

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME XI, NUMBER 2

and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## ARE YOU SLEEPING, LITTLE BROTHER?

To J. E. C.

Are you sleeping, little brother,  
In the room that once was mine,  
Where the night winds sing in summer  
Haunting legends of the Rhine?  
Does the aspen by the window  
Whisper still of high desire,  
Of the tread of Roman legions  
And the purple pride of Tyre?  
On that little iron bedstead,  
Where I've lain so many a night,  
Good for vanquished knights, or Caesar  
When the Gauls are put to flight,  
Are you sleeping, little brother?

Are you dreaming, little brother,  
Olden dreams that once were mine,  
Glorious dreams of kingdom-sacking  
Where the tropic planets shine?  
Do those dreams still dwell, I wonder,  
In that little attic room,  
Do they steal and take you captive  
To far lands of Orient bloom?  
Of the camps toward the sunset,  
Of the warships on the blue,  
Of the queens and of the kingdoms  
Waiting, somewhere, just for you  
Are you dreaming, little brother?

Are you loving, little brother,  
As another used to do,  
Just the rose because it's crimson,  
Just the sky because it's blue?  
Does your heart near burst with loving  
When you hear the larks at morn,  
And you see the dew a-glisten  
On the tassels of the corn?  
One who never took a kingdom  
One whose knightly dreams are fled,  
One whose coward lance has rusted  
Since his heart was broke and bled,  
Could you love him, little brother?

W. S. C.

(The Library, Aug. 4, 1900)

Mrs. Ella Cather Lewis of Long Beach, California, sent the above poem with a letter stating that her father, Willa's youngest brother, John (Jack) Cather, was the second occupant of the room. When he took possession at the age of eight, Willa Cather wrote this poem for him. It tells what the little attic room meant for Willa Cather and shows why it has seemed important to preserve it.

## Visit Willa Cather's Attic Room



Photo by Vern Walters

Here is the little room where Willa Cather dreamed her childhood dreams. "It was the end room of the wing and was not plastered, but was snugly lined with soft pine. The ceiling was so low that a grown person could reach it with the palm of the hand, and it sloped down on either side. There was only one window and it was a double one and went to the floor. . . ." The wallpaper that Willa Cather put on her attic room still remains.

## CATHER HOME OPEN FOR VISITORS

The Cather childhood home has been restored and is now open for visitors. You will not find lace curtains at the windows nor drapes at the tops of the window frames. We have difficulty finding the old fashioned lace curtains that have long since gone out of style. If anyone knows of a manufacturing company that makes such curtains, will you please write us?

The restoration of the Cather house was made possible first by Dr. W. K. Bennett's purchase of the house and rejuvenation of the foundation and the premises. For a few years the MEMORIAL rented the house as two apartments, and put the money in a maintenance fund. Then came the grant of \$10,000.00 from the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc., which has enabled the present restoration.

Much of the furniture came from the estate of Willa Cather's sister, Elsie, administered by Mrs. Helen Southwick of Pittsburgh, Pa., and Mr. Charles Cather of Long Beach, California, children of James Cather, one of Willa's younger brothers.

Most of the other furniture has been selected and placed by Helen Obitz to fit the time and the unity of each room. Mrs. Carrie Miner Sherwood (who is in her

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## Cather Home Open for Visitors (continued)

98th year) has lent a helping hand and a good memory to the reconstruction of the Cather house of the 1880's.

We have installed a series of loud speakers which tell the story of the Cather house. In order to pay for the upkeep of the house and the use of the sound equipment, the Board of Governors of the WCPM voted to charge admission to the Cather house.

The schedule is as follows: adults \$1.00, students 50c, under 12, 25c. Special rates for groups.

### WOULD YOU LIKE A TOUR OF THE CATHER HOUSE?

This is the house of **The Song of the Lark**, of "Old Mrs. Harris" and "The Best Years." Cather describes it in **The Song of the Lark**. "They turned into another street and saw before them lighted windows: a low storey-and-a-half house, with a wing built on at the right and a kitchen addition at the back, everything a little on the slant—roofs, windows, and doors . . . The front hall was dark and cold; the hat-rack was hung with an astonishing number of children's hats and caps and cloaks. They were even piled on the table beneath the hat-rack. Under the table was a heap of rubbers and overshoes. . . ."

In order to make it easier for the visitor to know what artifacts and furniture in the house have come from the Cather family, we have put red ribbons on all those items which are authentic Cather.

