

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME VII
NUMBER 1

Red Cloud, Nebraska

PROGRESS REPORT AIMS OF THE W. C. P. M.

WALKING PLOWS TO MARK MEMORABLE SETTINGS

Aim

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

A forgotten plow, magnified to heroic size by the horizontal rays, stood out against the disk of setting sun—"black against the molten red; a picture writing on the sun." This scene in MY ANTONIA is one of the most memorable in Willa Cather's writing. The plow against the sun, Willa Cather's symbol of the greatness of the pioneer, is at the same time symbolic of the magnificence of Willa Cather's art—a fitting emblem for her Memorial.

The search is going on for 20 walking-plows like the one in MY ANTONIA. As these relics of a faded era are discovered, they will be fitted with new handles, refurbished, and set in concrete to mark permanently the memorable scenes that Willa Cather painted with her enduring artistry of words—the crossroads grave of Antonia's father, the tall house on the divide where the boy who was ONE OF OURS grew up, the hill-top cottonwood grove where the LOST LADY'S house stood. A plow will be placed at each of these sites and all the others along the 65 mile route through Webster County where Willa Cather's stories took place. The first is in the process of being erected now. As funds are available for installation, each plow will take its stand beneath the prairie sun in Cather Country.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Aim

To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial in the form of art and literary scholarships.

Again this year the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial will award a scholarship to a high school senior. The award will go to the student who has written the best essay on the subject, O PIONEERS!, MY ANTONIA, and THE SONG OF THE LARK as interpretations of early Nebraska life.

At Hastings College a \$100 Willa Cather Scholarship will be awarded to a senior in the English Department. Dr. Frank S. Hewitt of Austin College, Texas, who is the sponsor of this Willa Cather scholarship, reports that Miss Jean Benner, the first person to receive this award, has completed her Master's thesis on Willa Cather at the University of Arkansas and is now teaching English at Northwest Missouri State College.

WILLA CATHER MUSEUM

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.

. . . . **New Displays**

The dedication of the Willa Cather Museum by John G. Neihardt made the spring of 1962 a milestone in the life of the Memorial. Next month marks the first anniversary of the opening of the display area of the four and a half story Museum to the public.

Newly installed in this area is the fifth of the series of miniature dioramas. In this kitchen scene from ONE OF OURS, Mrs. Wheeler is at the window watching Claude and Ernest coming home at dusk. The artist, Dorothy Hawkins, is now working on a sod house scene from O PIONEERS! which she hopes to finish by the time the Museum opens June 1 for the 1963 summer season.

. . . . **New Equipment**

Mrs. Jennie Miner Reiher reports the complete success of the \$1,080 project which she originated—obtaining for the Museum an Automatic Selectroslide Projector. Mrs. Reiher has ordered the machine, and it will be installed as soon as possible.

This relatively new electronic device, which is be-

ing used so successfully in leading museums, produces tailor-made programs of slides with commentary and background music. Because it is capable of producing an unlimited number of programs of infinite variety, this versatile machine will be an invaluable benefit to the purpose of the Museum, telling the story of Willa Cather.

. . . Renovation Progress . . .

Last year top priority was given to making two massive vaults completely fireproof and theftproof to ensure the safety of irreplaceable artifacts, papers and books. The vaults also contain the microfilms and photostats of these items. In this form valuable information is easily filed and readily available for study while the originals are protected from excessive handling.

During the winter our reconstruction team, William Leaverton and C. B. Atkinson, worked on the upper floors rebuilding the rooms where interior scenes from various Cather stories will be reproduced with authentic furnishings and wax figures. The narrow staircase has been extended upward to reach a new room built in the pointed tower. This lofty space with its queer slanted ceilings will contain a scene from THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE. Approximately \$150.00 is needed to complete the plastering, painting, and papering of the "Professor's Attic" and make it ready for furnishing. Construction work in A LOST LADY'S room off the first landing is even nearer completion.

Outside the building, the upper side sections are ready to be painted with the Memorial emblem and Museum sign.

. . . Response to Appeal for Help . . .

Many years ago when Willa Cather was gathering material for DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP, she remarked, "Why should historical research demand so much traveling? Why, oh, why, isn't all this Western historical material gathered in one central research center?"

