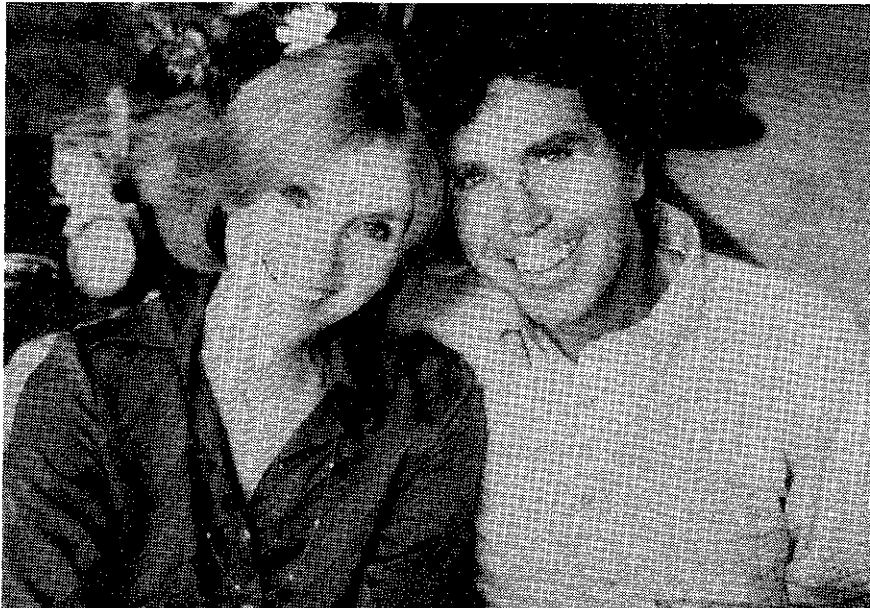


Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXXIV, No. 1

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

Eva Marie Saint and Jeffrey Hayden Featured Artists for 1990 Spring Conference



Academy award winning actress, Eva Marie Saint and her prize winning husband, director Jeffrey Hayden, will highlight the 35th Spring Conference. After the evening banquet, Miss Saint will read a few selections from *O Pioneers!*. Mr. Hayden will address how a narrative novel like *O Pioneers!* can be taken with integrity to the screen.

Miss Saint, the versatile star of stage, screen and television, won the academy award for *On The Waterfront*. In 1986 she received the Drama-Logue Magazine's "Outstanding Actress" award for her role as "Georgie" in the theatre production of *In the Country* which was directed by her husband. A few of the fifteen movies in which she performs starring roles are *That Certain Feeling*, *Raintree County*, *A Hatful of Rain*, *North*

by Northwest, *Exodus*, and *The Sandpiper*. Miss Saint received three Emmy nominations for *Our Town*, *How the West was Won*, and *Taxi*. In 1986-87, Miss Saint appeared as Maddie's mother in television's *Moonlighting*.

Mr. Hayden's list of credits is equally impressive. He has been a director since 1950. Some of his episodic television includes *In the Heat of the Night*, *Cagney and Lacy*, *Magnum P.I.*, *From Here to Eternity*, *Courtship of Eddie's Father*, *Peyton Place*, *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *Lassie*. At Kennedy Center he directed Williams' *Summer and Smoke* and O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*. In Boston he directed Shaw's *Candida*. He has directed summer stock and other theatrical plays from California to New York.

Special for 35th Annual Spring Conference

The Red Cloud horsedrawn street car will be available for rides to the Episcopal and Catholic churches for the Saturday services, May 5. It will also run to and from the Burlington Depot from 1:00-6:00 p.m., where the photographic exhibit *Midwestern Farm Women: A Century on the Land* hangs.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Ph.D. candidate, Julie Cochran, will read Willa Cather's 1890 graduation speech, "Superstition vs. Investigation." This precedes the afternoon panel discussion of *O Pioneers!*. Willa Cather graduated from Red Cloud High School June 6, 1890.

Sunday, May 6

8:00 a.m.

Memorial Mass for Mildred Bennett at Grace Episcopal Church, 6th and Cedar. Father Theron Hughes officiating.

