

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXI, No. 2

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

Plans For The Future

Last spring I made the following announcement to the Conference participants:

"On March 29, 1977, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Board of Governors made an official proposal to the Nebraska State Historical Society board that all buildings and physical objects belonging to the WCPM be given to the state group.

"As many of you know, funding a public foundation that has no income except from voluntary contributions is difficult. In addition the Board has a responsibility to think of the perpetual conservation and security of the things it has selected to collect. Obviously a collection relating to the life of such an important artist as Willa Cather is of state interest. The Nebraska State Historical Society board voted unanimously and enthusiastically to accept our gift, subject to state legislative action to officially acquire the properties."

I would like to share with you the same comments about the proposal that I made then.

When will this happen? Certainly not tomorrow or the next day, but we hope by the end of next spring. Getting a funding-bill passed in the Nebraska State Legislature takes a lot of doing and a good deal of time.

How will this proposed merger affect your use of the WCPM facilities? Not at all. The Cather Educational Foundation will continue functioning as always—dedicated to our educational program of tours, classes, lectures, seminars, publications, newsletters and conferences. Only the physical properties — the buildings and contents — will be maintained and staffed as a part of the State Historical Society Museum complex. We are confident that when it is accomplished, this merger will greatly increase the effectiveness of what we are doing.

Thank you for your support. We are counting on your continuing help now with your membership contribution renewal. And we hope that in the future you will maintain your positive interest so that the educational potential of the WCPM will develop fully.

—Miriam Mountford

Outstanding Spring Conference

There is no way to summarize public reaction to the twenty-second annual Cather Spring Conference held May 7, 1977, in Red Cloud. Comments and letters of appreciation from those who were here are full of



*The stage was set for the premiere showing of **Into the Morning: Willa Cather's America** with the introduction by WCPM president, Miriam Mountford, of "Antonia's children" (on the platform) and (standing on the left) other actors who played various silent roles in the film. The camera's eye reflects a strange glow on the scene that was described by more than one Conference participant as being "a mystical experience." — Photo courtesy Lucia Woods*

accolades and superlatives: "outstanding!" "by far the best ever!" "mind-blowing!" "exciting!" "great!" "no words to describe my feelings" "I cried!" "so many firsts!" "such a variety!" "a fantastically well-planned program" "a triumph!" — to mention just a few.

More than 500 people were involved in the Conference. But not all at once. Tickets were available for individual events and students particularly took advantage of bargain prices, arriving in buses and staying for a part of the day. Though many of the faces changed, the size of the crowd for each event stayed within a 200-275 range. And the spirit of excited interest kept growing in intensity.

Highlights of the day? It all depends on whom you talked to.

One lady was concerned about what time the doors would open for the first event, the commemorative mass in the tiny St. Juliana Falconieri Church which has been restored to its original 1883 condition. She was there an hour early because, "I came all the way from Pittsburgh for this, and I don't intend to be left out in the cold." Many were not so farsighted, but out-side loud speakers enlarged the congregation to include the over-flow crowd on the front lawn and those sheltered from the chilly spring breeze in parked cars. The service, with the music of Rossini's Mass by Red Cloud's ecumenical choir, set the mood for the day dedicated to celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Cather's **Death Comes for the Archbishop**.

Spring Conference Highlights

"Into the Morning: Willa Cather's America" is the hour-long documentary on Cather and her art made in 1975 by a film crew directed by Richard Schickel, **Time** magazine cinema critic. Episodes from Cather's Nebraska novels were shot in and around Red Cloud with actors recruited locally and costumed in the styles of the period. WCPM restored buildings provided more than a dozen authentic backgrounds, and 110 photographs from the WCPM collections were used.

Additional sequences were shot in the desert country near Santa Fe, New Mexico, the setting of **Death Comes for the Archbishop**.

Hal Holbrook is the narrator and Gena Rowlands reads the selections from Cather's books. The special, which was produced by WNET-TV, New York, will be aired on PBS nationally either this fall or early next spring.

During the afternoon's program, "The Passing Show," another large crowd felt itself transported magically to the Southwest by means of the magnificent slides and narration by Lucia Woods. Her "The Country of the Archbishop" set the mood for discussion of the theme book by Mildred R. Bennett, Bernice Slote, JoAnna Lathrop, and L. Brent Bohlke. Your spring 1977 literary Newsletter gives you a sampling of the sort of diverse insights into Cather's art that were offered for consideration and questions by "The Passing Show" audience.

