

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME XIII, NUMBER 2

and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

TWO RESTORATION PROJECTS

Catholic Church . . .

A twenty-five thousand dollar grant from Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. finances restoration of Pioneer Church and old Burlington Depot.



The clock is being turned back for the little Catholic Church, but trees framing the building are evidence of the passing years. In front one of the tiny cottonwoods planted by the first parishioners has survived more than eight decades of heat and drought, snow, wind and floods to be a magnificently gnarled shade tree. Out back beside the pump a volunteer maple shelter the back door. — Photo by Tom Allan, courtesy of Omaha World-Herald.

Everyday the old, 1883, red-brick Catholic Church looks more and more like a church and less and less like a private residence, which it was for sixty-one years.

First everything "new" in the interior was torn out—ceilings, partitions, plaster, wiring, etc. In the bare skeleton workmen found evidence of where things used to be—the high rafters of the ceiling, doors that used to be windows, a window that was once the front door, the stove-pipe hole above the altar space. With such a three dimensional blue print to follow the inside work is going quickly.

An old picture guides our outside work. The "new" bricks blocking the original front doorway have been removed and a copy of the covered front steps built. The reinforcement work is completed as is a new roof and a duplicate of the original bell tower (that never held a bell) topped with a cross.

Work is progressing so rapidly that by the time this letter reaches you the restored St. Juliana Falernexis Church, where Antonia was married, should be ready to be filled with the many antique church furnishings collected during the past ten years.

Advisors in the project are Carrie Miner Sherwood, Willa Cather's friend who will be 100 years old in December, and Margarette Kellett who remembers as a



President Mildred Bennett sweeps up under the carpenters' scaffold in the 1883 St. Juliana Falernexis Catholic Church. The original bishop's chair, the pump organ, and the barrel stove behind it are mute observers of the noise and clutter of restoration. — Photo by Tom Allan, courtesy of Omaha World-Herald.

little girl coming to church with her father on frosty mornings to help him stoke the stove with prairie hay.

The Catholic Church was given to the Cather Foundation in 1967 by the heirs of Ethel Barnes. This year \$25,000 from the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. of Lincoln and Chicago is making the restoration possible. The late Frank H. Woods and his wife, Nelle, were classmates of Willa Cather at the University of Nebraska. The author wrote their wedding story for a Lincoln newspaper.

The Depot . . .

Actually the Woods Charitable Fund is financing a twin bill of restoration, much to the delight of the sidewalk superintendents of Red Cloud. You will be delighted, too, when you come visiting next spring to find not only the church ready for inspection but also the 1897 Burlington Depot restoration completed. At least it is our hope that the weather will cooperate sufficiently with the projects so that dedication ceremonies for both buildings can take place during the Spring Conference, April 18, 1970.

You will remember that acquisition of the Depot in 1965 and some restoration was made possible by Mr.

(Continued on page 2)

ADDITIONS AND GIFTS

Cather House . . .

Willa Cather's childhood home, the setting of *A SONG OF THE LARK*, *The Best Years*, and *Old Mrs. Harris*, will also receive some additional work thanks to a \$1,000 donation from Carrie Miner Sherwood, the Frances Harling of *MY ANTONIA* and life-long friend of Willa Cather. Even though you who have been in the house feel that it is perfect, there are a few things to be added. For instance the white picket fence. Maybe you didn't notice it doesn't go all the way around the yard because you are used to today's purely decorative fences. But when Willa Cather was young a hole in a fence meant trouble. The youngsters would be chasing scattered chickens all the way to the stand-pipe where Thea's typhoid-feverish tramp drown himself—and the neighbor's cow would be eating the bitter-sweet vine that covers the north end of the front porch.

Museum and Archives . . .

A new microfilm-reader is the latest improvement in the study area of the Museum. Most of the archives material has been microfilmed now, and with the addition of this new-model reader Cather students are doing their research more quickly and easily than before. At the same time the originals, some of the oldest of which are in very delicate condition, are saved the wear and tear of handling.

Library . . .

A \$1,000 gift from Frank H. Woods of Chicago will be used for special work in library promotion. Consultant for the project is Foundation Board Member Dr. Bernice Slope, University of Nebraska Professor of English and editor of two collections of Willa Cather's works.

SHADOWS ON THE ROCK and *Willa Cather's View of the Past*, an article appearing in *QUEEN'S QUARTERLY*, summer issue, 1969, was contributed to the library by the author Sargent Bush, Jr., Durham, North Carolina.

From R. Fleck of Laramie, Wyoming, comes his book of verse which includes a poem pertaining to Willa Cather, *Prairie Shadow*.

Additional Donations . . .

The maintenance fund has received \$2,000 from the Miner-Weisz Foundation.

Another \$2,000 from Mr. and Mrs. Richard Shannon of Denver is for whatever needs are most prominent. Mrs. Shannon is Willa Cather's niece.

Newest Major Acquisition . . .

