

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXVI, No. 4

Editor, Mildred R. Bennett

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## WILLA CATHER WEEK AT UNION COLLEGE

In the *Not Under Forty* essay "148 Charles Street" Willa Cather says: "At 148 Charles Street an American of the Apache period and territory could come to inherit a Colonial past." For the past year, I have been repeating Cather's experience — in reverse.

I became a fan of Cather's work as a born and bred New Englander, long before I had any idea that I might someday teach in Nebraska. Cather evoked a region and made alive a way of life with which I had no experience. My astonishment could not have been more complete, when, about a year after I began reading Cather, I found the picture of her grave in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, in the *Woods-Slote Pictorial Memoir* which had just been published. I had been through Jaffrey hundreds of times on the way to next-door Dublin where my grandparents lived. I could not imagine a less likely place than that small cemetery behind the white Meetinghouse with a view of Mount Monadnock for Willa Cather to have been buried.

When I came to teach at Union College in Lincoln, I honestly expected all my midwestern students to be familiar with their region's most important writer. I found that the students who were familiar with her works or even just her name, were a small minority. What is the adage about taking for granted what's in one's own backyard? It seemed a serious omission in the education of a student that he could be a midwesterner, attend college in the center of "Cather Country" and still be ignorant of her work.

We formulated the idea for a Cather Week at Union College last spring when Mildred Bennett, a graduate celebrating a 50th anniversary, visited campus for Alumni Weekend. Ruthita Fike, Assistant to the President, and I approached Mrs. Bennett with the idea that the College as a whole might focus its attention for a week on Willa Cather and her work. When we asked whether she would be willing to participate, she replied with immediate enthusiasm that she would do anything she could.

When a leading Cather specialist, who also happens to be an Alumna, is so willing to be taken advantage of, one jumps at the chance. We did.

Mrs. Bennett spent most of the week of September 26-October 3 on campus and visited numerous classes, discussing Cather and her work as well as answering student and faculty questions. She was interviewed at the Union College radio station, KUCV-FM, and the interview was aired in segments throughout Cather Week. But everyone agrees that the highlight of Mrs. Bennett's stay was her Assembly address. Her blend of insight, interesting anecdotes and sense of fun made her presentation a treat for students and faculty as well as for distinguished guests from the University of Nebraska and the Capitol.

Dr. Everett Dick, frontier historian and former professor of history at Union College, presented an evening of Nebraska/frontier stories. English and Drama classes saw several films on Cather and her work.

Visitors and students enjoyed photograph exhibitions during Ca-

ther Week. One, entitled "Willa Cather's Prairie," a collection of twenty-seven color prints, came from Hal Nagel, Professor of Biology at Kearney State College. Nagel's photographs were accompanied by quotations from Cather's works, done in calligraphy by Arthur Pierce.

The other collection, the work of former LIFE photographer David E. Scherman showed thirty-one black and white pictures which appeared in the March 19, 1951 issue of LIFE

## 1983 MEMBERSHIP

With annual membership donations due again, we encourage you to renew your financial pledge to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

We have been most successful this past year in reaching out to students and scholars. We have enjoyed worldwide publicity and have hosted thousands of people.

Next year promises continued growth in scholarship and increased awareness of Cather's Art. We are hard at work planning the 2nd National Seminar on "Willa Cather Today" which is set for June 19-25, 1983.

We appreciate your assistance in the past and look forward to your continuing financial aid.

Our thanks to those of you who have already paid your 1983 memberships.

Viola S. Borton  
President

as part of a feature article on Willa Cather. The majority capture scenes familiar to readers of *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* and were taken during four trips to Red Cloud — spring, summer, fall and winter. Trips to Santa Fe and Quebec produced the photographs related to *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*.

Mr. Scherman had just donated these photographs to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Mrs. Bennett and the Board of Governors very generously arranged for their premiere showing to be part of Union's Cather Week. These photographs will later be on display at the WCPM.

At the end of our Cather Week, faculty members from the Divisions of Humanities and of Music presented a Vespers service combining readings from several of Cather's novels with music selected to complement the words.

The final event of the Week, a field trip to Red Cloud, took a busload of Union College students to tour the WCPM Art Gallery and Bookstore, the Cather Historical Center Museum, Cather's childhood home and Catherland.

