

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME XV, NUMBER 2

and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## MEETINGS IN CATHERLAND

### ... Cather Day ...

October 16 was Cather Day in Red Cloud. About thirty-five members of Willa Cather's family (close and distant relatives) met with ten Board members on that Saturday to inspect what has been done here in Red Cloud. The meeting began with a coffee at the Memorial Building at 9:30. Then the guests visited the various buildings restored in memory of Miss Cather. At noon the group had luncheon at the Congregational Church. Jennie Reiher (a Cather descendant—her



Relatives of Willa Cather and Board Members of the Cather Memorial assemble in front of Willa Cather's church prior to a Memorial service for her.

mother was the baby in the poem "Macon Prairie") gave information on genealogy showing the relationships of the different members of the family.

At three o'clock The Right Reverend Robert P. Varley, Th. D., Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Nebraska conducted a Memorial Service for Miss Cather in the little Episcopal Church where she belonged from 1922 to her death.

Following the service the group had coffee and visited until time for a picnic at the little red school-house.

Among those present were two daughters of Roscoe Cather, the two daughters of John (Jack) Cather, and Mrs. John E. Cather.

### ... Western Literature Association ...

The Western Literature Association held its sixth annual meeting Oct. 8-9 at Red Cloud. Meeting in the now restored Episcopal Church, the group listened to discussions on Western writers. Of these papers, two discussed Willa Cather. Marilyn Arnold of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah presented "The Desert as Sanctuary in Willa Cather." David Stouck of Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada gave "O PIONEERS! Willa Cather and the Epic Imagination." More than fifty attended, including teachers from California, Utah, Illinois, Arkansas, Colorado, Minnesota, Texas, Idaho, Iowa, Washington, Ontario, Canada and British Columbia, Canada.

The luncheon honored John G. Neihardt, ninety year old poet laureate of Nebraska who dedicated our Memorial in 1962.

The group held its social hour at the restored Burlington Depot. In the midst of the activities a freight train pulled in. Some of the group had never been on a train. They toured the caboose and talked with the crew. They felt they were in the real rural Catherland.

Although this convention has been held in much more glamorous spots than Red Cloud, the people present thought Red Cloud had the right atmosphere and declared this meeting the best they have ever had.

### ... Nebraska Historical Society ...

On June 12, a sunny day rare enough to delight the heart of poet, romantic novelist or visiting dignitary, the Nebraska State Historical Society held its annual spring meeting in Red Cloud. Attendance far exceeded advance registration as reported by the State Director, Marvin Kivett.

For the morning tour of selected Willa Cather settings, buses bulged and additional space had to be supplied by private cars. It was FHB at the luncheon at which Professor Donald F. Danker, Washburn University, spoke on Nebraska history. The caravan of cars for the tour of historic sites blocked Saturday afternoon traffic almost the entire length of Red Cloud's main street.

### ... Spring Conference 1971 ...

At the Board Meeting held during the Spring Conference in April three new members were elected to serve on the Board of Governors. They are Margaret Cather Shannon of Denver, Colorado, daughter of Roscoe Cather, Willa's brother; Ella Cather Lewis of Long Beach, Calif., daughter of John (Jack) Cather, youngest brother of Willa Cather; and Lucia Woods, daughter of Frank H. Woods whose family has contributed so much to the Cather Memorial. With these choices we now have members from the families of each of Willa Cather's brothers and sister. Other members previously elected are Helen Cather Southwick, daughter of James D. Cather, and Dr. Thomas Auld, son of Jessica Cather Auld.

### ... Events for Members and Friends ...

We are letting others convey to you the aura (feeling, spirit, mood, flavor) of the day.

Gil Savery was one of the many, many on the tour that day. We have quoted some of his comments under "What Others Say About Us." In the same section we have quoted Barney Oldfield, Conference speaker.

## WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT US

### ... A Spring Tour ...

Gil Savery in his column PANORAMA, Friday, April 23, 1971 in LINCOLN EVENING JOURNAL & NEBRASKA STATE JOURNAL, "The Magnetism of Catherland."

"The words were there in the dictionary. It was the way Willa Cather transplanted them that brought the flowering of literature. That artistry brought her fame and created the magnetism that draws scholars and literature lovers to the scenes of her childhood, scenes immortalized in her writings.

"Saturday is the 24th anniversary of Willa Cather's death. A week ago, in connection with Red Cloud's centennial observance, wind-kissed caravan travelers, riding in two buses and trailing cars, toured the now-familiar terrain that was the grand backdrop for the players on Willa Cather's literary stage.

