

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXV, No. 1

Editor, Mildred R. Bennett

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## Hear Maya Angelou in Person May 2nd in Red Cloud

Tall, stately and handsome, carrying herself with the dignity derived from centuries of proud African heritage, Maya Angelou is the epitome of beautiful serenity. But the serenity actually is just a cloak for a sensitive, intelligent and eloquent woman who speaks lyrically with vigor, wit, fire and perception.

A lady of many talents is Maya Angelou. With just a high school education, she has been a singer, educator, dancer, author, historian, lecturer, actress, producer, editor, song writer and playwright. And she speaks six languages fluently.

Miss Angelou's background is as complex and interesting as the lady herself. Born in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, she spent most of her early childhood with her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, a town one can hardly find on the map. In 1940 she and her family moved to San Francisco where Maya completed her schooling in 1943. Jobs were difficult for a 15 year old girl who had to go to work. Even at this early age she discovered that writing poetry brought relief from the problems of ordinary living. Determined eventually to carve out a stage career, Maya studied dance and drama at night while working a variety of jobs.

In 1952 her career took a significant upturn. She received a scholarship to study dance with Pearl Primus in New York. Returning to San Francisco early in 1954, Miss Angelou made her first professional appearance at the Purple Onion as a singer. She then joined the European touring company of "Porgy and Bess," sponsored by the U.S. State Department. She



sang the role of *Ruby* and was the lead dancer in this production which, during 1954 and 1955 was presented in 22 countries in Europe and Africa. Between times she taught modern dance at the Rome Opera House and conducted classes in modern dance technique in the Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv.

Miss Angelou lived in Africa for a time and became the associate editor of **The Arab Observer** in Cairo, the only English language news

weekly in the Middle East. She also wrote free-lance articles for **The Ghanaian Times** and for the Ghanaian Broadcasting Corp. in Accra and became assistant administrator of the School of Music and Drama in the University of Ghana. She concluded her stay in Africa in 1966 as feature editor of **The African Review** in Accra.

Random House has published six best-sellers by Miss Angelou: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Gather Together In My Name*, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*, (her three autobiographical novels), and three books of poetry: *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie*, and *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*, and *And Still I Rise*. Because of the overwhelming demand for these publications, all six volumes have been reprinted in paperback.

Miss Angelou has made over 100 TV appearances on network

### IN MEMORIAM — FRANK H. WOODS 1905-1980

Frank Woods' parents, Frank and Nelle Cochrane Woods, attended the University of Nebraska with Willa Cather. She wrote the **Journal** account of their marriage.

Therefore, the organization of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial interested Frank Woods from the beginning. Early he became a life member. His interest never diminished, but grew. Through his own gifts and those of the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc., he made possible our progress, growth and survival. From his Chicago office he advised us on all aspects of our work.

One great contribution to Willa Cather's memory is the preservation of the Willa Cather Prairie, a 610 acre area given by the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. to The Nature Conservancy.

Our debt to Frank Woods cannot be accessed. All citizens of the cultural world grieve his loss. We hold his memory in the highest honor and gratitude. Words cannot express our admiration.

and local talk shows which of course include The Tonight Show (Johnny Carson), The Today Show, Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas, Kup's Show, etc., and was also the subject of an hour interview by Bill Moynahan on PBS.

Presently, Miss Angelou is writer-producer for 20th Century Fox TV, for whom her film "Sisters, Sisters," is her initial full-length effort. Her renowned autobiographical accounting of her youth, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" was aired as a two-hour TV special for CBS in April, 1979. Other television accomplishments are the five-part mini series "Three Way Choice" for CBS, for which Miss Angelou is author and executive producer. For PBS she has hosted a study course filmed in thirty half-hour segments, "Humanities Through the Arts" produced at Golden State University and syndicated throughout the country. In 1977 Miss Angelou received the coveted Golden Eagle Award for her documentary, "Afro-American in the Arts" for PBS.

Honors from institutes of higher learning have been heaped upon Miss Angelou, among them the Chubb Fellowship from Yale, doctorates from Mills College, Lawrence University, Columbia College (Chicago), Occidental College, Central State University, Smith College, and she was on the Board of Visitors of Wake Forest University.

Miss Angelou has had articles published in countless national publications including **Cosmopolitan**, **Red Book** and **The New York Times**, etc., and in 1976 she was accorded **The Ladies' Home Journal** award, "Woman of the Year in Communications" which she received on a nationally televised special. Miss Angelou's musical "And Still I Rise" for which she is librettist, lyricist and composer, is due for a Broadway opening in the near future.