Students of Willa Cather are faced with the same problem. One of the major efforts of the Memorial is to provide just such a central Willa Cather research center. In the Fall Newsletter we asked for your help with this project of finding materials and artifacts that tell the story of Willa Cather. Here are some of the results of that request:

Ben Stinchfield, Trustee and Publicity Director of Nordica Memorial Assoc., Inc. of Farmington, Maine, discovered a number of old magazines containing early Cather material as well as Gertrude Hall's **Wagnerian Romances** with the introduction by Willa Cather. Mr. Stinchfield has presented all of this material to the Memorial.

Miss Josephine Frisbie of Omaha has given the Memorial her personal letters from Willa Cather.

Mrs. Irene Miner Weisz of Chicago has added her collection of letters written by Willa Cather to Mark Twain's kinsman, Cyril Clemens. Mrs. Weisz has also contributed recordings of the music that is such an important part of the story of LUCY GAYHEART. This is the beginning of a collection of Cather "background music" Mrs. Weisz is gathering for the Memorial.

Professor Floyd Zulli of New York University, well known for his Sunrise Semester and for his weekly CBS broadcast, has made the Memorial's collection of foreign editions considerably larger by giving all of the new British editions of Cather. Professor Zulli is to be commended for his contribution to the sizeable project of gathering together all the foreign editions and translations of Willa Cather's works.

Several years ago Dr. Otakar Odlozilik of the University of Pennsylvania gave the Memorial his book about Willa Cather published in Czechoslovakian, SKETCHES FROM TWO WORLDS. The University of Pittsburgh Press has donated its translation of Dr. Odlozilik's book to the Memorial.

INTEREST IN WILLA CATHER

Aim

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

. . . Memorial Roots Grow Deeper and Wider . . .

The volume of correspondence to the Memorial grew another ten percent in 1962 and is of increasingly varied nature as news of the Memorial spreads to the far corners of the world and reaches all kinds of people.

From the stream of letters and the clippings and articles from newspapers and magazines coming in, we find that a wider variety of writers are choosing Willa Cather and the Memorial for a subject. Poets have joined the ranks along with scholars, authors, and reporters. One of these poems, "Willa Cather's Nebraska," by Sanford Sternlicht appeared in the New York **Times**.

The type of publications carrying these stories is also increasingly varied. The popularity of the subject has spread well beyond literary and educational circles to include most of the leading newspapers and magazines. The coming tourist season will add yet another type, travel publications. News of the Memorial will appear in the new Bell Telephone publication and will be spread internationally by the new Pan American World Airways travel brochure and by the 281 Continental Highway Map, the Alaska to Central America route through Red Cloud.

The staff is keeping up with student requests for information, material, and literature as well as the budget will allow. In turn these students are perpetuating an interest in Willa Cather in their own way. For example, a letter came from Miss Irma Schmitz who carried her interest in Willa Cather home to Germany after her visit here last spring when she was an exchange student at Norton, Kansas.

We are especially happy to have correspondence which includes suggestions and ideas. Some solve an immediate problem and are used promptly. Some are excellent for-the-future material for the "Ideas" file. All are extremely welcome, as are your opinions and criticisms.

You are also urged to join in the search for materials. Nothing is too small to lack significance. One newspaper clipping added to many others tells a story; or it may offer a clue to a whole new story. One dog-eared volume may complete a set. One faded negative may be just the thing that a search by hundreds of others failed to uncover.

Willa Cather traveled all over the world, and everywhere she went she left her mark. Only with all of us working together through the Memorial can we gather the pieces, large and small, and fit them into the whole picture of Willa Cather.

Girl Scouts of America

For a number of years, Willa Cather has been a favorite of the Girl Scouts, and the Museum has been a popular place for them to volunteer their services. Now as a result of the efforts of Mrs. Bliss Tanner, who conceived the idea and initiated the necessary action, National Headquarters has approved a Willa Cather Merit Badge. This month the Senior Scouts of Troop 161 were the first to be awarded this new badge. To earn it the girls fulfilled ten requirements including a thorough study of Willa Cather as well as acquaintance with the Museum by serving in various ways. They have set a high standard for future Girl Scouts.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Mrs. Tanner whose enthusiasm has directed the girls to a profitable and lasting interest. To the Girl Scouts of America for approving the Willa Cather Merit Badge, the only one of its kind, our congratulations.