Ella Cather Lewis of Long Beach, California, expressed her feelings and those of her sister, Catherine Cather Lowell, who was also here, to the banquet crowd of more than 200. "It was my aunt," Ella said, "who recreated the exiles and the serfs and the refugees who made these plains what they are — the breadbasket of the world. But it is you who preserved the sites. Cather has preserved the characters who peopled these places, but you are the ones who are truly magnificent."

Ella concluded her moving tribute to what is being done by the WCPM by sharing the poem "Are you Sleeping, Little Brother?" written for her father John (Jack) Cather by his big sister, Willa.

Are you sleeping, little brother,
In the room that once was mine
Are you dreaming, little brother,
Olden dreams that once were mine

Ella explained that when he was eight, Jack (also the child of "Jack-a-Boy") moved into the little attic room originally decorated by Willa Cather and that he was sleeping in the same bed which in the 1880's had been Willa's. "where she dreamed the dreams that led to greatness."

The Cather family house in Red Cloud has been restored by the WCPM. The attic room is familiar to Cather readers as Thea's room in **The Song of the Lark**.

The finale of this day full of first-rate Cather material, much of it new, was the introductory performance of six songs from the yet-to-be-produced

musical drama, **Out to the Wind**, based on Willa Cather's short story, "Eric Hermannson's Soul," with libretto by Virginia Faulkner and music by Robert Beadell, both professors at the University of Nebraska. Also associated with the University were soloists Lorraine Beadell and Raymond Miller, accompanist Vena Genuchi, and Ron Hull who provided the introduction and story bridges between songs. The musical will be produced in 1979 by the School of Music of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Presented to each of the banquet audience were handsome brochures, "Songs from **Out to the Wind**", printed especially for this occasion in a numbered edition and signed by the composer and librettist.

The creators of **Out to the Wind** gave us Cather Country in words and music.

Yet all the while

*I am thinking of another me—a woman
Whose paths leads beyond the horizon of the
known,
Drawn on, pulled forever by sun and stars,
Daring the untamed land, heading westward,
Out to the wind, out to the wind, out to the wind.*

from the title song **Out to the Wind** by
permission of the School of Music,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Lucia Woods' Visit With Irene Rich

"I have some things in my mind that I do remember but they are not the things that other people know anything about . . . all my personal sort of things."

Catherine Cather Lowell, sister of board member Ella Cather Lewis, daughters of Willa Cather's brother, Jack, and I visited Irene Rich on her ranch near Palm Desert, California, last July. Miss Rich played Marian Forrester in the 1925 Warner Brothers silent production of **A LOST LADY** which opened to mixed reviews. Red Cloud, where the film had its Nebraska premiere, received it fairly well, the local viewers thinking the Garbers quite accurately portrayed.

Irene Rich, charming and energetic in her mid-eighties, said they hadn't done such a good job on **A LOST LADY**: "There was nothing subtle about it, including my performance." She recalled that the director, Harry Beaumont, hadn't wanted her for the part but had come around to liking her. Miss Rich was adamant that the actress he had originally in mind was not the lost lady. The 1934 version of the story with Barbara Stanwyck distressed Willa Cather herself so that she never again sold a book to the movies *and in her will stated that none of her books could ever be dramatized, filmed, broadcast or televised, or used in any other medium now in existence or ever discoverable in the future.**

All known prints of the 1925 **A LOST LADY** are too damaged to view, but The Museum of Modern Art in New York screened two of Miss Rich's films for me.



Irene Rich (left), star of the 1925 film of A LOST LADY, at her ranch near Palm Desert, California, with visitor Catherine Cather Lowell.

In the role of an older woman in Lubitch's 1926 *LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN*, based on the Wilde play, Miss Rich expressed a rare combination of intelligence and sensuality. From our meeting last summer she seems to consider herself a practical, intuitive person, not at all intellectual. She said she hadn't learned anything from school and wasn't a reader, though she had just reread *A LOST LADY* and planned to read more Cather. She admitted to a poor memory. While working in film, supporting her mother and two daughters, she kept an account book of how much she earned each day — with hardly another particular about any film. She said she couldn't remember Willa Cather's brother, Douglas, who was on the set during the making of *A LOST LADY*. He had told his nieces of the friendship he and Miss Rich had developed and of how she had stored some liquor for him. Catherine and I had hoped for more.