In all fairness, I suppose I should not have been so surprised that my midwestern students didn't know Willa Cather. Hadn't I arrived from New England without any slides of Concord and Boston to show my classes? I had never gotten around to taking pictures of these places when I could take my students to see them first hand!

We think Cather Week did a great deal to make our students aware of Willa Cather and the things she wrote about. And judging by the comments students have been making, we inspired some to read Cather.

— Deborah Leonard-Lethbridge

*Deborah Leonard-Lethbridge comes from Lancaster, Massachusetts. She now teaches English at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

## WLA MEETS IN DENVER

Mildred R. Bennett, Chairman of the Board and Viola Borton, President of WCPM attended the meeting of Western American Literature in Denver this October 6-9. Two complete sessions discussed Willa Cather and her works. Participants came away with new ideas for more articles on Cather.

Ron Butler, who teaches English at Henderson Community College in Kentucky, asked about Cather's use of the name "Claude Melnotte" in *One of Ours*, page 60, regular edition. Madame Schroeder-Schatz tells Mrs. Erlich that it is a pity she hasn't a daughter to marry Claude Melnotte.

Cather scholars know that such a reference does not mean careless, or incompetent work on the part of the author. Therefore, although the question has not arisen before, we tracked the answer down. *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, published 1948 by Thomas Y. Crowell Company says: "Melnotte, Claude. Hero of Bulwer Lytton's comedy *The Lady of Lyons* (1838). Though only a gardener's son, he plays the role of Prince of Como with such success that he wins the fair Pauline Deschappelles. When she learns the truth she repudiates him, but he wins her back."

John Bergers, the Cather artist, has asked about windows in Cather's writings. Here then, one finds another to illuminate Cather's dream for Claude.

The following are abstracts of papers presented at the Western American Literature meeting:

BRIGGS, Cynthia K. "Sensuality in Willa Cather's *One of Ours* and *The Song of the Lark*." Passion, as expressed through sensuality in characters and in perceptions of landscape, is the element of Cather's fiction that creates the "intangible residuum of pleasure." Cather deftly matches the type of sensual details with the basic nature of her central characters. In *One of Ours* Claude Wheeler's deeper nature is strongly sensual,

but rarely openly expressed. Cather cloaks Claude's smouldering, unfulfilled sensuality in symbol to emphasize its furtive, unchanneled nature. Conversely, Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark* revels in her sensuality. Hers is open, honest, pure passion. While Cather employs in *Song of the Lark*

### "WILLA CATHER TODAY"

#### 2nd National Seminar on Willa Cather June 19-25, 1983

The seminar will bring together distinguished Cather scholars, critics, and students from various parts of North America. Lectures, discussions, panels, films, tours, slide presentations, and exhibits will be used to explore the theme, "Willa Cather Today."

Seminar staff will include James E. Miller, Jr., University of Chicago; Bernice Slote, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Mildred R. Bennett, Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation; Joan St. Clair Crane, University of Virginia; Mona Pers, University of Uppsala, Sweden; John J. Murphy, Merrimack College; Marilyn Arnold, Brigham Young University; Patricia Yongue, University of Houston; Brent Bohlke, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Cooperating participants will include Bruce P. Baker II, Ann Billesbach, John Carter, Robert Harwick, Robert Knoll, Hal Nagel, Lucia Woods and others.

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similar symbols as those in *One of Ours*, the effect is more passionate. Thea wrestles with her secret, sensual self as a child and young woman, but is able to channel her passion. She and Claude are driven by their passionate nature, but Thea succeeds where Claude does not.

BUTLER, Ronald. "Willa Cather's 'Paul's Case': A Masterpiece of Symbolism." Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" presents a sensitive young man's brief life as an aesthete. The strength of this story is not in its plot so much as in Cather's use of imagery and symbolic statement to portray Paul's experience. The story is replete with symbols, intricately interwoven, and coming together as a masterful psychological portrait of a disturbed teenager with unbearable aesthetic sensibilities. Cather used flowers, physical details, the objects of Paul's aversions, sexual imagery, high and low places, and colours as a part of an intricate fabric of symbolism. She chose unerringly the appeals to the senses which would speak most completely to the reader. Consequently, her symbols give the appearance of being felt rather than consciously realized, and each is a part of a thoroughly realized symbolic matrix.