Maya Angelou's appearances on college campuses and before private organizations are legend-

ary. Her wealth of information and ability to speak with authority on countless subjects such as Equal Rights, The Arts, Politics, Women's Role in Business, Culture's Role in Society, etc., make Miss Angelou one of today's most in-demand personalities.



Funding for this project is provided by a grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## CONFERENCE NOTES

Saturday morning, rain or shine, May 2, will be beautiful. The day starts at 8 a.m. with your registration at the Cather Historical Center. At 8:30, Mass may be heard at the Grace Episcopal Church on the corner of 6th and Cedar, in memory of Willa Cather's 108th anniversary. At 9:45, Mass will be held at St. Juliana's Catholic Church on 3rd Avenue. At this little church Willa Cather heard her first great religious classical music.

Coffee and rolls are available until 10 o'clock at registration headquarters. At 10:30 a.m., "A Sense of Place: Lucia Woods' Views of Cather's Virginia with Slides and Readings" will be presented at the Vet's Hall.

After the slide show, guests will have time for questions, for a brief stroll about the town, or a chance to freshen up before the box lunch in the Park at 12:30 p.m.

Panel discussion, under the direction of Dr. Bruce Baker of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, starts at 2:00 in the Vet's Hall. Two of the participants on the panel will be the featured speaker, Maya Angelou, and Mildred R. Bennett. After this session Miss Angelou will autograph books (she has six best sellers) in the Cather Foundation Headquarters. Books may be purchased now by mail, or at the conference. They are available both in hard back and paperback.

## MICHEL GERVAUD WRITES FROM FRANCE

Excerpts from a letter from Michel Gervaud, professor of English at the University in Aix-en-Provence to Mildred R. Bennett (October 13, 1980).

"I received (about a week ago) the Summer Newsletter which I perused with great delight. The editor has done a very fine job! Quite obviously, as you had already told me, Dr. Rowse was a great success. I don't think I would agree with him about Harry Gordon who does not at all appeal to me (but Dr. Rowse perhaps likes his charming smile and clean cut face) though Miss Cather (you see I respect the etiquette) draws a balanced portrait of him (modern advertising has since glamorized the image of the aggressive and virile young executive) and Lucy Gayheart behaved in a rather bitchy way when he came to Chicago and took her to the opera and expensive restaurants. Later, Lucy tries — whether or not she is aware of it — to entice him again and make him desert his perfectly plain and frigid rich wife. It was not at all necessary for Lucy to say that she had gone 'all the way' with Sebastian (by the way it is a pity Miss Cather did not make Lucy and Sebastian true lovers. These kisses and fatherly embraces do not seem to be very satisfactory and Sebastian is above all interested in his art). All in all, in this novel the study of relationships is rather rudimentary and frustrating. What

During the afternoon, guests may see the buildings related to Willa Cather, walk her streets, and study the paintings of John Bergers, Cather artist. Notice, also, in the Cather Historical Center a sketch of "Nancy" made for us by a Chinese artist from The People's Republic of China.

At 7:00 p.m. all join for the banquet at the new Grade School facility where Miss Maya Angelou will speak. The Sweet Adelines will also sing. Let us see you there.

is lovely are the evocation of Chicago scenes versus the small town life and Lucy's characterization — her sensitiveness, impulses, aspirations. All this is very tender, delicate, nostalgic. I say characterization because what deals with her behavior in connection with the love story proper seems to me artificial and forced upon the characters. There were interesting potentialities in Pauline and the lame accompanist. The paradox about **Lucy Gayheart** (this is the impression I have at least) is that though it is half a failure by Cather literary standards, one reads it with great pleasure. (I've read it about ten times!) I think (as you stressed it at the conference) it is because it tells so much about Willa Cather's deepest feelings and conflicts. I'm not qualified as a psychoanalyst but together with **My Mortal Enemy** and **The Professor's House** it casts a strange, vivid light on Willa Cather's tormented personality in later years and the foundations of her ego: the father image — sex — money — art — Pauline — the distorted mother-image, castrating,

destructive though well meaning, the bitter old village maid. Also in a nutshell, one has Willa Cather's vision of Red Cloud reflecting her ambivalent attitude toward it: hatred — rejection — nostalgia and love; bitterness towards its inhabitants together with gentleness, kindness, understanding towards the few exceptional or unconventional and sensitive people she observed. Willa Cather was always impressed by the strong and the energetic but she always spoke kindly and approvingly of the sensitive. Finally, there is — as always — in this novel, Miss Cather's lovely sense of place and nature — seasons — springtime — flowers — the ugliness of rain and cold in big towns and the beautiful winter scenes on the Platte. As a whole **Lucy Gayheart** disappoints but the reader feeds with delight on 'Morceaux de choix'."