But there are hundreds of films in Miss Rich's past, many years in radio, theater engagements, real estate and ranching ventures, her current decoupage work and four husbands. Her last marriage was a very happy one. She spoke of positive aspects in all her experiences but was most enthusiastic about where she was now living. When her daughter, Frances', health indicated the need for a climate away from Santa Barbara, they began looking for a ranch in Arizona. Enroute home one trip, they stopped for gas in Palm Desert and noticed this area. Meeting with its owner, Irene heard herself say she would buy the place. The words just came through her. She believes she has been led in many things: "my mind wasn't very bright," she said, "just well guided."

Frances Rich, a prominent sculptor, is Irene's only close neighbor, except for their many dogs. At her house for drinks, she told of her and her mother's reading of *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP* together one year in a Kansas hotel during a trip across country. These two very independent women's land, remote and rugged, had reminded me immediately of the Archbishop country. It had the same sort of austerity and grandeur, and something about the air. More important to anything in Irene Rich's past seemed her and Frances plan for these some six hun-

dred acres. They have willed the land to The Living Desert. As The Nature Conservancy cares for a prairie in memory of Willa Cather in Nebraska, so will another national organization preserve another of Cather's beloved landscapes in California.—Lucia Woods

*World of Willa Cather by Mildred R. Bennett, UN Press

Photograph Exhibits

Lucia Woods spoke and exhibited her photographs of Willa Cather's world last fall at Sweet Briar College and last spring at Lord Fairfax Community College in Virginia. The Handley Library and the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, along with Lord Fairfax, sponsored Lucia's talk with slides at the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Winchester. Many Virginia Cathers attended the meeting, as did Mr. Charles Poole, the present owner of Willow Shade in nearby Gore. Rev. Morris Cather, responsible for having the historic marker placed at the birth house in Gore, is president of the Cather Reunion. He reports that at their annual meeting last summer, they raised \$155.00 toward the \$500.00 necessary for a marker to be placed at Willow Shade. Others interested in contributing toward this should contact him at 302 South Braddock Street, Winchester, Va. 22601.

New Board Officers

The WCPM Board of Governors met in Lincoln on September 23, 1977, and elected new officers for the coming three years.

Viola S. Borton, of Red Cloud, was elected president, Keith Albers, also of Red Cloud will serve as treasurer. Josephine Frisbie, of Omaha, is the new secretary. Dr. C. Bertrand Schultz of Lincoln remains as vice-president.

1978 Spring Conference

The twenty-third annual Spring Conference will be held May 6, 1978. The theme for the day will be **The Troll Garden**.

Bequests To The Foundation

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation will receive \$5,000.00 from the estate of Roger A. Leech, Chicago, Illinois.

Judge H. L. Blackledge of Kearney, Nebraska, bequeathed \$1,000.00 to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation in memory of his mother.

Please Send Your Change of Address

Remember to send in your change of address if you are moving.

Christmas Gift Suggestions

from the Willa Cather Gift Shop

Plates-Frankoma (Limited) . . . Special Price \$ 5.00
 Trivets-Frankoma pottery 3.00

Willa Cather: Pictorial Memoir
 Woods-Slote 15.00

Alexander's Bridge (Once again in print) . 2.95
 Introduction by Bernice Slote (Paperback)

The Troll Garden (Spring Conference '78
 theme) 2.95
 (Paperback)

Collected Short Fiction 1892-1912 15.00

Notepaper of Memorial Building, Cather House,
 scene from Lucy
 Gayheart 15 per box 1.50

All occasion card, photo of Laguna Pueblo
 Church, New Mexico by Lucia
 Woods 25 for 3.50

We also have for sale all of Cather's other works
 and bibliographies too numerous to mention.

Postage and handling \$. 50 per item.

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 secure the bonding, insurance and housing of a permanent art, literary and historical collection relating to the life, time and work of Willa Cather.
- To identify and restore to their original condition, places made famous by the writings of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial 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 Subscription Only \$5.00
 (not a membership)

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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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