

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXII, No. 2

Bonita English, Editor

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

Fall Promises New Growth for WCPM

The anxiously awaited official acceptance by the State of Nebraska of most of the WCPM properties took place in Red Cloud, Wednesday afternoon, November 1.

Though the transfer was marked by only a small ceremony in front of the Cather house, its implications are far-reaching. With the State Historical Society focusing primarily on preservation and improvement of the "body," the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation's energies can be directed more effectively to expanding the "spirit" through conferences, seminars, publications, tours, lectures, and other Cather-related activities in Red Cloud and elsewhere.

Proposal for this mutually-rewarding sharing-receiving relationship was made March 29, 1977 to the Nebraska State Historical Board which was unanimously in favor of seeking legislative approval for the transfer. Miriam Mountford, then WCPM president, suggested that the Foundation's Board "has a responsibility to think of the perpetual conservation and security of the things it has selected to collect" and "obviously a collection relating to the life of such an important artist as Willa Cather is of State interest."

With added urging from State Senators Martin Kahle of Kearney, Douglas Bereuter of Lincoln, and Jerome Warner of Waverly, Nebraska strongly agreed. The Legislature this spring approved a \$40,638 appropriation for July '78 to June '79 fiscal year for maintenance and administration of Catherland properties, with \$1,000 of this to be used (for a program statement) for the important **My Antonia** house on the country tour.

On perpetual lease exclusively to the Foundation, the Dane Church, located northwest of Red Cloud, is the only Catherland tour building not included in the transfer. Also, the Foundation will continue to act in an advisory capacity to the Willa Cather Historical Center and will maintain its own trust accounts and investments.

As witnessed by the properties transfer, Cather-centered energies are now greater in sources and in intensity than ever before. New office spaces are being created.

Until April when its more permanent quarters will be at a newly-purchased building three doors south of the Memorial Museum, the Foundation is establishing offices in the basement of the Red Cloud Post Office. The State's Willa Cather Historical Center offices,



Nebraska State Historical Society receives key to its largest single acquisition of historic properties. WCPM's Vice President Dr. C. Bertrand Schultz and President Viola S. Borton communicate happiness as Board Chairman Mildred R. Bennett makes the presentation to Marvin Kevitt, director of State Historical Society.

— photo, courtesy of **Hastings Daily Tribune**

headed by Curator Ann Billesbach, will remain in the Garber Bank Building.

What goes into these offices and Centers and grows from them continues to depend greatly on Cather- and humanities-devotees everywhere, but now in November new promises of enduring beautiful growth appear.

1979 Membership Drive

Your annual membership dues are as important this year as ever before. The Foundation will continue to promote the study of Cather and her works, as indicated by the revised aims.

The Foundation will continue to collect letters and artifacts pertaining to Cather and will, in turn, make them available to the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Your past support has been greatly appreciated. The success of our new and expanding programs depends upon your continuing support.



Mel Schwartz's two-week show drew a large, appreciative number of viewers.

— WCPM photo by John Carter

Foundation Sponsors Exhibits at Depot

In keeping with one of its aims, "to provide for Willa Cather a living memorial by encouraging . . . scholarship in the field of the humanities," WCPM has, in recent past, commissioned two art showings for public viewing at the Old Burlington Depot.

In July, native Red Cloud artist Mel Schwartz displayed a number of her watercolors painted during a spring '78 visit to the Big Horn Mountains, Wyoming. Ms. Schwartz, who received her MFA from the University of Iowa in 1974, included, along with her own paintings, several student works from classes she taught in Red Cloud during the past winter.

Coming in May (4 - 30) is "A Second Chance," containing 35 of Solomon Butcher's photographs of frontier life. Mid-America Arts Alliance states that Butcher's "pictures of sod houses, families, merchants and, finally, towns show the progression of settlement patterns from lone pioneer to community life." Folklorist Roger Welsch has edited literary selections which accompany these outstanding Nebraska State Historical Society photographs.



This spring's Cather conferees will have a good opportunity to see "A Second Chance".

— Courtesy of Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society

On the Scene . . .

CATHERLAND — Though throughout 52 years British Knight Sir George Pickering and his wife, Lady Carola, have arrived at Catherland in dimension of Cather's writing, their first in-person visit here was for a full day, October 16. Because Cather's novels and short stories seem to have gripped Sir George and Lady Carola much in the same way the land gripped Willa Cather — "with a passion I have never been able to shake," visiting Catherland resulted in more than just pleasant memories for them. (For a full and delightful account of this visit, read Tom Allen's "Britons Discover Catherland" in the October 18 issue of the **Omaha World Herald**.)

JAPAN — At Gunma University, Daniel K. Shudo, Doctor of English, is making plans with a number of his students for a group visit to Catherland next year. This is to be in conjunction with the Foreign Student Program these students will be attending at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln campus. Dr. Shudo's enthusiasm resulting from his visit to Catherland last August sparked the students' interest.

MISSOURI — For Northwest Missouri State College's annual English Department Colloquium, October 4, Mildred Bennett was featured speaker. Central to her lecture, "In Pursuit of an Author," were guidelines on researching Cather. Ann Billesbach, curator of the Cather properties, accompanied Mrs. Bennett to Maryville.

Bequests Received

\$900 from the estate of Gertrude L. Coon, former Webster County Superintendent of Schools, who died in April at Hastings, Nebraska.

\$20,000 from the estate of Ralph French Rawson, in memory of Grace Garber Tait.