The Grace Episcopal Church has been offered to the Cather Foundation by Bishop Russell T. Rauscher and the Trustees of the Diocese of Nebraska. We are pleased to have the church, which has not been used for several years, as a part of the Cather Memorial and to comply with the one reservation requested by Bishop Rauscher. The Diocese retains the right, should the need arise, to use the church for a funeral or a wedding or an occasional service.

This was Willa Cather's church. She joined the congregation in 1922 and remained a member until her death. Two of the beautiful stained glass windows in the building are special because Willa Cather, with her brothers and sisters, had them brought from Munich, Germany and dedicated them to their parents.

INCREASED INTEREST IN WILLA CATHER

The Library of Congress in *A GUIDE TO THE STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA* gives a full column to Willa Cather, emphasizing the international importance of her work.

Two of her novels: *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are listed in the *FICTION CATALOG* among the "100 greatest novels of all time."

The Cather Foundation is included in the new addition of the "National Trust of Historic Preservation Directory of Member Organization and their Properties."

The American Automobile Association also lists the Foundation.

The Cather House is now listed with the National Register of Historic Places of the National Park Service.

Information has been requested by the *INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY OF ARTS*, Berlin, Germany so that the Cather Foundation will be included in the tenth edition of its publication.

Wayne F. DeMouth of the Perfection Form Company, Des Moines, and his photographers were here this summer filming Catherland. The film will be available in nine months or so.

Important Discovery . . .

Roger R. Leech of Chicago, attorney and collector of Cather books and manuscripts, has acquired Willa Cather's original typescript of her poem *Going Home (Burlington Route)*. At the top of the page Willa Cather has written "To be added as the last poem in this volume *April Twilights*." The typescript is dated September 14, 1922; therefore she is referring to the 1923 edition of *April Twilights*.

Mr. Leech compares Willa Cather's final poem choice with that of Tennyson who directed that his *Crossing the Bar* should appear as the last poem in any collection of his poetry.

This is a rare find because very few of Willa Cather's typescripts or manuscripts remain. Most of them were destroyed.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

At their business meeting in April the Board of Governors discussed the need for increased museum display space and more adequate research and library facilities. The present Museum, the old Farmer's and Merchant's Bank built by Silas Garber (Captain Forrester) in 1889, is bulging at the seams. The logical answer is a new building designed for museum and research purposes with room for future expansion. Something in the neighborhood of 80 to 100 thousand dollars ought to do it. Don't gasp. We are only dreaming. But dreams have a way of coming true. Just remember fourteen years ago we owned nothing but a few Cather artifacts displayed in a chicken-wire enclosure upstairs over the theater—and the first mimeographed newsletters were addressed by hand to a few hundred friends.

Two Restoration Projects (continued from page 1)
and Mrs. John Quirk of Hastings, Nebraska. Because the Depot had to be moved off railroad property, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Makinster of Randall, Minnesota donated the land where it now stands.

1970 SPRING CONFERENCE

Willa Cather's use of music in her writing is the source material for a great number of books, articles, and studies. Now John Moran and Robert Beadell of the University of Nebraska Music Department have arranged a WILLA CATHER CONCERT. Plans are being made to bring this unusual musical program to Red Cloud for the Spring Conference April 18, 1970. Mark the date on your calendar and watch for details in the Spring 1970 Newsletter.

FOURTEEN YEARS OF PROGRESS

In 14 short years such startling progress has been made by the Cather Foundation that people from other similar organizations are constantly asking, "How do you do it? To accomplish your aims how do you attract large donations from individuals as well as foundations?" The answer is simple. The Cather Foundation has two things no one else has:

First of all we have our president, Mildred R. Bennett. **Because of Mildred Bennett—Willa Cather's World Is Being Recreated** is the title of an article appearing in the INTERNATIONAL ALTRUSAN for June, 1969. Author of the story, Jo Frisbie, after listing many of the things accomplished by the Foundation, writes, "Such developments do not just happen. Someone is always responsible. Credit for this project goes to Mildred Bennett . . . recognized nationally as an authority on Willa Cather . . . her book, **The World of Willa Cather**, was published in 1951 by Dodd Mead . . . It was because of the enthusiasm which Mrs. Bennett generated that a memorial association was formed in 1955 . . . The road has not been easy, but Mildred Bennett is not one to give up . . . (she) is not one to sit back and be satisfied with what has happened in the past. She is constantly looking forward to future developments.

"To anyone not acquainted with the dedicated efforts and the unusual accomplishments of Mrs. Bennett in the past, this (new building plan) may sound impossibly ambitious, but to her friends it appears not only possible but entirely probable."

Second Ingredient . . .

Our second exclusive ingredient is YOU, and the nearly six thousand like you, who donate your time, energy, enthusiasm, ideas, influence and money—grade-schoolers pooling their pennies and dimes and nickels, housewives sending a dollar or two out of their grocery money, people living on pensions faithfully year after year mailing a \$5.00 check with a note wishing it were more, and the many who feel they can spare a larger donation. You are the backbone of the organization giving it solidity and permanence.

