

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME XI, NUMBER 1

and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

PROTOTYPES OF CHARACTERS IN MY ANTONIA RECOGNIZED AT SPRING BANQUET

The characters in Willa Cather's novel MY ANTONIA are known all over the world because the novel is read and enjoyed not only in English editions by people everywhere but also in countless foreign language translations.

MY ANTONIA is the story of real people who came from far away to make a place for themselves in a new land. The heroine, Antonia, was Willa Cather's friend, Annie Pavelka.

Friends and neighbors of the Cathers, the Miner family, the first home where Annie Pavelka worked as hired girl, appear in Antonia's story as the Harlings. Annie Pavelka's own large family are Antonia's children.

Of the large cast of characters used by Willa Cather in MY ANTONIA, thirteen are still living. Five of them were able to accept the invitation of the board of governors to attend the Cather Foundation spring conference banquet and personally accept citations. They were being honored not only as prototypes for Willa Cather's characters, but also because they have made "significant and enduring contribution to the goals of presenting and interpreting the life and times and artistry of Willa Cather."

Also honored but not pictured because they were unable to attend were: Mary Miner Creighton, "Julia Harling"; Irene Miner Weisz, "Nina Harling"; Leo

Pavelka, "Leo Cuzak"; George Pavelka, "Martha's son"; Louis, Clement, and Edward Pavelka, "Cuzak's boys"; and Hugo Pavelka, prototype for Rudolph Rosicky in Cather's short story "Neighbor Rosicky."



Honored at the Spring Conference are characters from Willa Cather's MY ANTONIA. Pictured here from left to right are: Carrie Miner Sherwood, "Frances Harling"; Emil Pavelka, "Jan Cuzak"; Elizabeth Pavelka Boyd, "Nina Cuzak"; Antonette Pavelka Kort, "Lucie Cuzak"; and Lucille Pavelka, "Martha".

CATHER FOUNDATION CONFERENCE

The spring conference of the Cather Foundation was held the third weekend in April. At the same time, on Saturday, April 15, more than fifty members of the Nebraska Writer's Guild met in Red Cloud, toured Catherland, and joined members of the Cather Foundation at the spring conference banquet.

Young Willa Cather

Cather Foundation board member, Dr. Bernice Slote, gave the banquet audience a new look at the young Willa Cather as a student and journalist and critic in Lincoln in the 1890's. Very little was known about these years in Willa Cather's life until Dr. Slote began her search through old newspapers. The vast amount of material she turned up is the subject of her latest Cather book, THE KINGDOM OF ART, published by the University of Nebraska Press.

Tribute

Novelist Frederick Manfred, featured speaker at the

spring conference banquet, pointed out that the varied occupations and background of the people gathered there to pay tribute to Willa Cather was in itself a testimony to her greatness and her universal appeal.

The professional writers were there as were the scholarly educators representing widely diverse fields of interest from the classics to paleontology to theology. Publishers and journalists were there. So were librarians, elementary teachers, administrators and students, as one might expect. Also present were other professional people—lawyers, doctors, nurses, and ministers. But more than one half of the audience was comprised of people whose occupation has nothing to do with literature—businessmen and clerks; farmers, ranchers, and hired hands; housewives, salesmen, grocers, butchers, carpenters . . . Many of them drove hundreds of miles from a five-state area for the occasion.

Enjoyment of Willa Cather and a desire to show their admiration brought this assortment of people together on common ground for one evening.

SPRING INVASION

The spring migration of college students to sunny beaches annually makes the headlines. Though not much is written about it, Red Cloud experiences its own peculiar sort of spring invasion that lasts not a few days, but all season from early in March when winter's snow is old and comparatively harmless til the last June commencement oration has been delivered.

Furthermore, the age of the invaders is not limited to college undergraduates. The ranks include youngsters in grade school, teen agers, and graduate students with gray hair. Nor are they all registered as students. Intermingled are housewives, professional people, farmers, writers, artists, family groups . . . the recruits are from far-away cities and from small towns in the next county—people from foreign lands and people out to explore their own backyard. They infiltrate by twos and advance by companies.