About Grace Garber Tait, Lonnie Pierson supplied the following from her MA thesis **Lyra and Silas Garber: A Nebraska Story** —

"Grace Garber Tait was the daughter of Joseph and Addie Garber and was raised on a farm near Red Cloud when that town was experiencing its early settlement. Before marrying, she taught kindergarten in Red Cloud. On October 4, 1901, she married LaRoy Tait who was publishing the **Red Cloud Argus**. Grace had a splendid reputation as a very attractive, well educated young woman and as an admirable family person. One anonymous source described Grace as "very pretty with pink cheeks and very feminine dress . . . she loved to wear organdy sleeves."

Grace and LaRoy had four daughters — Kathryn (Rawson), Pauline (Noble), Frances (Pitzer) and Lyra who was named for her aunt Lyra Garber, wife of Silas and the subject of Willa Cather's novel, **A Lost Lady**. Lyra Tait suffered the effects of polio for many years and died just before graduation from the University of Nebraska.

In Red Cloud, the Taits lived in a big white house just north of the old school building. The daughter,

(continued on page 4)

Cather Eligible for Arts Medallion

Regardless of how patriotic or speculative Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation members and friends are, they are certain to be interested in at least part of the shape Congress' recently passed bank bill takes, for it includes the minting of gold medallions, some of which may bear the picture of Willa Cather.

Acting on the principle that gold tends to go up in price as the dollar goes down, the U.S. Treasury Department has been selling gold in 400 ounce bars since May to help stabilize monetary conditions. This wide-ranging bank bill by Congress — in contrast to the Treasury's sales of the large bars, mainly to Germans and Swiss banks and international speculators — calls for the government to mint and sell half-ounce and one ounce gold medallions, a much more manageable sum for individual Americans. (Each 400 ounce bar has required investment of around \$90,000.)

In addition to Willa Cather, the nine others listed as eligible to be pictured on the "American Arts Gold Medallions" are authors Mark Twain and John Steinbeck; artists Grant Wood and Alexander Calder; poet Robert Frost; jazz musician Louis Armstrong; actress Helen Hayes; architect Frank Lloyd Wright; and singer Marian Anderson.

Will senators from across the country hear from Cather friends, not just that a government-minted Cather medallion should exist, but that it should be first in the series?

WCPM Receives Nomination

In September, the Foundation was honored to learn that it had been nominated by the Nebraska Arts Council to receive one of the Governor's Arts Awards for significant contributions to the cultural life of Nebraska. Arts Council Chairman Wallace Richardson stated the Council's hope that "more individuals and organizations will be encouraged to emulate your (the Foundation's) efforts for the fine arts in Nebraska." Representing WCPM during the awards banquet, September 22, at the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education in Lincoln, were President Viola Borton and Curator Ann Billesbach.

Memorial Archives Needs Continual Up-date

Because interest in Cather books and studies is world-wide, not only do many Cather-related articles appear in area papers and magazines, but also numerous scholars choose Cather themes for theses or dissertations. Through oversight, some of these valuable materials never reach their safest and perhaps most important home — the Pioneer Memorial Archives. For this reason, all newsletter subscribers and others are asked to be on the alert for current, pertinent Cather materials. Information should be sent in care of Vi Borton at the Foundation offices in Red Cloud.



*In **Shadows On The Rock**, Cather describes Notre Dame de la Victoire as "a plain, solid little church, built of very hard rough stone."*

— photo, courtesy of Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society

Conference Theme Is SHADOWS ON THE ROCK

Set in Quebec of the 17th and 18th centuries, Willa Cather's **Shadows On The Rock** will provide the theme for this spring's WCPM conference at Red Cloud, May 6. In a letter to Governor W. Cross of Connecticut — which was later printed in an October 1931 issue of **Saturday Review of Literature** — she spoke of the rock itself:

"To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which many strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite. There another age persists. There, among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire. It is hard to state that feeling in language; it was more like an old song, incomplete but uncorrupted, than like a legend . . . Those people brought a kind of French culture there and somehow kept it alive on that rock, sheltered it and tended it and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire — and all this temperately and shrewdly, with emotion always tempered by good sense."

Bequests Received (continued from page 2)

Pauline Noble, recalls that the Tait household was always very lively and happy and that their Aunt Lilly (Lyra) Garber lived with them for a year or more after Silas died. Pauline said that "everything was very jolly at home with mother, Aunt Lilly and Bessie Bordee, the Bohemian hired girl, always laughing. . . . Mother liked people who were genuine. . . . Perhaps that is where the feeling started of making everything fun — it has remained and **is** associated with that childhood." (Interview by Lonnie Pierson with Pauline Noble, Omaha, April 19, 1975.)

LaRoy Tait developed a variety of business interests in Red Cloud. He owned and edited the **Webster County Argus** and the **Guide Rock Signal** and owned the Red Cloud Real Estate Company and

the Red Cloud Auto Company. He sold the first cars in the county — Fords, Everitts, Studebakers and expensive touring cars. Grace became very active in community affairs while raising her family.

In May, 1913, the Tait's moved to 1645 Washington Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, where LaRoy purchased an automobile dealership. Grace had the care of her bedridden daughter, and spent hours in therapy sessions with her. The Tait's were determined that each of their girls would get a college education and Grace helped the young Lyra with her University studies. After the girl died and the others were married, Grace became very prominent because of her significant community work, particularly at First Plymouth Congregational Church. The Tait's are buried in Red Cloud. LaRoy died in 1951 and Grace in 1953."

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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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970

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MUSEUM HOURS

Open May 1 to October 1
 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays
 1 to 5 p.m. weekends