Thanks to You . . .

Thousands of letters arrive from those who have been here expressing thanks and gratitude. The most eloquent tribute to what you have accomplished is from Victor P. Hass, Omaha World-Herald Book Editor, in his **Leaves From a Bookman's Notebook** for May 4, 1969: "I am persuaded that when all who now live are dust, the novels of Willa Cather still will be read and that unborn generations will bless those who preserved this Catheriana. Here is one of the touchstones of the American heritage.

"What is being done in Red Cloud today is, I think,

precious beyond belief. It is as though some visionary Concordian had thought to preserve Thoreau's hut beside Walden Pond."

To that we add our personal thanks for being an active member. We look forward to seeing you in Red Cloud next spring, or whenever you can come, to see for yourself what you have accomplished in Catherland.

COMMEMORATIVE STAMP

Last spring the Board of Governors took 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.

For this purpose a bill (S. 2279) was introduced May 27, 1969, jointly by the Honorable Roman L. Hruska and the Honorable Carl T. Curtis, Senators from Nebraska.

In his remarks to the Senate as reported in the Congressional Record the day the bill was introduced, Senator Curtis had this to say:

I need not tell the Members of this distinguished body the importance that Miss Cather holds in American and world literature.

It is eminently appropriate both that her achievements be recognized by a commemorative stamp and that her Nebraska associations be recognized.

Therefore, the bill provides for first-day covers to be issued at Red Cloud, Nebraska, where she spent her formative years and where she found the setting for many of her writings.

Miss Cather was born on December 7, 1873, near Winchester, Va. She moved with her family to Catherton Precinct in Webster County, Nebraska in April 1883. In September 1884 the family moved to Red Cloud and Miss Cather lived there and in Lincoln where she graduated from the University of Nebraska until June of 1896, when she went to Pittsburgh to edit a magazine.

One renowned literary historian has written that the three most famous literary villages in America are the Concord of Emerson and Thoreau, Mark Twain's Hannibal, Mo.; and Willa Cather's Red Cloud, Nebraska.

At Red Cloud the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation has been established. Under the presidency of Mrs. Mildred R. Bennett, the foundation has moved a long way toward fulfilling its fourfold aim.

Thousands of people come to Red Cloud every year to visit the Willa Cather Museum, the restored Cather home and other historical sites connected with her work.

In letters to friends, and in talking with friends and reporters, Miss Cather stressed repeatedly that the prairies of Nebraska were her country. It was there that she grew up, received her education, wrote and published her first work and began her professional career. Before her name became established in the east. She had become known as one of Nebraska's leading newspaper women and had become recognized throughout the West as an outstanding drama critic.

She was the first woman to receive an honorary degree from Princeton University. She also held honorary degrees from California, Creighton, Columbia, Michigan, Nebraska, Smith, and Yale.

The passage of this bill would pay tribute to the memory of perhaps the finest woman novelist that America has produced.

Senator Hruska in the June 2, 1969 Congressional Record commented further on the Willa Cather Commemorative Stamp:

Few writers receive the widespread acclaim of literary critics and the general public. Such recognition is limited to only the best. That Miss Cather was one of the best is evidenced by the following facts:

First. She enjoyed widespread circulation of her works among the general reading public.

Second. She was awarded, among other honors, the following: the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for "One of Ours"; the French award, Prix Femina Americaine for "Shadows on

the Rock" in 1931; the Mark Twain Society Silver Medal in 1934 for "My Antonia"; and the Gold Medal, American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Further evidence of Miss Cather's greatness is found in the fact that all of her works are still in print and selling even though it is over 22 years since her death.

Miss Cather's works, which are widely studied in schools throughout the country, have always been popular in other countries.

In view of Miss Cather's accomplishments it is only proper that we honor her memory by issuing a stamp marking the 100th anniversary of her birth which was December 7, 1873. Although Miss Cather was greatly admired and loved by people throughout the Nation and world, she holds a very special place in the hearts of Nebraskans, because she was one of us.

Miss Cather's strong feeling for our State is reflected in the fact that six out of her 12 novels were set in Nebraska.

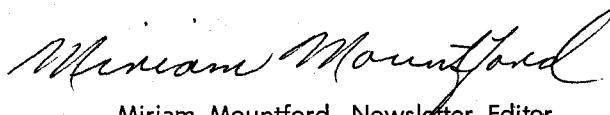
Mr. President, I respectfully urge that all Senators join with us in this effort to honor a great American, a great Nebraskan, and a great lady on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of her birth.

What You Can Do . . .

The groundwork has been done and the machinery set in motion. Now it is up to you to follow through on the stamp project.

As a loyal Cather admirer please write in behalf of the Commemorative Stamp to: Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C. 20260.

Sincerely yours,



Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor
WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL
AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

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

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

LIFE DONATION CONTRIBUTION . . . \$75.00

SUSTAINING CONTRIBUTION . \$5.00 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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