This is invasion with a purpose. The spring call to adventure brings the invaders here to see for themselves what they have already discovered in their reading. They are traveling over familiar ground because they have already been here with Willa Cather's characters. They are looking for specific places, they have questions to ask, pictures to take, and people to interview. Along the way they discover unfamiliar settings and hear about characters from books they have yet to read.

. . . Welcome to Catherland . . .

The welcome signs at the county lines reassure the invaders that the natives are friendly—that a county-wide hospitality is extended to make the duration of their occupation pleasant, informative, and profitable. This is a demonstration of the unusual spirit of cooperation that last fall won the sweepstakes award for Webster County and the title of Nebraska's Centennial County.

. . . Aid and Comfort . . .

Giving aid and comfort to the invaders is one of the principal tasks of the Cather Foundation. Our pathfinders and map-makers have spied out the land. The trail has been blazed.

Catherland tour signs mark Cather settings in Red Cloud and along a fifty-five mile route through western Webster County. New this year is a printed guide of Willa Cather's Red Cloud with map, pictures, and commentary on the thirty points of interest. This is a companion to the guide of Willa Cather Country that has been in use for several years.

A task force of volunteers are in training and will be ready for the summer season when activity changes in

nature but increases in intensity—groups are smaller but the total numbers larger. The warm-weather assault will continue until school opens in September and full scale invasion is resumed.

RESTORATION

. . . Cather House . . .

Some of the late spring visitors had a preview of things to come. Ducking under ladders and side-stepping wet paint, their clothes collecting plaster dust, they inspected the interior of Willa Cather's childhood home now being restored to its original condition.

They climbed to Willa Cather's own tiny attic room by way of the newly reconstructed back stairway which replaces the one torn out more than fifty years ago. The attic has been sealed off since and remains unchanged from the time when the Cathers lived there. In Willa Cather's room the wallpaper that she herself put on is still there, just as she pictured it in *SONG OF THE LARK*. The main part of the attic where the boys slept is as Willa Cather described it in "The Best Years."

The rest of the house has been remodeled so many times—ceilings lowered, partitions put in and others taken out—that it hardly seems like the same house that Willa Cather wrote about in her books. Now the remodeling changes are gone, leaving an arrangement of rooms that seems familiar because we have shared those rooms with the people in "Old Mrs. Harris," with Lesley Fergusson of "The Best Years," and with Thea of *SONG OF THE LARK*.

All of this progress is possible because of a \$10,000 grant from the Woods Foundation earmarked for the restoration of the Cather house.

Very soon it will be time to start moving in the 1880 style furnishings that have been collected by you and our researchers. Newly arrived for display in the house is the Cather family Bible from the estate of Elsie Cather.

. . . Willa Cather Museum . . .

Increasing the effectiveness of "The Sculptor's Funeral" scene are two new wax figures, the dissolute, red-bearded, shyster lawyer brooding beside the coffin of the world-famous master sculptor. The scene illustrates Willa Cather's short-story masterpiece on the theme of the uniquely gifted individual's struggle with an unfavorable environment.

In the downstairs display area the ceiling-lighting system was finished during the winter months.

Both of these major improvements were made possible by several substantial gifts received at the first of the year.

WILLA CATHER AND MUSIC

Willa Cather once said, "I must have music."

Musicians and music lovers are fascinated with the way she weaves music into the background to heighten the mood of her stories, how she uses music to add extra dimension to her character delineation, and with her casual introduction of an operatic theme to suggest the significance of a scene.

. . . **Cather Concert** . . .

"An Evening with Willa Cather" is the theme of a musical concert being planned for June 30 in Lincoln at the Pershing Auditorium. The varied program indicates the vast scope of musical literature Cather drew on for her writing. Included are selections ranging from FAUST, TANNHAUSER, and the NEW WORLD SYMPHONY to Sousa marches along with hymns, popular songs, Spanish ballads, and a new musical setting for Cather's poem, "Prairie Dawn."

Excerpts from the appropriate Cather story or novel will accompany the vocal and instrumental performance.

. . . **New Book** . . .

Richard Giannone, associate professor of English at Fordham University, has made an extensive study of Willa Cather's use of music. His book, MUSIC IN WILLA CATHER'S FICTION, being published by the University of Nebraska Press, will be out in January 1968.

