

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME IX

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Red Cloud, Nebraska

Ten Years of Progress

Ten years ago this March, eight people met in Red Cloud to draw up plans for an organization to fill a growing need—to take care of the Willa Cather possessions that through the years had been collected by some of these people, to handle the growing volume of correspondence asking for information about Willa Cather and her hometown, and to accommodate an increasing flow of Cather admirers coming from all over the world to see the town and the country that are a part of so many of her books and stories.

These eight people wanted to provide a living memorial to Willa Cather in order to share their admiration of the gifted writer with the hundreds of others who had indicated an interest. These eight people were drawn together by a mutual respect for Willa Cather and a dedicated determination to transform an idea into concrete action.

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial was born March 26, 1955 when the articles of incorporation were signed. Among the organizers was Carrie Miner Sherwood, intimate friend of Willa Cather since 1883 and the first to dream of a memorial for her famous friend. Mildred R. Bennett, whose study and research and writing have earned for her an international reputation as the foremost authority on Willa Cather, was elected president. Other signers were famous author and expert in the field of Western Americana, Frank O'Rourke; Nebraska's most renowned writer of books for juveniles, Dr. L. V. Jacks, whose experience as an educator ranges from the classics to creative writing; Willa Cather's cousin, Jennie Miner Reiher; Omaha educator and text book editor, Josephine Frisbie; businessman and professional golfer, Harry Obitz; and his wife Helen Obitz, a specialist in antiques and Webster County history.

The first few years in the life of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial were spent patiently and methodically establishing a firm foundation and a sturdy framework to secure for the organization the capacity for unlimited growth and expansion. The results of this careful planning astonish even the most optimistic organizer.

In ten short years the WCPM membership has doubled and redoubled until today it numbers in the thousands. To guide and direct the constantly increasing activities of the ballooning organization, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial board of governors has more than doubled in size.

Contributions to the WCPM during the first year, 1955, amounted to \$160.00. Since then your financial support of the WCPM has increased by leaps and bounds until by the end of 1964 you have donated a grand total of more than \$50,000. In this time the WCPM has received several handsome gifts including three foundation grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. However, these large donations account for only a small percent of the total income. Your contributions and an increasing number of others from \$1.00 to \$100.00 in size add up to more than 75% of this \$50,000 total.



Scenes from Willa Cather's stories are being marked by the WCPM with signs like the one shown here in front of one of the houses of MY ANTONIA.

Because of your solid financial support along with your enthusiastic interest, you are responsible for making a dream a reality, for turning a well-planned organization into a vital, living, growing memorial to Willa Cather.

Aims of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

From the very beginning the aims of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial have served as guideposts for expansion and development. By considering what has been accomplished toward fulfilling these aims, we can most accurately measure the progress of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial in its first decade.

WCPM MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

WCPM AIM

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.

. First Museum

When the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial was organized ten years ago, this aim was the first activity to get underway. With the Willa Cather artifacts that were being saved by her relatives and friends, the WCPM was able to maintain a small but impressive display in a rented, upstairs room in a fire-proof building. The first year the collection was insured for \$1,000.

WCPM Building Purchased . . .

Five years later, so many more artifacts had been donated that the Cather collection had increased in value to \$13,000 and the makeshift museum was bulging at the seams. During this time many of you had been contributing to the special building fund making it possible in 1960 for the WCPM to purchase the building constructed in 1889 by Silas Garber, the Captain Forrester of Cather's A LOST LADY.

After two years the reconstruction of the building and restoration of one floor were well enough along so that the museum artifacts could be moved to their permanent home and the enlarged volume of source material comprising the archives could be safely filed in the two vaults. On May 26, 1962, poet John G. Neihardt led the dedication ceremonies and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Museum and Archives was officially open for visitors.

Museum Progress . . .

Today because of your continuing interest in providing a museum for many, many years of service, most of the major reconstruction projects in the building have been completed. These projects include such things as a new roof, entirely new plumbing and electrical wiring, fire-proofed exterior and interior walls, reinforced floors, and a completely new heating and air-conditioning system.

Your generous support of this one WCPM aim has gone beyond the provision of a sound structure. Today the entire building—the two full floors and the three abbreviated floors in the front tower—are in use to display Willa Cather artifacts and scenes from her stories.