1:00-5:00 p.m.

Quilt Show at Webster County Historical Museum, 4th and Franklin. Features quilts made within the last twenty-five years. This is part of their 25th anniversary celebration.

**Call for Papers . . .
1990 Literary Edition**

See inside article!

Needed: Volunteers to Paint

Antonia's farm home will be scraped, primed and painted on Saturdays, April 21 and April 28. We ask for your help. Please call or write the Foundation office (402-746-2653) and let us know which Saturday you are available. Bring a paintbrush and/or a scraper. The Nebraska State Historical Society will furnish the primer and paint; the Willa Cather Foundation will provide lunch and refreshment breaks.

This is a continuation of the project begun in 1988 to restore the Pavelka Farm home to its 1916, pre-electric state.

Call for Papers

The WCPM *Newsletter* issues a call for papers for the October, 1990 literary edition. Papers on *O Pioneers!*, the topic of the 1990 Spring Conference, are especially welcome, but papers on other novels or subjects will be given equal consideration. The *Newsletter* particularly encourages the work of beginning Cather scholars.

Papers must be post-marked by June 15, 1990 and sent to: Professor Ronald Butler, Editor, Owensboro Community College, 4800 New Hartford, Road, Owensboro, KY 42303.

Cather Prairie Burns

In the spring of each year one half of the Cather Prairie, 5½ miles south of Red Cloud, is burned as a means of weed and thatch control. In 1989, conditions were never right for the controlled burn.

Late afternoon on an extremely dry, blustery day in October,

(Continued on page 3)

35th Annual Cather Spring Conference

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 1990

8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.

Registration, coffee and Kolache — Cather Foundation
Art Gallery and Bookstore, 326 North Webster

8:30 a.m.

Mass — Grace Episcopal Church, 6th and Cedar
Father Theron Hughes, officiating

9:45 a.m.

Mass — St. Juliana Catholic Church, 3rd Avenue and South Walnut
Father Frank Leiblinger, officiating

10:30 a.m.

O Pioneers! Country Tour — Tour departs from
Bennett Building, 3rd Avenue and Webster Streets

1:00 p.m.

Lunch — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar

2:30 p.m.

"Superstition vs. Investigation"
Willa Cather's 1890 Graduation Speech — Julie Cochran

2:45-4:30 p.m.

"The Passing Show" — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar
Panel Discussion, *O Pioneers!* — Bruce P. Baker, Moderator

4:30-6:00 p.m.

Photographic Exhibit
"Midwestern Farm Women: A Century on the Land"
Refreshments at Depot (4:30-5:30)
Courtesy of Catherland Federated Women's Club

7:00 p.m.

Banquet — Eva Marie Saint and Jeffrey Hayden, Guest Speakers
High School Gymnasium, 7th and Webster

★ ★ ★

Wine and Cheese Party

Immediately following the Banquet — Red Cloud Country Club
2 miles east of Red Cloud, Hwy. 136, and ½ mile north

Open House — Burlington Depot, 1:00-6:00 p.m.

"Midwestern Farm Women: A Century on the Land"
Please Note: This exhibit *will* be open during the panel discussion.

★ ★ ★

Cather Buildings are opened courtesy of
The Cather Historical Center, Nebraska State Historical Society,
John Lindahl, curator.

Depot Exhibit

Midwestern Farm Women: A Century on the Land, a photographic essay, fits neatly with the conference theme novel *O Pioneers!*. The exhibit celebrates the lives of rural women and offers a permanent documentary record of women's central contributions to rural life.

The exhibit, developed by Terry Kuhn, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, is comprised of seventy photographs in eighteen thematic groupings, each of which reflects both the historical progression and continuity in farm women's lives. Because of its size, it will hang in both the Foundation's Art Gallery/Bookstore and at the Burlington Depot.

The show has been at Northern Illinois University and Naper Settlement, Naperville, Illinois. After its tour in Red Cloud, the exhibit moves to Bishop Hill, Illinois (May 1991-March 1992) and Galena, Illinois (May 1992-March 1993).

