

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

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Editor, Mildred R. Bennett

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

WILLA CATHER TODAY: The 2nd National Seminar

The second Cather seminar met June 19 to 25 in Hastings and Red Cloud. Ninety-six participants took part in the week's intensive study of Cather. Some wanted undergraduate credit, or graduate credit, and some just wanted to learn more about Willa Cather. The following experts spoke and conducted round table discussions: Marilyn Arnold, Professor of English at Brigham Young University and editor of the journal, *Literature and Belief*, wrote her dissertation on Willa Cather, "Self-Division and Self-Unity in the Novels of Willa Cather" (1968). Mildred R. Bennett, Founder, Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial spoke on "Willa Cather's Walks"; L. Brent Bohlke, English Department of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, wrote his dissertation, "Seeking is Finding," on Willa Cather and religion. James E. Miller, Jr., Professor of English and Chairman of the Department, University of Chicago, has written a number of essays on Willa Cather. John J. Murphy, Associate Professor of English, Merrimack College, Massachusetts, has published widely on Cather. Mona Pers is Chair of the English Department at the University College of Västerås, affiliated with Uppsala University, Sweden. Her interest in Willa Cather resulted in her dissertation, "Willa Cather's Children." Susan J. Rosowski, Associate Professor of English, chairs Cather Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Lucia Woods, photographer, was drawn to the Cather world through family connections in Nebraska. Patricia Lee Yongue, Associate Professor of English at the University of Houston will teach in London next year.

Co-directors and organizers of the 1983 Cather Seminar were Susan J. Rosowski, English Department of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Viola S. Borton, executive director of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation. The WCPM & EF gave ten travel stipends at \$100.00 each and fourteen tuition scholarships in the amount of \$1,754.50.

In reviewing the 1983 national seminar of June 19 to 25, let us read from a few participants who wrote us:

"I wanted to write to thank you in general for the excellent seminar this summer and in particular for the travel grant. About a month before the seminar began, the dean here informed me that there would be no money for my travel. The arrival of your letter shortly after encouraged me to continue with my plans to attend. I am most glad I did. That late afternoon we sat in the shade of the bus listening to the larks and upland plovers is a nice memory." Tom Scanlon, Associate Professor Department of Rhetoric, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, St. Paul, Minnesota.

"A quick note to thank you for all your work and for going so much out of your way to make my week relaxing and refreshing. It was so good to renew friendships, visit the land and discuss Cather's artistry with other like-minded folks." Cynthia Briggs, High School English Teacher, Cincinnati, Ohio.

"Hope you were able to take a bit of a rest after the Seminar. You are, you know, the glue that holds it all together. Your work, attention to detail, and dedication did not go unnoticed among the participants. It was a fine week and I'm glad I was part of it." Virgil Albertini, Pro-

fessor of English at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri.

Harold White from Massachusetts rode Amtrak to Hastings and had a two-hour stop in Chicago where his sons came to the station to see him. When Harold was getting on the train, his sons presented him with a first edition of *Sapphira*.

"I've wanted to drop you a note for weeks now to say how much I appreciated all the *hard* work you put into the Cather Seminar. I know from experience that it is only by hard work, headaches and frustrations that such things can be made to look so smooth and easy. You

1984 MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew your membership with the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

The year 1983 was most successful. With your financial support we awarded fourteen tuition scholarships in the amount of \$1,754.50 for the Second National Seminar. We also provided ten travel stipends at \$100.00 each. We assisted Kearney College with team-teaching fees for the Prairie Workshop in July.

We count on your generosity to further and expand these valuable educational projects. Thanks to those of you who have already renewed your membership for 1984.

— Viola S. Borton
President

and the others did a marvelous job. Thank you.

"While home [Massachusetts] I'm running all over New England to read Cather letters and gather ideas for my paper. Everything looks so good to me." Deborah Leonard-Lethbridge, Professor of English, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

"Thank you for the splendid seminar. Thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. Thank you also for sending copies of the interview and the letter which is just the kind my 'boss' will love! I immediately made him copies of it and clippings to 'prove' that his investment in me was a sound one!" Mona Pers, Chairman, English Department at the University College of Västerås, affiliated with Uppsala University, Sweden.

"Can I trade you a Texas story for a Willa Cather story? I just happened by a bookstore yesterday — I never usually go near those places — and couldn't resist picking this up for you. Many thanks, once again, for your help and cheer and encouragement." Patricia Yongue, Associate Professor of English at the University of Houston.