Still much remains to be done to improve the displays and to continue with a number of unfinished projects both large and small. Your continuing financial support is imperative to carry out the plans that have been made.

Professional Direction . . .

Soon after the WCPM was organized Dr. C. B. Schultz joined the board of governors, and the entire WCPM Museum development program has had the benefit of Dr. Schultz's knowledge and years of experience directing one of the world's finest museums of natural science, the Nebraska State Museum.

Museum Schedule . . .

Visitors to the museum have been growing steadily more numerous every year. Thirty volunteer hostesses are making arrangements for the coming season and looking forward to welcoming even more visitors than in record-breaking 1964. From May 1 through October 1 the WCPM Museum will be open every afternoon from one to five. Any other time you can visit the museum by making arrangements beforehand.

Soon after the mailing of the Fall Newsletter containing an account of the memorial service for Miss Elsie Cather, we received word of the death of the last of the Cather sisters, Mrs. Jessica Cather Auld of Palo Alto, California. Mrs. Auld's final visit to Red Cloud was in 1962 when she was an honored guest at the WCPM Museum Dedication.

PLACES MADE FAMOUS BY WILLA CATHER

WCPM AIM . . .

To identify and restore to their original condition places made famous by the writings of Willa Cather.

Willa Cather Country . . .

Red Cloud has been ranked with Cambridge, Mass., and Hannibal, Mo., as one of the three most famous American small towns. As Mildred R. Bennett wrote in her WORLD OF WILLA CATHER, "Red Cloud has probably been described more often in literature than any other village its size." The same could be said of Webster County—the vast playground of young Willa Cather, the land that is known all over the world through the writings of the mature artist.

Authentic Settings . . .

The first step toward this aim of identifying and restoring places made famous by Willa Cather was extensive research to establish the authentic locations appearing in her stories. A great deal of this research was done by John March, Research Librarian for Collier's Encyclopaedia in New York, who joined the WCPM board of governors in the early years. As more and more places were positively identified, it became evident that the project would have to be developed in two categories—those places that should be owned and restored by the WCPM and those places that should be marked as Willa Cather settings.

Willa Cather's Home . . .

In the first phase of this aim the WCPM has acquired Willa Cather's childhood home. This house appears so often in Miss Cather's stories that every room in the house has been described including the attic and her own tiny upstairs room where, as John G. Neihardt has said, "the girl first dreamed the dreams that led to greatness."

Catherland Interpretation . . .

In the second phase, 27 places described by Cather in Red Cloud and an additional 25 Cather settings in the country were selected and conducted tours of these sites were developed. Here again you have shown overwhelming interest in a WCPM project. Visitors in ever increasing numbers are being attracted by the tours.

Because of your generous contributions, augmented by a \$1,000 grant from the J. M. McDonald Foundation, rapid progress is being made in improving the tours and the methods of interpreting Willa Cather's Red Cloud and Cather-Country. A printed guide to Catherland was made available last year. Pictured on the front of the Newsletter is one of the 25 signs which are now being erected to mark Cather settings. Arrangements are being made to place three more walking-plow markers like the one which was constructed last year.

With your continuing interest in providing printed guides and various kinds of signs and markers you will soon be able to find your own way through Catherland—from the River where LUCY GAYHEART skated to A LOST LADY'S hilltop, cottonwood grove to the "Divide" and to the house where he who was ONE OF OURS began his life and to all the other living Cather scenes in between.

WORLD WIDE INTEREST IN WILLA CATHER

WCPM AIM . . .

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

. . . WCPM Gives Aid . . .

In ten years thousands of people and organizations have asked for and received help with their Willa Cather study and research. These requests arrive by mail from all over the world, and a growing number of Cather admirers are coming in person to gather facts. As the WCPM has become more widely known and the quantity of requests has increased, the type of assistance required has become constantly more varied.

. . . Current Activities . . .

To illustrate the growing world-wide influence of the WCPM, here is a sample of the activities that are going on right now.

WCPM assistance is being given to a new library research center at Osmania University, Hyderabad, India. The WCPM is cooperating with its first foreign charter in Tokyo whose members are writing a book about Willa Cather. The WCPM is supplying the material for the section on Willa Cather in the forthcoming McGraw-Hill eleventh grade literature textbook.