Prairie Burns (Continued)

nature took care of the burn. A fire, probably sparked by a catalytic converter, spread rapidly over two thirds of the 610 acre Cather prairie. One hundred twenty fire fighters from eight towns responded to the call for help. The grassland burned for nearly six hours charring 800-1000 acres coming to within three miles of Red Cloud.

Once evening set on and danger to farm homes and buildings diminished, one could admit that from the circle at the top of the prairie, this was a stunning sight. The embers of the fence posts looked like lanterns strewn across the prairie, and the big red and orange fireball on the horizon was breathtaking.

The prairie, its vast blackness haunting, soon will be green.

Scouts Give Childhood Home a Facelift

You'll have a surprise when you see the "new" Cather Childhood home.



Photo Courtesy of Hastings Tribune
Patti DeJonge, Photographer

Two senior Girl Scouts, Jennifer Phillips and Marlene Nikodym, scraped, primed and painted the house in a four month period beginning in July. The undertaking fulfilled the service project requirement for the Girl Scout Gold Star Award. Both girls are juniors at Red Cloud High School. The project was monitored by their leader, Miriam Nikodym, and Cather Historical Center Curator, John Lindahl.

The house, no longer the familiar white with green trim, boldly wears its new (old) color of cottonwood (a brownish pink) with shagbark (a grayish brown) trim. To determine the color of the house when Cathers lived there, paint samples were taken all the way down to the clapboard siding by the Nebraska State Historical Society and were sent to Frank Welsch, a widely known architectural paint consultant at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania for analysis. The Historical Society supplied the primer, paint and equipment.

On November 18, the girls planned and gave tours through

the home to 150 area Girl Scouts. With the help of their leader and others in the troop, the visiting scouts were entertained and fed once they had been on tour.

We are proud of what these young people accomplished and admire their determination and abilities. Both Institutions, the Cather Historical Center, and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, are grateful for their effort and contribution.

Rev. Morris E. Cather, Jr., cousin of Willa Cather, died December 30, 1989 in Waynesboro, Virginia. Rev. Cather was steeped in the Virginia Cather lore and genealogy. He was instrumental in the State of Virginia's placement of a sign at Willa Cather's birthplace. At the time of his death, he served as pastor of the Hebron Baptist Church in Gore, the church to which the Charles Cathers belonged before moving to Nebraska. He was appreciated, and he will be missed.

News...

Forty-five students from the Los Angeles Unified School District's Amnesty Preparation Program visited Catherland last August as part of an educational trip across the country. The group of adults (US in a Bus) are studying to become American citizens. Other significant points of interest were the Grand Canyon; Garden of the Gods; Hastings (NE) Museum; Hannibal, Missouri; Abraham Lincoln's home in Springfield, Illinois; Gettysburg; and Washington D.C.

Review of *My Ántonia: The Road Home* by John J. Murphy

Mellanee Kvasnicka
Omaha South High School

John J. Murphy's *My Ántonia: The Road Home* provides for scholars and general readers alike a comprehensive analysis of Cather's sometimes perplexing, always intriguing masterwork. Murphy's straightforward style makes reading the book, as its title suggests, a satisfying journey.

Included in Murphy's work are sections dealing with historical context, the novel's artistic importance, and a survey of the novel's critical reviews. At the heart of Murphy's book are the sections dealing with the raw material of the book, the aesthetic sensibilities through which Cather distilled those raw materials, textual commentary, and a summary of "new directions."

Among the "raw materials" are Cather's friendships with Annie Sadilek Pavelka and Isabelle McClung, the latter's marriage in 1916 to violinist Jan Hambourg, and her rebellion against "maternal discipline and the town's narrow-mindedness."

Perhaps the most useful comments are those dealing with the influence of Cather's education upon the novel. Murphy's study cites three "filters" through which Cather's personal memories distilled: the Bible, Virgil's *Georgics*, and painting.