MURPHY, John J. "A Comprehensive View of Cather's *O Pioneers!*" *O Pioneers!* attests to Cather's ability to combine literary traditions and styles successfully. Between heroine Alexandra Bergson's epic taming of the wild land and her final recognition of its eternity, Cather interweaves domestic drama and social satire, stories of friendship, love, and illicit passion, manslaughter and spiritual struggle. Beginning as a story of creation echoing back to Genesis and structured toward a fall in a garden, the novel combines individual and universal concerns and concludes with the theme of life everlasting in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The encompassing character of Alexandra becomes the inte-

grating factor; through it Cather achieves unity despite her novel's dualistic beginnings and consequent lack of a "sharp skeleton."

PETERSON, Carol. "Willa Cather's 'Wilderness of Allusion' in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*." Willa Cather's use of allusion demonstrated her commitment to the ideal of art presented by suggestion rather than specifics. She believed the novelist must recall the feelings and emotions at the depth of his or her experience and consciousness to structure the art. Her own consciousness was shaped by her childhood and adolescent conversations with settlers on the Divide and by her extensive early readings of Scriptures and classics; these were later to emerge from her as folk, mythic, and religious elements. Bernice Slotte describes this as a "wilderness of allusion," which Cather molded unobtrusively into her work. Two of her prairie works, *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, develop multiple strata of allusion, moving the reader from one plane to another and providing a broad spectrum of shared cultural facets.

ROSOWSKI, Susan. "Willa Cather's Female Landscape: *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*." In *The Song of the Lark* and *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather gave major emphasis to the relationship between gender and artistic consciousness. *The Song of the Lark* presents Thea Kronborg's artistic growth in terms of her ability to convert her world into female metaphors. In *Lucy Gayheart* a discrepancy between metaphoric and narrative meanings presents a female artist's entrapment within her "abominable sex consciousness."

Goichi Fukui, who has visited Cather Country, has translated *One of Ours* into Japanese for the benefit of young people. When he could not immediately find a publisher, he decided to print the book at his own expense. Such devotion we find in those who love Cather's work.

## MARI SANDOZ STORY CATCHER OF THE PLAINS

Helen Stauffer's new book on Mari Sandoz must be read by all scholars interested in Western American Literature. She does a thorough research and traces the difficulties and the splendor with which Mari Sandoz faced them all — Mari Sandoz makes a worthy ideal for the hard-working author in the middle west, facing an Eastern establishment which (sometimes) doesn't know nor care about Nebraska.

Order from the WCPM. Costs: paperback, \$10.95; hardback, \$22.50. Postage and handling, add \$1.25.

## IN PURSUIT OF WILLA CATHER By Herb Hyde

It was my pleasure to attend, by gracious invitation from the Union College faculty and administration, Mildred R. Bennett's September 30 convocation lecture on Willa Cather. I hope the students appreciated what they heard as much as I did: an all too brief glimpse into the research life of a scholar in pursuit of a literary quarry. There were lots of brambles on that chase, but there were some lush meadows, too, to make it all worthwhile. Mrs. Bennett, whom I am accustomed to seeing in Red Cloud each year on the first Saturday in May, presented a delightful range of anecdotal material that merely whetted the appetite for more. Her time was gone far too soon.

On the sixth floor of the Everett Dick Building was a double treat: Hal Nagel's full-color wildflower photographs with calligraphy by Art Pierce and former LIFE photographer David E. Scherman's 31-picture Cather exhibit of people and places in Nebraska, New Mexico and Quebec. The Scherman pictures were a gift to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation in Red Cloud,

and the Union showing is their Nebraska premiere. They were published first with a LIFE feature story on March 19, 1951, then in a 1951 book, LITERARY AMERICA, by Rosemarie Redlich Scherman, David's wife. All are excellent, but the one that has very special meaning for me is a sharp, clear, almost three-dimensional portrait of Anna Pavelka, who was Antonia in *My Antonia*. Pure art of prime quality.

Mrs. Bennett is a Union alumna and taught there for a while. Her gift to her alma mater stood on an easel next to the elevator in the Everett Dick Building: a print of John Blake Bergers' *On Lovely Creek*. More pure art of prime quality. How fortunate Union College is to share in the generosity of this warmhearted and gracious Red Cloud scholar!

