“Spitfire Grill”—Musical

Nebraska Theatre Caravan
October 23 at 7:30

“The Fantasticks”—Musical

November 5, 6, 12, 13 at 7:30 & 7, 14 at 2:30
Community Theatre, Sponsored by the Republican Valley Arts Council

Thalken, Tesdall, & Thalken—Holiday Jazz Concert

December 3 at 7:30

“Christmas Dragon”

Theatre of the American West
December 17, 18, at 7:30 & 19 at 2:30

In the Gallery . . .

Mads Anderson, Paintings &
Art Pierce, Scripts
September—October, Reception October 16 at 5:00

“The Prairie Palette”

Kim Horne, Ron Meyer, Katy Cardinal, Christine Brown, and Keri Steinke
Sponsored by the Republican Valley Arts Council
October 28—November 30

“The World of Willa Cather”

John Blake Bergers, December 1—January 15
Reception for John Blake Bergers and
Celebration of Willa Cather’s Birthday
December 3 at 5:30

A Message from the President



As outgoing president of the WCPM, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your on-going support of our organization. When I became a board member, I was immediately impressed by the mission of the WCPM and the dedication my fellow board members brought to supporting that mission. When I became president, this mission became even more personal. Who knew when I began to read Cather so many years ago, I would find not only a touchstone of my life but also a world of friends and acquaintances who shared my passion.

For the past two years, I have been gratified for the support shown to me by board members and members of the WCPM at large. I have been honored to represent this organization. I discovered early on that those who care for Cather are extraordinary people. Over the years, I have been the beneficiary of their generosity and kindness. It is the beneficence of the Cather Foundation board, the Red Cloud community, and those members and supporters everywhere which has enabled us as an organization to grow beyond my wildest dreams. The completion of the Opera House renovation represents the best of what we all can do when we work toward a common goal. Our future is very exciting as our programming and outreach strive to continue our highest mission: to promote the importance of Cather’s life and work. I have said it before in many ways, but I believe our mission has taken on an even greater significance. There is something so inherently important about the preservation of literature, of words that help sustain us through those times and events which can seem overpowering. I believe Cather’s words are especially appropriate for this mission. I find myself thinking so often of Jim Burden’s words about what a “little circle man’s experience is.” In a world which often seems fragmented and torn, I think Cather’s words suggest a truth whose application we might do well to remember. But mostly I remember *My Antonia*’s final line: “Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.” In the spring of 2005, we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Cather Foundation. In a celebration of that past, we look forward to the future which, with your help and continued support, will be full of promise and hope.

Mellanee Kvasnicka
President, Cather Foundation Board of Governors

Happy Holidays from the Cather Foundation!

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