Murphy's comments on the specific text suggest how Cather's aesthetic influences work with her experiences in terms of structure and symbol. The discussion of Book III, especially the introduction of Dumas's play *La Dame aux Camélias*, illustrates the significance of seemingly unrelated incidents. Much of the Dumas play relates to Jim and Lena in terms of plot, but more significantly, the section illustrates Jim's inclination to

"make over reality for his convenience and to transfer his emotions from life to art," to see the aging actress as dazzling. This sets the stage for the final book when he makes Ántonia "a battered woman now," into someone who "fires the imagination."

"New Directions" includes comments regarding the importance of Cather's separation of herself from her narrator, Jim's romantic sensibility, and his need to filter the reality of that past, becoming clear in his arrangement of the book's incidents in the tradition of painting and classical literature. Murphy sees the final sentence as crucial, especially the first four words: "Whatever we had missed . . ." The book concerns itself with how Jim "reconciles himself to it by filling the emptiness with something else."

Murphy quotes poet Wallace Stevens speaking about Cather "We have nothing better than what she is. She takes so much pain to conceal her sophistication that it is easy to miss her quality." John J. Murphy's book illuminates that sophistication and for those who study and admire *My Ántonia*, reading that book is indeed like going home.

Approaches to Teaching Cather's My Ántonia, the twenty-second volume in the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series, offers a review of background studies, critical works on Cather, and teaching aids. In twenty-five essays, teachers describe their varied approaches to the novel.

The first part of the volume reviews sources that teachers have found especially good on American literature, plains literature, Cather and *My Ántonia*.

In the second part of the book, instructors explain ways in which they use their scholarships, criticism, and other ex-

perience in the classroom. Their diverse approaches focus on traditional literature surveys, specialized courses on women's studies, plains literature, American studies, and composition classes.

Approaches to Teaching Cather's My Ántonia edited by Susan J. Rosowski; xii and 194 pages; available in paper, \$17.50 or cloth, \$32.00, from the Cather Bookstore.

Hours of Operation May 5

Foundation Art Gallery/
Bookstore
8:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
4:30-5:30 p.m.

Cather Historical Center
Museum
8:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Cather Childhood Home
9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
4:30-5:30 p.m.

Grace Episcopal Church
1:00-2:30 p.m.

St. Juliana Catholic Church
1:00-2:30 p.m.

Burlington Depot
1:00-6:00 p.m.

A Review . . .

Excerpted from a review by Zoe Akins from *Reedy's Mirror*, St. Louis, Friday, December 11, 1914. From the Cather family collection, Willa Cather Historical Center.

O Pioneers!
by Zoe Akins

This novel was written by Willa Sibert Cather and published by the Houghton Mifflin Company more than a year ago.

It is a very moving, slowly-told tale of a woman's slow success. By this I do not mean that one

(Continued on next page)

line of it grows tedious or that it is too long, for it is almost too brief and one feels at the end that, while the most significant events of Alexandra Bergson's life have been told, much more of lesser importance might have been included without any relaxation of the interest that stirs the reader from the very beginning of the book

Almost immediately we are there, with Alexandra Bergson, the pioneer daughter of pioneer parents, in the little, gray, wind-swept town of Hanover, that is "trying not to be blown away" from its insecure moorings on a Nebraska plain. She has come to town to do some trading, and has brought her little brother Emil, who in turn has brought his kitten. The kitten runs away and climbs a telegraph pole. Alexandra's friend, Carl Linstrum, a boy younger than herself, but curiously in sympathy with her, rescues the kitten and goes with the little boy and his sister into the village store, where all three see for the first time the child Marie Tovesky — already a vivid personality and startlingly engaging — in the arms of her Uncle Joe.

Then Carl and Alexandra and the sleepy Emil, hugging his kitten, drive together in the growing darkness as far as the Linstrum's, where Carl leaves them and Alexandra goes on home

O Pioneers! is not something put in a room — and kept there. It is not a little play formed for a little stage. It is the panorama of a great plain — with the figure of a woman against the sky, and lesser figures halting her, appealing to her, or leaning upon her. Always she moves forward, sowing the seeds of progress, turning into the soil the qualities of her own courage, her honesty, her intelligence, her unconscious wistfulness — making that wild land a part of herself and herself a part of the land. Such a story could not be conveyed without sincerity and

sympathy and a deep feeling for its poetry.