On Thursday there was still Webster County dust on my shoes—maybe even some that once soiled Antonia's . . ."

#### ... A Speaker ...

Col. A. Barney Oldfield, USAF(Ret), native Nebraskan, world traveler, and journalist spoke at the Spring Conference on April 17 in Red Cloud. Col. Oldfield reported for the LINCOLN STATE JOURNAL in the thirties, forty years after Willa Cather held the same job.

His speech under the title "Cather, Theatre and Things" was reprinted in the NEBRASKA ALUMNUS for July, 1971. Col. Oldfield compared the theatre as Willa Cather knew it and as he had known it forty years later. He said: "When the University of Nebraska was tolerating me as one of its less likely students, it was the late Dr. Lowry C. Wimberly who first invoked Willa Cather as a beacon to put writing sights on. Many of the oldsters at the JOURNAL when I was a cub reporter had known her, not as an employee but one who came back for a visit or did something in the East which was duly reported. She was far away then from where I stood; and in her attainments in writing, she is still far away. But we experienced some of the same things. NEBRASKA, a wonderful place to find one's self, and with gates open to every direction. WRITING, a lonely, not greatly compensating, but highly satisfying profession. PERCEPTION, the ability perhaps to see the commonplace differently and more deeply than others, and to feel blessed therefore. For this kinship, I am grateful—and to you all, I'm grateful that you asked me to be a part of all this with you."

#### ... Summer Vacation ...

Josephine Robertson wrote about Willa Cather in the June 15, 1971 issue of THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR for its special section on summer vacations.

In her article "Prairie Pioneers" she says, "Few people saw the beauty of the open prairie in those hard years of pioneer settlement, but the young writer had a passionate love of its windswept miles of buffalo grass, and its rugged characters. This she distilled and preserved in her writings, which add a special dimension to our understanding of our own country. A visit to Red Cloud today can make this impression all the more vivid."

#### ... Travel Guide ...

The MOTOR CLUB NEWS put out by the Cornhusker Motor Club for July 1971 has an article entitled, "Red Cloud: Nostalgia in the Cornfields," written by Barc Wade, Editor. He says:

"It's not that the people of little Red Cloud are not progressive—for they are. It's more that they have an appreciation for time-honored things and are in no hurry to plunge into the frantic existence of big city neighbors.

"Tenderly, they describe their realm as 'CATHERLAND' . . . for it's the memory of their most famous

citizen that provides the spark that keeps Red Cloud from becoming just another dying farm community.

"Everywhere the ghostly presence of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Willa Cather can be felt . . . in proud old buildings, in scenic rural settings, and in the thoughts of its citizens."

## PICTURE NEWS

"The world broke in two . . ."

#### ... Pictures ...

Pictures are very important to supplement written records and descriptions.

This summer when Harry and Helen Obitz returned from England, they went into an antique shop in New York. An expert on antiques, Helen explored the shop and asked the manager if he had anything about Willa Cather. He brought out a photograph, labeled Maury, 1920. The photograph appears at right. None of the Memorial Board has seen it before. We thought you would like this new glimpse of Willa Cather.



Photo of Willa Cather, 1920

## RESTORATION

#### ... Willa Cather's Church ...

The Grace Episcopal Church has been completely redone downstairs. Workmen finished the carpet in the basement just in time for the meeting of the Western Literature Association. Volunteers papered the vestry just before the Cather Family reunion.



The sanctuary gleams in the soft light of the stained-glass windows which have been repaired and fitted with protective outside diffused glass.

The Cather Memorial put in a new water line to the church, the old one having disintegrated through years of disuse. The water line had to come from a block away, but the City of Red Cloud helped in this work. All that remains to be done in the sanctuary is the painting of the ceiling.

The Memorial put in a new sidewalk on the complete quarter of a block. Next spring plantings will replace the old trees destroyed by Dutch elm disease.

Thanks to Mr. Frank H. Woods of Chicago, thanks to Mrs. Richard Mellen of Colorado Springs, and thanks



to all of you whose contributions put together made a large job possible.

## NEW IN THE MUSEUM

### ... First Cather Plate ...

The first Cather Memorial plate went on sale at the Museum last spring. Made by Frankoma Pottery, Salpula, Oklahoma, the plate is decorated with designs



—Photo by John English

symbolizing many of Cather's stories. The designs, which also border the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Charter, were created by Willa Cather's friend, Carrie Miner Sherwood who is now 101 years old.