"Thanks so much for such a well planned and organized seminar on Willa Cather. I know I'll continue to enjoy all I learned and have a much greater appreciation for Cather's work." Frances Cater, Humanities and English Instructor, Kodiak Community College, Kodiak, Alaska.

"Although the trip has been a delight, we think about and talk about our week in Hastings as the highlight. Brief as it was, our time with you was especially rewarding." Barbara Bilson, Professor of English, Santa Monica College, Santa Monica, California.

"Cather conference was terrific." Hank Chapin, Associate Professor of English, West Oahu College, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii.

"Thanks again for a terrific Willa Cather Conference," Diana Wendt, English Instructor, Univer-

sity of Nebraska-Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska.

"The Willa Cather Seminar was a great — if exhausting experience — and I can't help but think that you had a lot to do with it running so smoothly.

"If you ever need some volunteer labor for a week or so in the summer, let me know. I'm equally deadily with either typewriter or paint brush in hand." Audrey M. Smith, English Instructor, Platts-mouth High School, Platts-mouth, Nebraska.

"It's difficult for me to find words to express my gratitude to you for my experience in Catherland. I knew that I would be touched by the experience of being there — I did not foresee that it would be almost a 'religious' experience for me — which it was. I did not foresee also the wonderful people I would meet and share that time with. It was an added dimension I didn't anticipate — a group of some of the loveliest people I have ever met. When I reread Cather now, I can see and feel the land and places and also the people." (Name withheld.)

"I have come back to Red Cloud to talk to the local people. What fun! I shall try to do a 'spinky' travel story and send a copy to you. The entire week has been wonderful — warm, generous, fun." Dr. Pepper Worthington, Department of English, Mount Olive College, Mount Olive, North Carolina.

"The Seminar was absolutely marvelous and one reason is your part in it before and during the week. Thank you. Your enthusiasm is delightful and added much, not to mention your knowledge." Evelyn Dorr, Crete, Nebraska.

"Just a note to say that the check arrived safely. Thank you so much for your generosity and your kind words. I have decided to use it to pay researchers in foreign countries to track down Cather criticism and translate it for me. I have to do that for the current book I'm work-

ing on. So, as it turns out, you folks are helping me significantly with that project after all.

"Aside from the official business, let me say a very personal thanks. You and the Red Cloud crew were just terrific. And the seminar was wonderful." Marilyn Arnold, English Department, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

"The seminar exceeded even my expectations. It was one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences I have ever had. In addition, everything from the people involved to the food and accommodations was great! I came home wanting to do nothing but to continue my work. I hope I will be able to repay you some day by producing something worthwhile in the area of Cather studies." Barbara Jo Hood, Teaching Assistant, Graduate Student, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

CATHER CONFERENCE 1983

By Herb Hyde

People from three nations with disparate philosophies of government laid politics aside the other week in Red Cloud to exchange ideas and build personal friendships. It was a quiet but historic moment.

Historic? Yes, even though it may be little noted except by the people who were there. It was historic because a young man from the Republic of China, two women of the People's Republic of China and a group of Americans with ethnic backgrounds as diverse as prairie wildflowers were able to relate to one another and communicate through universal feelings. Drawing them together were the writings of Willa Cather.

"What is the connection between Willa Cather and China?" a participant in the 28th Annual Spring Conference asked me. "The land and its people," I re-

plied. "The only difference between the people in Cather's works and the people of China is the language. And the same can be said of Japan or Denmark or Czechoslovakia or any other country where readers of Cather's works have identified with the universality of her themes."

Deju vu! At the afternoon panel discussion of "Cather and China," Tzu-An Tsu, a student at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, said virtually the same thing when he spoke of the American frontier spirit, which, he said, he will use when he returns to Taiwan. Cather scholar Lo-Chi Chang of Shanghai repeated the thought in her essay "Willa Cather and China," which she wrote especially for the conference and which Cather biographer Mildred Bennett read to us. Ching (Jean) Tsien, a professor at the Peking Foreign Language Institute, confirmed Tsu and the Chang essay and told us the central character in Cather's "Neighbor Rosicky" is an identifiable type in China.

The warmth of familiarity pervaded both the discussion and private conversations later. Literally and figuratively, the Chinese extended the hand of friendship and told us: "We want to emulate you because you have done in 200 years what we have been unable to accomplish in many centuries. Please help us." Would that U.S. politicians and diplomats could understand this simple yet eloquent plea and react in kind.

I'm out of synch, as they say. All this was *post meridiem*; I have not begun at the beginning.