As you enter the front door, you first press a little red button which starts music and then the story of the Cather house, narrated by Charlie Dugdale, of Hollywood, California, who is a television announcer on KNXT-TV in Los Angeles.

### The Living Room Looking Into the Cather Parents' Bedroom



Photo by Vern Walters

While Thea Kronborg in **The Song of the Lark**, is sick, she sleeps in the parlor. During her illness she is aware of what goes on about her. Cather says: "She saw everything clearly in the red light from the isinglass sides of the hard-coal burner—the nickel trimmings on the stove itself, the pictures on the wall, which she thought very beautiful, the flowers on the Brussels carpet, Czerny's 'Daily Studies' which stood open on the upright piano. . . ."

The first LOUD SPEAKER tells of the parlor. In this room hangs the original mirror that reflected the family life of the Cathers for so many years. Beneath it stands a marble top table that usually held books. In the northeast corner of the room is a walnut what-not. Foremost of interest in the parlor is the old Cather family Bible with the birth and death records. In this Bible, Willa Cather changed her birthdate from 1873 to 1876. The substitution can be easily detected.

Beyond the living room to the right is the bedroom of the Cather parents. Here the three younger Cather children were born. One of these births is described in **The Song of the Lark**.

In the dining room stands a maple finished table such as Cather describes in "The Best Years." Dishes from the Elsie Cather estate fill the built in china cupboard, which also contains Willa Cather's napkin ring, and a little gold colored pin cushion in the shape of a shoe that Mary Miner (Julia Harling in **My Antonia**) gave to Willa Cather back in 1884 when they first became friends. Also in the dining room stands Willa Cather's high chair.

The NEXT SPEAKER turns on in Grandmother Boak's room, which Cather describes in "Old Mrs. Harris" and in "The Best Years." To the north of Grandmother Boak's room is the children's bedroom and the back porch which was enclosed some time during the years and we have left it that way for security purposes.

### Grandmother Boak's Room



Photo by Vern Walters

This scene is taken from "Old Mrs. Harris." "It was a queer place to be having coffee . . . a hideous, cluttered room furnished with a rocking horse, a sewing machine, an empty baby buggy. A walnut table stood against a blind window, piled high with old magazines and tattered books, and children's caps and coats. . . . In another corner was the wooden lounge with a thin mattress and a red calico spread which was Grandma's bed. Beside it was her wooden rocking chair. . . . On her bed was a heavy quilt."

Next THE SPEAKER turns on in the kitchen which Cather describes mainly as the place where people go to get to the back stairway that reaches the attic. Vickie in "Old Mrs. Harris" has a room that is reached through the kitchen stairway, and when Vickie goes upstairs in disappointment over not having enough money to go to college, Mrs. Harris stares at the pine door in severe dislike.

It was in the kitchen that Mandy used to soak and rub Mrs. Harris' feet. Cather describes the kitchen in

the morning. "When Mrs. Harris went out into the kitchen to get breakfast, Mandy always had the fire started and the water boiling. They enjoyed a quiet half-hour before the little boys came running down the stairs, always in good humor. . . . In winter the boys had their breakfast in the kitchen."

### The Attic



Photo by Vern Walters

This scene comes from "The Best Years." "Upstairs was a story in itself, a secret romance. No caller or neighbour had ever been allowed to go up there. All the children loved it—it was their very own world where there were no older people poking about to spoil things. And it was unique—not at all like other people's upstairs chambers. . . . Their upstairs was a long attic which ran the whole length of the house, from the front door downstairs to the kitchen at the back. Its great charm was that it was unlined. No plaster, no beaver-board lining; just the roof shingles, supported by long unplanned, splintery rafters that sloped from the sharp roof-peak down to the floor of the attic. Bracing these long roof rafters were cross rafters. . . . In this spacious, undivided loft were two brick chimneys, going up in neat little stairsteps from the plank floor to the shingle roof—and out of it to the stars!"

The FOURTH SPEAKER turns on upstairs, and the visitor goes up the narrow stairs to the attic to see the original plank floors, the rafters and shingles overhead. This attic has been sealed off since about 1907 and this fortunate circumstance accounts for the fact that the original paper still decorates the walls of Willa's room. Little has been changed in the attic since the Cather children slept there in their iron beds.

The last story that Willa Cather wrote, "The Best Years" centers around this house and this attic where the children dreamed so many happy dreams.