This lovely signature plate done in off-white and brown tones is a limited edition. It can be ordered only from the Willa Cather Museum, Red Cloud. The price—\$11.00 postpaid.

### ... Postcards ...

Also available at the Museum are new additions to the picture postcard supply: the Cather windows in the Grace Episcopal Church, Willa Cather's childhood home after restoration, and the restored Burlington Depot.

### ... Articles ...

David Stouck of Simon Fraser University, Burnaby British Columbia, Canada has presented the MEMORIAL with copies of several articles on Willa Cather which he and his wife have written. One of these he gave at the WESTERN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION meeting in Red Cloud, Oct. 8-9.

## LOOKING FORWARD TO 1973

### ... Commemorative Stamp ...

The time has come to take further action to encourage the issuance of a series of postage stamps to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Willa Cather's birth with the stamps first being offered for sale in Red Cloud on December 7, 1973.

The project was begun May 27, 1969 when Nebraska Senators, the Honorable Roman L. Hruska and the Honorable Carl T. Curtis, introduced bill S. 2279 in the Senate.

In the Fall 1969 Newsletter and again in the Spring 1970 Newsletter we asked you to write letters endorsing the project.

Selection of stamps to be issued in 1973 is made in 1972 by the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. This Committee is not swayed by hundreds or even thousands of form letters that all say the same thing. Nor is the Postal Service.

However, they are definitely influenced by individual letters expressing personal interest. Won't you please help keep the project fresh and alive by using your influence? Write your personal letter urging that a stamp be issued honoring Willa Cather. Address it to:

The Honorable Winton M. Blount  
The Postmaster General  
US Postal Service  
Washington, D. C. 20260

Then write to your Senators and Congressman urging them also to use their influence.

### ... Centennial Book ...

Also to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Willa Cather's birth, the University of Nebraska Press will publish in 1973 a Willa Cather Centennial picture book.

## NEW LAW

The new Federal law on museums states that a public foundation must receive one third of its support from the public. We are classified as a public foundation, but in order to maintain that status, we need more support from the general public. For that reason we are sending you return envelopes for your 1971-1972 memberships, and we are also making a new classification: Newsletter membership. For the benefit of libraries we have inclosed an invoice so that the librarian may present her request to the proper authorities.

Of additional interest to libraries and to all of you is the fact that beginning in 1972 we will publish the Newsletter quarterly, the summer and winter numbers being made up at the University of Nebraska by the English Department and the University of Nebraska Press. In order to take care of the added financial burden of mailing, we request that you send in your membership dues if you want the Newsletter. The extra issues will enable us to print student comments and newly discovered Cather material. You will find these important to your archives.

If you classify as a sustaining member, you may visit all properties of the Museum free when you visit Red Cloud. Present your membership card for the attendant to see.

## LETTERS FROM OUR FRIENDS

### ... France ...

From Michel Gervaud of Aix en Provence, France, who visited us in 1970 and again in 1971.

"This summer I have been rereading several of Cather's novels, especially THE SONG OF THE LARK. What a faithful evocation of Red Cloud and I suppose her own childhood! You just have to forget the desert and the brush sage to imagine your town—the way the South-West and Nebraska are mixed here is very curious. . . .

"I am also planting bushes and trees (this must be the influence of Willa Cather). The weather has been gorgeous—just like when Willa Cather visited Provence the first time. The Nebraska fall must be beautiful too.

Cornfields must be of a brown colour now I suppose. Here it's grape-gathering time in the South. . . ."

... Nebraska ...

From Anne L. Johnson of Lincoln who visited in 1969 and again in 1971.

Best of all was seeing the tall red grass which made the whole prairie the colour of wine-stains. Traveling through that countryside becomes a kind of mystical experience for me . . . now I wish I could spend a month in semi-seclusion in Red Cloud with nothing more to do than to read Cather books and to explore the country side on horseback."

... India ...

From Dr. Clara B. Cooper of India who was our guest speaker at the Spring Conference in 1969. Dr. Cooper, again in the United States, teaches Humanities at the University of South Florida at Tampa.

"I would very much like to attend the Spring '72 annual Conference of the Willa Cather Convention . . ."

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

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Sincerely,

Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor

**YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION:**

● By becoming a member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP . . . . . \$100.00  
 SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP . . . \$5.00 Annually  
 NEWSLETTER . . . . . \$3.00 Annually

- By contributing to a project fund.
- By contributing to the restoration fund.
- By contributing to the scholarship fund.
- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

**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 in the form of art and literary scholarships.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.



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