Monique Deschaux, a student in France, is receiving WCPM research materials for a "Diplome d'Etudes superieures" on the novels of Willa Cather. University of Nebraska students are making frequent visits to the WCPM while preparing their television documentary based on the writing of Willa Cather. WCPM President Mildred R. Bennett is planning for April a short lecture tour in southern California.

. . . New Publications . . .

The University of Nebraska Press has embarked on the formidable task of collecting and reprinting all the important work done by Willa Cather from 1892 through 1912. These are the years prior to the publication of O PIONEERS! the immortal work which first brought her fame.

Eight books, written either by Cather or by scholars and critics who have studied her art, are already off the presses or are planned by the end of 1966.

According to Virginia Faulkner, editor of the University Press and member of WCPM board of governors, "To date, critical writing on Willa Cather has taken into account only a very small percentage of the work she did in the first two decades of her professional career. Only now, nearly 20 years after Willa Cather's death, are we really beginning to understand and appreciate the extent of her achievement."

Cather books now available include APRIL TWILIGHTS (1903) by Willa Cather with an essay by WCPM board member Bernice Slote; WILLA CATHER, A MEMOIR by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant; and THE WORLD OF WILLA CATHER by Mildred R. Bennett, president of the WCPM.

Now on the presses is Mrs. Bennett's new book, WILLA CATHER'S COLLECTED SHORT FICTION, 1892-1912, which will be out in July. This anthology which might be subtitled "The Education of a Classic American Author" contains a number of Cather stories which themselves are entitled to a permanent place on American book shelves. Already the book is attracting a great deal of attention both here and abroad, and inquiries about foreign rights have been received from both England and Germany. Royalties from all editions of Mrs. Bennett's book will go to the WCPM.

The University of Pittsburgh Press is making plans to publish a book dealing with Willa Cather's years in Pittsburgh which is being written by Mrs. Herbert F. Byrne.

. . . WCPM Newsletter . . .

Number 1, Volume 1 of the WCPM Newsletter was a two-page, mimeographed affair; 500 copies, addressed and stamped by hand, were mailed out in the summer of 1957. The enthusiastic response to that first experiment made the Newsletter a regular part of the WCPM. Since then the number of you receiving the Newsletter has multiplied ten-fold. As the financial support has increased, the format as well as printing and mailing methods have improved. Now twice each year 5,000 copies of the Newsletter are printed, processed by the WCPM's address-o-graph machine, and mailed all over the world by means of the WCPM'S postal permit.

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The tenth anniversary of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial will be celebrated May 8 in conjunction with the annual WCPM Spring Conference. Festivities have been planned for the entire weekend beginning Friday evening with the board of governors meeting and culminating with the Conference Banquet Saturday evening. President of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, Val Peterson, has accepted the invitation to speak at the Conference Banquet. Additional speakers on the program include Ron Hull, program director for

the University of Nebraska television station, KUON TV.

Make your dinner reservations now by means of the enclosed envelope and plan to spend as much of the weekend as possible in Red Cloud. Whether you are a longtime WCPM member or are hearing about the WCPM for the first time, you are cordially invited to participate in this milestone celebration—the Tenth Anniversary of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

FUTURE EVENT

An outstanding cultural event scheduled by the WCPM for early next fall will be an appearance in Red Cloud by poet John G. Neihardt.

When Dr. Neihardt was here in 1962 he related his association with Willa Cather, his contemporary and fellow Nebraska writer. Though they shared a common heritage, their paths did not cross until both had achieved fame. The two young writers first met

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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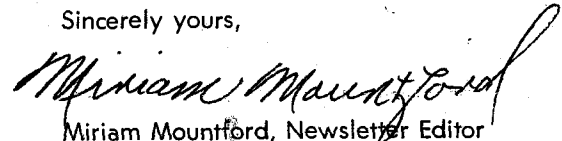
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when Willa Cather was editor of McClure's Magazine.

Later both received many honors. In 1917 Willa Cather and John Neihardt received honorary doctor's degrees from the University of Nebraska along with General John Pershing and President Theodore Roosevelt. Their association and correspondence continued until Miss Cather's death in 1947.

In 1962 at the dedication of the WCPM Museum and Archives, John G. Neihardt paid tribute to his friend, "here where so many of the people of the living world she built in story moved briefly in the flesh, . . . it is for us, the living, and for the living who shall follow us, generation after generation, that we set this Willa Cather Memorial against the flowing years, lest we forget the precious heritage that is ours through her."

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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