The history of Alexandra (sic) Bergson is as simple and yet as stirring as the history of the great farm-country of Nebraska. As a child she came with her father and mother from Sweden to America. There is just a glimpse of the father before his death. We see John Bergson as a man who is very tired after his years of struggle with the wild land: yet he dies with his belief in its future unshaken, and with a consoling belief in his daughter's ability to win from it an eventual success of dignity and comfort. To her he intrusts it as the inheritance of herself and her two brothers, Oscar and Lou. Both John Bergson and his simple minded wife are superior people in that they are industrious, honest, intelligent and more fastidious than their emigrant neighbors in their living, and in maintaining traditions of thrift and order and family courtesy

After her father's death, Alexandra directs the affairs of the farm with such vision and care that the Bergsons get considerably ahead. Then come the lean years, when many of the neighbors sell out and move away. Lou and Oscar are among those discouraged by three seasons of repeated drouth and failure. They are tired of it all — and want to sell their land and go where things are easier. Alexandra, however, has almost a prophetic insight into the future, and insists upon raising all the money possible and buying more and more land. Her attitude at this crisis is fine and strong, with something so infinitely more noble and thoughtful than the mere gambling instinct of speculation, that even her unimaginative and low-spirited brothers are touched by her purpose: with heavy hearts they agree to mortgage the homestead — and Alexandra, "feeling the future stirring," buys the deserted farms of men

who have failed and so begins to build the fortunes — and beyond them — that John Bergson came to America to find for his children.

And to Alexandra what do the years bring, beyond success? A great tragedy — when Emil, her "little brother," soon after his graduation from the State University, is shot with a neighbor's wife — she who was the little Bohemian girl, Marie, the child of such extraordinary attraction that we first saw in the country store the day that Emil went with his sister to town — and lost his kitten. Undoubtedly this love tragedy, culminating in the fourth book called "Under the Mulberry Tree," (sic) is one of the most beautiful bits of American literature. I know of nothing quite like it, in its mournfulness, its inevitableness, and its very purity. It makes one dream beyond those constantly occurring news items of remote tragedies in remote villages. There seem so many of them — so many faithless wives and avenging husbands! Well, the story of Emil Bergson and Marie Shabata may or may not be like them, in more than the outward circumstances; but back of their tragedy, and more somber, was the tragedy of the tragedy to Alexandra — the shadow of the shadow that fell on her.

Then, more than ever in her life, Alexandra needs some one to help her — and she turns to Carl Linstrum, who, as a boy younger than herself, was her only friend and who helped her then in "the only way that any one ever helps anybody else." — by understanding things. So the novel ends, very quietly.

Alexandra's history was not of the kind that was meant to stop, sheer, on a climax. Nor was it one of the many incidents — the sort that subsequent volumes can employ, indefinitely. It was the slow, day-by-day record of life that had the splendid satisfaction of expressing itself best in its routine of-duty to a trust.

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial
326 North Webster Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970



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- Newsletter subscription
- Free guided tour to restored buildings

- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

ALL MEMBERSHIPS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND REQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1965

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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It was not a life of intimacies

. . . Without Miss Cather's insight, Alexandra's story would not have been found; without her eloquence of feeling and decisive technique it could not have been told

Norma Ross Walter Scholarship

Ninety-one applications were received for the fourth competition of the NRWS. Winner of the

\$8,000 award will be announced at the 35th Annual Spring Conference on May 5. Previous winners and the colleges they attend are Karen Hartmann, University of Michigan (1987); Kristin Guild, Carleton College (1988); and Lynn Lu, Harvard University (1989).

Upon her death, Norma Ross Walter of Camp Meeker, California, left a bequest of just over \$100,000 to the WCPM to establish a scholarship fund. Instructions in her will were specific. She wanted the scholarship to be awarded to female graduates

of Nebraska high schools whose plans are to major in English.

The academic school year 1990-1991 will mark the completion of the first cycle of the scholarship program, with four outstanding Nebraska girls attending the college or university of her choice.

**1990 Spring Conference Theme Novel
O Pioneers!**