NEW CATHER PUBLICATIONS

Virginia Faulkner, Cather Foundation board member and editor of the University of Nebraska Press, reports additional activity regarding Cather publications.

. . . **Nebraska** . . .

THE WORLD AND THE PARISH, "Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1903," selected and edited with a commentary by William M. Curtain, will be forthcoming in the fall of 1968.

Two articles about Willa Cather are featured in the centennial edition of the literary quarterly, PRAIRIE SCHOONER, which will be out late in June. One was written a number of years ago by George Seibel in whose home Willa Cather was a weekly visitor while she lived in Pittsburgh. James E. Miller, professor of English at the University of Chicago, is author of the second article.

. . . **Chicago** . . .

Cather selections are included in the new two volume BRITANNICA LIBRARY OF GREAT AMERICAN WRITING.

. . . **Japan** . . .

Two different Japanese publishers are using their own translations of Willa Cather stories in textbooks for Japanese students.

EXPENSE ACCOUNT

The preservation and restoration of Cather settings and the presentation and interpretation of Cather artifacts is one of the important goals of the Cather Foundation. As the program grows and expands, the expense of maintaining it goes up.

. . . **Museum** . . .

Insurance, utilities, repairs, fresh paint, washing windows, replacing lightbulbs—all of these bills were of minor worry not so many years ago when all there was to see was contained in one room. A few modest contributions and a couple of exuberant volunteers equipped with a screwdriver and a turkey duster could handle the situation in one Saturday afternoon.

How things have changed! Your organization now owns and operates a four story Museum full of Cather displays with two vaults of irreplaceable Cather source material. Think what the insurance rates must be. Certainly it takes more than a few modest contributions to pay the premium.

Think of the thousands of watts needed to light the displays properly, to say nothing of the heating and air-conditioning bills. Keeping the building neat and tidy is a full time job as growing numbers of you bring along your dust from all over the United States and many foreign lands to mingle with the native prairie soil.

Upkeep and repairs are a growing item of expense as more and more feet are wearing off stairway paint and a mounting number of hands are loosening door latches and guard rails.

Even if we could lock the door, keeping the place as a shrine for the favored few, the roof would still need looking after.

. . . **Additional Projects** . . .

Furthermore, the museum is just one aspect of what you are doing to present the Willa Cather story. In Red Cloud, and out in Willa Cather country, there are more than 75 signs and markers to keep track of, to maintain and replace.

Your organization owns the old Burlington depot which must be kept up even though its restoration is not complete. And now that the renovation of Willa Cather's house is underway—a great step forward in the over-all plan—the maintenance problem will become even more complex.

. . . **Solution** . . .

The income from a quarter of a million dollar endowment fund would solve the maintenance expense problem nicely and at the same time fill the imperative need for a full-time curator-administrator.

Until the happy day when such a solution is provided, please give consideration to what you can do.

Follow the example of the many groups who bring a contribution when they take advantage of the Museum and tour program.

Be prepared for a small admission charge when the Cather house is opened.

(continued on back page)

Solution (continued)

Join others who earmark their contributions "maintenance fund."

Add a little something to your annual membership check. At a book store one dollar buys a very slender volume. However, your extra one dollar with the dollar bills from everyone else reading this Newsletter would build a stack 6,000 dollar bills high. In a co-operative effort one dollar buys a great deal.

Do your best to help keep the Museum doors open and the Catherland tours running smoothly for the increasing thousands from all walks of life who take advantage of the various programs of the Cather Foundation.

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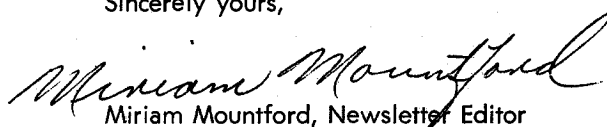
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Your Organization Foundation

Your enthusiastic, active interest and your financial support have built in a few short years a strong and flourishing organization. With your continuing participation in the goals of the Cather Foundation you are sharing your admiration of Willa Cather for the benefit of not only your contemporaries but also for generations yet to come. You are building a lasting, living memorial to Willa Cather whose works will be enjoyed one hundred years, two hundred years, from now and as long as the English language is read.

Sincerely yours,



Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor
WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL

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

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP \$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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