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## A GREAT PLAINS CENTER TRIBUTE TO WILLA CATHER

— Herb Hyde, *Sunday Journal and Star*, October 31, 1982

The Fall 1982 *Great Plains Quarterly* is devoted to Willa Cather, and boy oh boy is it loaded! There is an introduction by Cather scholar John J. Murphy of Merrimack College, followed by seven essays guaranteed to make you much more aware of the importance of Cather's work, especially in the fabric of American life during her writing career.

Kicking things off is James Woodress' essay "The Uses of Biography: The Case of Willa Cather," in which Woodress examines ways light can be shed on the creative process. Some of the best sources of information, of course, are authors' letters. In Cather's case, her will forbids publication of any and all she wrote, nor can they be quoted directly, although the fair-use clause of the U.S. Constitution permits their employment in

developing the larger body of literary criticism. The biggest problem, however, is twofold: Most of Cather's letters were destroyed, which takes them out of consideration forever, and the extant ones are scattered all over the landscape, which means that since they cannot be published the researcher must go where they are. Sometimes that isn't easy. Or convenient.

There are other roadblocks for the biographer, Woodress notes in his essay, and in Cather's case it is literally impossible to determine how she revised her work until she got it where she wanted it, though we know she did so. There is much to be learned from Woodress about this research puzzle and others, but most important is the enjoyment to be derived from his sharing. There is more than a dollop or two of that.

### *The world and the parish*

If you would know about Willa Cather, you must do two things: visit Red Cloud and hear Mildred R. Bennett lecture. Sometimes it is possible to do both on the same occasion, but do them you must if you want to share in the pure aesthetic pleasure afforded the reader of Cather's writings.

Mildred Bennett is a walking, talking Willa Cather library, and "The Childhood Worlds of Willa Cather" shows you precisely why this is so. Her essay could have been any length because she has that many things — and probably a bunch more — to tell, each quite fascinating in its own way. Those presented here will give you a base from which to pursue others.

The places and people Mrs. Bennett discusses were or are to be found in Red Cloud. Even today when you see folks on the street there you may be struck by the thought that a woman wearing red resembles who your mind's eye tells you might be Marian Forrester from *A Lost Lady*. Isn't that Jim Burden from *My Antonia* over

there? you may think. This doesn't happen all the time, of course, but happen it does. That is when you know that Willa Cather has accomplished her artistic purpose.

If you have walked the streets of Red Cloud, no doubt you will have visited the Cather home and will have seen where Willa directed her playmates in the varied productions she wrote and staged. The huge elm in the front yard stands today; think of what it was *then* and you will be awed. Perhaps your childhood was not quite like Willa's, but surely you shared in the marvels that imagination can create in the young. If you detect this phenomenon in your children or grandchildren, nourish it, for it will serve them — and you — well in this life.

Willa Cather put the people from her Red Cloud parish on the world's stage and let them act their roles. Mrs. Bennett's essay demonstrates this and thus complements Woodress' work by setting up elements and some of the machinery used in the creative process, for we see how Willa's childhood experiences birthed, molded and enhanced her creative power so that when she began to write she had a bottomless well of material from which to draw the elements of her stories.

### *Beyond the parish*

Bernice Slote's "An Exploration of Cather's Early Writing" complements Mrs. Bennett's essay quite well, although you will find it heavier going because of its scholarly bent. Remember now that young Willa was a sponge waiting to soak up all education could offer and that Lincoln and the University of Nebraska were waiting for her and she answered their siren call (there was more to it than this, but you'll have to read *Great Plains Quarterly* and other sources for full details). From this point on, Willa will write, write, write.

As in Mrs. Bennett's there is in Miss Slote's essay a good deal of

material that is highly relevant to the creative process of which Woodress writes. In fact, it should be noted here and now that all of the *Great Plains Quarterly* essays are complementary with one another to some degree and that to obtain maximum benefit and knowledge the reader should peruse all.

Just as Miss Slote's thesis requires much devotion, so, too, do the ideas developed in the last four essays: "O Pioneers!: The Problem of Structure" by Bruce P. Baker II; "Marriage and Friendship in *My Antonia*" by David Stouck; "Murphy's *One of Ours* as American Naturalism;" and "Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: Art Versus the Closing Frontier" by Susan J. Rosowski. As you can see, these pieces pursue widely differing themes and must be read at a leisurely pace if one is to absorb their content. Believe it, there is plenty to absorb!

