

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation

VOLUME XVIII, Number 3

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA



WILLA CATHER MEMORIAL PRAIRIE, WEBSTER COUNTY, NEBRASKA—Photo courtesy of Lucia Woods.

WILLA CATHER MEMORIAL PRAIRIE

Nearly a section of native grassland in rolling hills overlooking the Republican River Valley five miles south of Red Cloud is to be known as the "Willa Cather Memorial Prairie."

The 610-acre tract was purchased in August by the Nature Conservancy, the nation's leading land conservation organization, with funds provided by the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Chicago, Illinois.

A long-time active supporter of the Willa Cather Memorial, the Woods Fund since 1965 has made grants to restore and maintain the Cather home and other buildings prominent in Cather's novels.

A spokesman for the Fund said: "We believe it is important that a major tract of virgin prairie be preserved to compliment the restored landmarks which were such a part of Willa Cather's life and writing. This prairie near Red Cloud, in the heart of Catherland, ideally suits this purpose."

The vast prairies — the sea of tall grasses and ever-changing wild flowers — play a central role in Willa Cather's writing. Most of these prairies have been plowed and converted to cropland so that only a remnant now remains.

On making the purchase announcement, Geoffrey S. Barnard, Regional Vice President of the Nature Con-

servancy said: "The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, because of its beauty, accessibility, and the scarcity of native prairie in Webster County, will become more and more priceless as the years pass. This and future generations will be able to see, enjoy, and understand the prairie heritage of the early pioneers."

The grant of \$218,000 covers purchase of the prairie and creates a permanent endowment fund for continuing management and maintenance and study of this unique area and finances the erection and maintenance of a commemorative marker explaining the main features of this beautiful expanse of grassland, the "Willa Cather Memorial Prairie."

CATHER TRIBUTE ON NATIONAL TV

"A Menuhin Tribute to Willa Cather" featuring a concert by world famous violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, and his sisters, pianists Hephzibah and Yaltah Menuhin, was broadcast in August by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) through its 246 affiliates. In addition to performances by the Menuhins with the University of Nebraska Symphony Orchestra conducted by Emanuel Wishnow, the program included "Meet Willa Cather" narrated by Bernice Sote with selected pictures from **Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoire** and an informal interview of the Menuhins with Dr. Robert Knoll.

The Menuhins chatted about many things in the de-

20th ANNIVERSARY

Theme of the May 3, 1975, Twentieth Anniversary WCPM Annual Spring Conference is **Obscure Destinies**, the collection of Willa Cather's short stories with Red Cloud - Webster County settings, "Neighbour Rosicky," "Old Mrs. Harris," and "Two Friends."

Because **Obscure Destinies** has gone out of print in the hard bound edition, William A. Koshland, Chairman of the Board, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.—after he was here last fall—arranged to have the book put on the Vintage list for 1974. Mr. Koshland's latest report is the Vintage edition would be ready in August, so it should be available in book stores very soon.

Buy it or check it out of your library and enjoy your reading adventure.

lightful reminiscences of their treasured childhood association with "Aunt Willa" which began when they were introduced to her in Paris by Isabelle McClung in 1927. The Menuhins recalled their frequent visits to Willa Cather's apartment in New York. The comfortable feeling of being loved, her jollity and laughter. Of being accepted as equals with no generation gap. The fun of being introduced to the world of literature by reading together, each taking a part in a Shakespeare play, for instance. Of enjoying literature and art because of Willa Cather's contagious admiration and appreciation for what was right and good. Of becoming aware by way of Willa Cather that music and art and literature do not exist by themselves, are not a world apart, but that great art is rooted in the earth, that it is the quality that matters, not the quantity.

The two-hour program was produced by the Nebraska Educational Television Network, Ron Hull, Director, last year when the Menuhins came to Nebraska to pay tribute to Willa Cather with their music on the anniversary of her 100th birthday, December 7, 1973. Some of you were present at that memorable concert; now many, many of you have had the opportunity to enjoy it because of this first program devoted entirely to Cather to be broadcast nationally.

MEMORIAL MEMBERS AT WORK

Jennie Miner Reiher, one of the founders of the WCPM and long-time recorder of Cather family history, has made available to the Memorial letters saved by her mother, Retta Ayre Miner (Willa Cather's cousin).