### FOREIGN VISITORS

In August three ladies from Japan, members of the Tokyo Branch of the WCPM visited Red Cloud and Catherland. They were Mrs. Nobu Kawahara of Kamakura, Japan, Mrs. Masami Nishikawa, of Tokyo, and Miss Momoko Ishii of Tokyo. These ladies are three of the authors of the new book on Willa Cather brought out in Japan. Masami Nishikawa, husband of one of the ladies is former professor of American Literature at Tokyo University, and at present in charge of the Tokyo Branch of the WCPM.

In October Mrs. Reiko Masuda, editorial writer for the **Sunday Mainichi Magazine** of Tokyo, Japan, spent four days in Webster County visiting the places made famous by Willa Cather's writings. Mrs. Masuda is a participant in the International Visitor Program of the U. S. Department of State and was accompanied by Mrs. Anafu M. Kaiser, a Department of State escort-interpreter.

Other foreign visitors this summer have been: Helena Akerman, Finland, Mrs. Jack Weingart, Freeport, Grand Bahamas, A. A. B. Howson, Jamaica, West Indies, Maryhe LaCroix and Robert LaCroix II from the Netherlands. Mrs. Ute Harsten, Germany, Mrs. Joyce Redeho, Mrs. C. J. Best and Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Stead from England. Mr. and Mrs. Stead are from the School of English at the University of Leeds, Leeds, England. Mr. Stead is preparing a book on Willa Cather.

### PUBLICATIONS

Eight members of the Tokyo Branch of the WCPM have written a book on Willa Cather. It is one of a series that the Kenkyusha Publishers are bringing out on 20th Century English and American Literature. The WCPM furnished photos and information to help the project.

Professor Otakar Odlozilik of the University of Pennsylvania returned from a trip to Czechoslovakia this summer. He reports a new edition of the Czech translation of **My Ántonia** that is selling very quickly. Dr. Otakar Vocadlo, professor of English literature at the Charles University, Prague, was invited to write an essay to be published with the translation. In addition he also contributed an article to a Czech daily, **Lidova demokracie** entitled "The Czech Pioneers and Their Chronicle." It appeared June 4, 1947.

Dr. L. V. Jacks wrote an article for the Fall, 1967 **Per Se** about "Nebraska." He tells about Willa Cather and the MEMORIAL.

A story "Catherland Tour" by Glenda Peterson appeared in the August issue of **NEBRASKAland Magazine**. It is beautifully illustrated with a number of photographs.

The **American Notebook** of the **New York Times** Sunday Book Review of July 9th printed an item in regard to the restoration of the Cather childhood home. Mention was made of the MEMORIAL newsletter.

**Preservation News**, Safeguarding America's Landmarks, which is the official magazine for the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, carried an article May, 1967, "Cather Foundation Saves 1897 Red Cloud Depot."

An article "My Ántonia: A Dark Dimension" by Sister Peter Damian Charles appeared in the Summer, 1967, **Western American Literature**. Sister Peter Damian Charles toured Catherland several seasons ago.

The Cornell University Press has brought out a book, **Willa Cather and Her Critics**, edited and with an essay by James Schroeter.

You can help the Newsletter by sending in copies of articles that you find about Willa Cather. We thank those of you who have done us this service in the past.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The annual conference will be held in Red Cloud, April 20, 1968, the third Saturday in the month. Plan now to attend.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

One of our aims is: To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial in the form of art and literary scholarships. We have received some questions in regard to our scholarship program. We have suspended the giving of the spring scholarship because we felt that we were not getting the proper number of responses, and that we should consider the matter further. It has been suggested that we use the accumulated money to

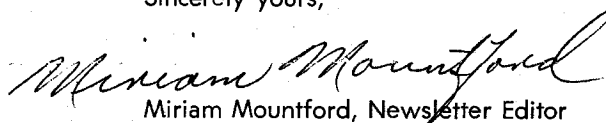
help a foreign student spend a school year in Red Cloud. We should like your suggestions on this matter.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to all of you who have sent your membership and maintenance checks. Our organization depends on your contributions and without them we should have to close our doors.

The recent Japanese journalist requested from the United States State Department that she be allowed four days in Red Cloud and Catherland. This fact should show you that the MEMORIAL and its work are known all over the world. You can be proud of your affiliation with the WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL & EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION.

Sincerely yours,



Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor  
WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL

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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 MEMBERSHIP . . . . . \$75.00

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- 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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