*Problems, parallels and such*

The structure of *O Pioneers!* always has posed a problem for scholars (general readers, too, for that matter), but if Bruce Baker has not solved it here he has come very, very close. Even if you don't agree with his conclusions you'll have to admit that his certainly is a defensible and logical explanation. Baker is worth his salt. So is Stouck, whose contribution sparkles with fresh insights concerning *Antonía* and Jim Burden and Willa Cather. The key word here is *parallels*, and they are abundant (lo! another facet of the creative process).

Rounding out the *Great Plains Quarterly's* special Cather issue are two analyses best described as incisive and detailed. From the first you get correlation between Cather's writing and the fabric of American life, mentioned earlier, and in the second you will perceive that fabric's shrinking in Cather's writings as the frontier recedes. Both examinations are essential if

one is to understand Cather's work properly, if at all.

No issue of *Great Plains Quarterly* is complete without the book review section, and of course this one is no exception, containing, as it does, reviews of ten books about the West. Incidentally, the seven Cather essays are documented with notes referring to books, articles and other sources of material, and in the latter you will find more than enough supplementary reading to keep you busy. But then that's what happens when you become interested in Willa Cather and her work.

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**GREAT PLAINS QUARTERLY**

The *Great Plains Quarterly* presents: Willa Cather and Nebraska, Fall, 1982, Volume 2, Number 4. The contents cover the texts of the main speakers at the 1981 Cather Seminar:

- Editorial Note . . . . . John J. Murphy
- The Uses of Biography:
  - The Case of Willa Cather . . . . . James Woodress
  - The Childhood Worlds of Willa Cather . . . . . Mildred R. Bennett
  - An Exploration of Cather's Early Writing . . . . . Bernice Slote
  - Marriage and Friendship in *My Antonia* . . . . . David Stouck
  - One of Ours* as American Naturalism . . . . . John J. Murphy
  - O Pioneers!*: The Problem of Structure . . . . . Bruce P. Baker II
  - Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: Art Versus the Closing Frontier . . . . . Susan J. Rosowski

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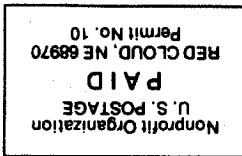
Mildred R. Bennett attended a meeting of the Utile Dulci Club in Atkinson, Nebraska, on October 15. Seventy-five persons, including some high school students listened to Mrs. Bennett's presentation on Willa Cather. Many of those present are now reading or rereading Cather.

On November 21, Mildred R. Bennett and Viola Borton attended a luncheon in North Platte at the Country Club where Mrs. Bennett talked about Cather and the necessity for all Nebraskans to appreciate the heritage Cather has given us. We have already received new memberships from the North Platte area. Host and hostess were Dick and Nancy Arneson. Dick is a Webster County native.

The other evening we were delighted by the visit of a tall, young man whose name was James Cather. Questioning proved him the son of Oscar Cather and grandson of George Cather. Heretofore the portrait of George Cather had emphasized his more worldly points, but his grandson tells us that Grandpa George is a favorite memory among James and his stepsisters, because he always had time to play with the children, and for a hug and a kiss, a child would almost always get five dollars. Other nephews and nieces confirm this aspect of Uncle George's character. James Cather works for the post office in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and will return to visit us again.

Mary Virginia Mellen died August 9, 1982. She was the daughter of Jessica Cather Auld and William Auld and one of Willa Cather's much loved nieces.

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**Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial**



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**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  
A BIBLIOGRAPHY  
By Joan Crane**

This bibliography establishes a canon of authority and accuracy that has long been needed. It includes all editions and printings of Cather's books and periodical pieces to date, every original collection of her writings, works she edited, anthologies, editions for the blind, translations, and productions in other media.

Joan Crane has had the full cooperation of leading Cather scholars and Cather's publishers. Members of the firms have sup-

plied information that illuminates not only the history of publication and bibliographical details but also the books themselves. *Willa Cather: A Bibliography* will be an invaluable reference for students and scholars of American literature and for libraries.

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