President's Activities

WCPM President Mildred R. Bennett has just returned from three weeks in the East. Though it was a personal trip, Mrs. Bennett took time for Memorial business and public relations along the way. She spoke to the Faculty Wives Book Club of Columbia Union College in Washington, D. C., called on the Nebraska Congressional Delegation, and conferred with members of the press. In New York she met with WCPM Board of Governors David Scherman and John March and toured the Metropolitan Opera House which figures so prominently in SONG OF THE LARK. On Long Island, Mrs. Bennett visited again with Willa Cather's close friend, Mrs. George Seibel.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Progress in 1962

The annual financial statement and progress report to the Board of Governors shows a fine increase in memberships and individual donations from a far greater number of areas than ever before. On the other hand the report shows foundation support dropped from \$9,000 the previous year to \$1,000 in 1962 resulting in a decline in total income. The only institutional donation came from the Eugene C. Eppley Foundation.

The largest part of the financial support of the Memorial, a total of \$7,677.21, came from your individual contributions. The size of the contributions remained constant, but the number of contributors in-

creased dramatically. Your donation along with all the others like it accounted for the progress of the Memorial in 1962. This firm and loyal belief in the Memorial and its Aims is in itself evidence of progress.

Foundation support is still earnestly solicited. The advantage of having large sums of money to accelerate the development of the Memorial's aims is obvious. You can be of invaluable assistance to the Board of Governors by putting us in touch with educational and cultural foundation donors and by using your enthusiasm in the field of public relations.

Plans for the Future

A number of projects are past the planning stage yet can go no further because of lack of funds:

- Portrait Bust of Willa Cather
- Oil Portrait of Willa Cather
- Central Heating and air conditioning system for Museum
- Lower floor display area of Museum
 - Completion of ceiling
 - Tile floor covering
 - Uniform glass display cases
- Tower portion of Museum building
 - Fire-escape system
 - Electrical wiring
 - Completion of construction of 4 rooms for life-sized scenes from Cather stories
 - Furnishings for these scenes
 - Wax-figures for these scenes
- Placing 20 walking-plow markers

SPRING ACTIVITIES

Tours

On April 16 student tours of the Museum, of Willa Cather's Red Cloud, and of Willa Cather Country will begin.

Because of Willa Cather's writing, Red Cloud ranks as one of the best known small towns in the United States and Webster County as one of the best known areas. Though the town has different names in her various Nebraska stories, the streets and the buildings and the houses that Willa Cather wrote about are here for you to see. The longer tour of Webster County is a 65 mile trip over the rolling prairie and along the Republican River with brief stops at sights that figure in Willa Cather's books.

Club groups as well as students are invited to take advantage of these conducted tours. There is no charge. The only requirement is that the arrangements be made in advance.

The Museum will be open from two to four every afternoon during the summer, June 1 through September 1. It is open any other time by appointment.

Annual Conference

The Spring Conference of the WCPM has come to be the most inspirational event of the year. A contagious enthusiasm is generated by the unusual gathering of writers, artists, educators, historians, and scholars, as well as the members and friends of the Memorial.

This year's Conference is taking on an international flavor. One of the principal banquet speakers will be Miss Mieka Hamaya of Japan who is doing research at the Memorial Archives for her Doctor's dissertation on Willa Cather at the University of Nebraska. Another speaker will be Miss Bernice Slote, Professor of English at the University of Nebraska, distinguished poet, and author of the Introduction for the new edition of Willa Cather's APRIL TWILIGHTS.

You are cordially invited to join the Board of Governors, the members, and friends of the Memorial in Red Cloud for the Spring Conference the weekend of April 27 and 28. Send your reservations for the banquet,

Saturday evening, April 27, and your requests for overnight accommodations in the enclosed envelope by April 18.

The envelope will also remind you that the progress of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial depends upon your financial support. Your one dollar contributions take care of a large part of the operational expenditures. As you are making your \$5.00 annual payment toward \$75 Life Membership, interest your friends in becoming W.C.P.M. members.

Thank you for your interest, for your support, for your participation. Everything that you are doing strengthens the organization and hastens its progress in fulfilling the four aims.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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Sincerely yours,

Miriam Mountford
 Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor
 WILLA CATHER PIONEER MEMORIAL

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

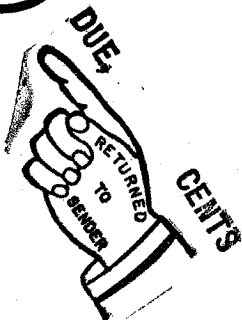
... by becoming a member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP \$75.00
 SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP . . \$ 5.00 Annually

- By contributing to 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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