Dawn seemed reluctant to make an appearance, perhaps because of the gloom cast by May 7's gray skies. The previous afternoon and the night that followed had been violent, with rain, hail, wind and funnel clouds pouring indiscriminately out of a storm system that spanned southern Nebraska from east to west as it moved rapidly northward. It washed out country

roads and the Catherland tour that had been scheduled for 10:30; the itinerary would have taken us to three Cather family farmsteads, Dane Church, the farmstead of Anna Pavelka (Ántonia), Catheron Cemetery and other Cather-related sites.

A small flock of wild canaries burst like brilliant yellow flashbulbs in front of the car. They had flitted in from my left, and now they disappeared instantly into some trees next to a house on my right. That was Red Cloud's greeting.

When we learned that the Catherland tour had been canceled, we retired to Vets' Hall for two films: *Jack-a-Boy*, based on a 1901 Cather story of the same title, and *A Publisher is Known by the Company He Keeps*, Alfred Knopf's movies of authors whose works he published. The film contains the only known motion-picture footage of Willa Cather.

Hostess Vi Borton turned on the sun at noon. That brightened everyone's outlook and took some of the chill from the north wind's gust. I have mentioned the panel discussion, which NMSU English professor Virgil Albertini moderated, but I have not mentioned the color slides shown by Sharon Browning, professor of marketing at NMSU, who studied China's agribusiness needs in 1981 and returned there May 15 for a three-week working visit. The slides and Professor Browning's explanation afforded us a minicourse on modern China.

The wind died just before the annual banquet started. Whether it was from exhaustion or because Vi Borton finally found the off switch I do not know, but to my way of thinking it was well past time. Robert Harwick of the Hastings College English department was master of ceremonies, and Zheng-Ying (Grace) Cheng, who teaches and studies at UNL, played Chinese classical music on the piano, performed a sword dance and demonstrated martial exercises that have been popular since the Ming Dynasty.

Jean Tsien divided her address on "British and American Literature in China" into two historical periods: 1625-1949 and 1949-1983. The earliest date marks the first translation of an English-language work into Chinese (*Aesop's Fables*, translated by a missionary), the latest a new surge of translations in which Cather works figure prominently. In between were multiyear gaps when nothing was translated and periods when only sporadic efforts were made to bring more works to China's literature. The translation surge has brought with it renewed interest in Willa Cather. Why else would more than 200 students sign up for Jean Tsien's course on "Neighbor Rosicky"?

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PRAIRIE WORKSHOP

Kearney State College and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation co-sponsored the Prairie Workshop July 11 to 15 in Red Cloud.

Dr. Helen Stauffer, English Department, and Dr. Harold Nagel, Biology Department, of Kearney State College made up the teaching team. This course, designed to be helpful in integrating science and the humanities proved a useful project in expanding and improving teachers' abilities.

The course examined our prairie vegetation and animals, and discovered their use by native Americans and early immigrant settlers. The prairie literature assignments used Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and *Obscure Destinies* and Mari Sandoz's *Crazy Horse* and *Old Jules*.

Thirty students from all over Nebraska took this intensive multidisciplinary three-hour graduate or undergraduate credit course.

In conjunction with the team teachers five other specialists participated. Bill and Jan Whitney, co-directors of the Prairie Plains Resource Institute, Aurora, assisted

with discussions and a prairie tour. Kay Young, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Great Plains Studies, showed how Indians and early settlers used prairie plants for medicine and nourishment. Dave Murphy, Preservation Architect, Nebraska State Historical Society, informed the participants through slides and lecture of early architecture in Red Cloud. John Carter, Curator of Photography, Nebraska State Historical Society, presented a program on Plains Photography. Ann Billesbach, Curator, Cather Historical Center, and Vi Borton programmed, gave Cather tours

and handled most of the logistics of the week.

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation was proud to pay the fee of one of the professors.

The need for this very kind of credit workshop grows far greater than we originally realized. Due to limited enrollment we had to reject more applications than those we accepted.

At the course's conclusion, each participant gave a comprehensive course evaluation. As a result of these evaluations, instructors and staff consider more such

workshops not only important but mandatory.

On June 5, 1983, Mildred R. Bennett received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, the only Seventh Day Adventist educational institution qualified to give Honorary Doctorates.

The thrust toward international understanding, promoted by the Cather Memorial, has its impetus in the world consciousness promoted by Mrs. Bennett's 16 years of education in the Seventh Day Adventist schools.

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

- By being a Cather Memorial Member and financial contributor:

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WCPM members receive:

- 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 BEQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1965

Special group memberships (such as clubs or businesses) are available. Write to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for details.

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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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

326 North Webster Red Cloud, Nebraska 68070

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