*Please write your opinion on any Cather subjects! Mrs. Gempp Love writes that she agrees absolutely with Dr. Rowse that Harry Gordon had nothing left to him but materialistic ambition.*

### INTERNATIONAL NOTES

About fifteen years ago, a young Japanese girl named Mieko Hamaya visited Red Cloud for a week and saw all the Cather artifacts and places. She was the speaker at our Spring Conference.

Now, a letter tells us that she recognizes Harue Tawarada (see recent newsletter with article) as a girl she knew and with whom she went to junior high school twenty-eight years ago. They have not heard from each other since.

Their mutual interest in Willa Cather has brought them together again. What a remarkable coincidence that the WCPM should do such a delightful service. Our work truly is international.

Michel Gervaud of Aix-en-Provence, France, is again teaching **My Antonia** to his third year students. (See article for his thoughts

on **Lucy Gayheart**.) He also published an article, "Willa Cather and the Nebraska Frontier," in a secondary school magazine.

Dr. A. L. Rowse of England published an article, "On the Track of Willa Cather in Nebraska," in **Blackwood's**. He recounts his joy at finding the restorations here on his visit in 1980 at Spring Conference.

Loh-chi Chang from The People's Republic of China reports that she was much interested in the newsletter account of Dr. A. L. Rowse, and the article by Harue Tawarada.

A letter from Emiko Yoshioka assures us she is in better health and back teaching at Nara. During her illness she read Cather and took great joy in the poem "Aftermath."

### NOTICE

Due to the extreme rise in all costs, we have restructured our annual Spring Conference prices and events to ease the overall expense. Please take careful note of the changes when filling out the enclosed form.

As an explanation of membership — a paid newsletter subscription donation **does not** denote membership. Thank you!

### BOOKS BY MAYA ANGELOU

#### HARD BACKS

- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (autobiography) . . . \$8.95  
*Gather Together in My Name* (autobiography) . . . 8.95  
*Singin' and Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas* (autobiography) . . . . . 8.95  
*Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie* (poetry) . . . . . 7.95  
*Oh Pray My Wings are Gonna Fit Me Well* (poetry) . . . . . 7.95  
*And Still I Rise* (poetry) . . . . . 6.95

#### PAPERBACKS

- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (autobiography) . . . \$2.50  
*Gather Together in My Name* (autobiography) . . . 2.50  
*Singin' and Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas* (autobiography) . . . . . 2.25  
*Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie* (poetry) . . . . . 1.75  
*And Still I Rise* (poetry) . . . . . 1.95

#### POSTAGE AND HANDLING

- First Item . . . . . \$1.25  
 Each Additional Item . . . . . .50

Brochures for the Willa Cather and Nebraska National Conference, which will be held June 14-20, 1981, in Hastings and Red Cloud, Nebr., have been mailed. The impressive list of lecturers for this seminar should encourage every Cather devotee to attend. If you have not received your brochure by March 15, please notify us.

# Make Your May 2nd Spring Conference Ticket Reservations Early!

Harue Tawarada has sent us a copy of **Uncle Valentine and Ardesa**, published in Japan with Japanese notes for teaching English. Mrs. Tawarada prepared the notes and teaching helps for this volume. We are grateful to her for our growing collection of Cather books published abroad.

Joan St. C. Crane of the Rare Book Department at Alderman Library, the University of Virginia in Charlottesville has sent us a copy of a pamphlet published in memory of Virginia Faulkner. It contains ar-

ticles by Eudora Welty, Alfred A. Knopf, and Yehudi Menuhin. Miss Crane kindly sent copies of this tribute to some of our international members. Appreciative comments have already come from Dr. A. L. Rowse, England; Michel Gervaud, France; and Emiko Yoshioka, Japan. Miss Crane's book, a bibliography of Willa Cather's works, will soon be published by University of Nebraska Press.

Richard Giannone has sent us his article which is also a tribute to Virginia Faulkner and Bernice

Slote from the **Notre Dame English Journal: A Journal of Religion in Literature** (Fall, 1980) entitled "Willa Cather as Psalmist."

Ron Hull, Program Director of Nebraska Educational Television and a member of the Board of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is spending three weeks in The People's Republic of China. He will be in Shanghai four days, and hopes to contact our Cather correspondent L. C. Chang there.

## YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

- By being a Cather Memorial Member and financial contributor:

BENEFACTOR ..... \$1,000.00 and over

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Patron ..... \$100.00  
 Sustaining ..... 25.00  
 Family ..... 15.00  
 Individual ..... 10.00

WCPM members receive:

Newsletter subscription

Free admission 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.

Newsletter Contribution Only ..... \$5.00  
 (not a membership)

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