During the summer of 1895, Mrs. William Cather (Willa's grandmother) took her granddaughter, Retta, back to Frederick County, Virginia, to visit her relatives and childhood home. These 23 letters were received by Retta and her grandmother Cather while they were in Virginia. The letters were written by members of the Cather families who had left Virginia and pioneered settlement of Webster County and Red Cloud between 1873 and 1883—the large family circle that surrounded Willa Cather.

Active WCPM worker, Paul D. Riley, Nebraska Historical Society Research Associate, edited and wrote the introduction to "Cather Family Letters" for the Winter, 1973, NEBRASKA HISTORY. In the same issue is WCPM President Mildred R. Bennett's article, "What Happened to the Rest of the Charles Cather Family?" and "Cather Post Office" by Charles Wesley Cowley.

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Don Connors of Downey, California, comes for a week or so at least once a year to put the shoulder to the wheel — to lend a hand and knowledge wherever help is needed in the Museum and other Memorial buildings as well as to various Memorial projects. Very often Don brings something with him. His 1974 addition to the Museum display in the east room is a framed mini-history, as he calls it, of the Willa Cather Commemorative Stamp and the first day of issue activities in Red Cloud, September 20, 1973. Bob Wallis of Harbor City, California, did the lay-out design and framing.

Like many of you who are teachers, Mr. Connors is directly responsible for many of our Cather Memorial visitors who are motivated by their classroom study of Willa Cather to search-out Red Cloud and Catherland during their travels around the country.

On the remote, beautiful island of Grand Manan in the Bay of Fundy, Willa Cather had a cottage where she found the solitude for writing. In recent years Willa Cather's niece and her husband, Dr. and Mrs. Philip Southwick, Pittsburgh, have restored that cottage.

This summer Mr. and Mrs. John Mamer, Minneapolis, included a stop on the island during their vacation trip in search of scenes from Cather's writing.

Other visitors were Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner returning to the University of Nebraska from Quebec and scenes from SHADOWS ON THE ROCK. Miss Faulkner and Dr. Southwick retraced Henry Grenfell's walk described in one of Willa Cather's last stories, "Before Breakfast." It turned out to be quite a hike. Evidently Willa Cather, as she often did, combined the scenes and telescoped the distance for Henry's walk through the spruce woods to the sea.

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Last winter, sparked by the enthusiasm of Jeanne Shaffer, a group of Cather admirers in Pittsburgh began meeting together informally and carrying out Cather activities in the city. About their May meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Mertz (formerly the Judge McClung house where Willa Cather lived and wrote when she was in Pittsburgh), Mrs. Shaffer wrote: "Phil Southwick showed his pictures of Grand Manan and I showed the slides I took in Lincoln and Red Cloud and a few of the grave site in Jaffrey . . . It was a great occasion being in that house showing those pictures. Very exciting!"

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Ellen Moers, literary historian in New York, was one of the speakers along with Leo Gurko at the centennial tribute to Willa Cather organized in February by Ruth Prigozy at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.

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The College of New Rochelle, New York, held a three-day symposium during April, "Willa Cather Today: The Presence of Her Vision," under the chairmanship of the Rev. Msgr. William Noe Field, Seton Hall University, and John Devlin, Fordham University. Speakers who are WCPM members were: David Stouck, Simon Fraser University; Richard Giannone, Fordham University; William Curtin, University of Connecticut; John J. Murphy, Merrimack College; John Hinz, Richmond College; and Lucia Woods, photographer.

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Evelyn Helmick, University of Miami, and Dalma Brunauer, Clarkson College of Technology, Potsdam, New York, are organizing another Willa Cather seminar in conjunction with the Modern Language Association meeting in New York late in December. A number of other WCPM members will be participants. The seminar will be similar to the one on Cather held by the MLA in Chicago last December.

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Richard F. Fleck is teaching a graduate-level seminar devoted entirely to Willa Cather this semester at the University of Wyoming.

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In June during her Cather research trip to England, Patricia Lee Yongue, University of Houston, was the guest of writer and friend of Willa Cather, Stephen

Tennant, in Wiltshire, where she studied his private collection of Willa Cather's letters. Miss Yongue was joined for a few days by Lucia Woods who reports the possibility of a Willa Cather photo exhibition in London some time in 1975.

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Sister Lucy Schneider, Marymount College (Kansas), contributed to the WCPM archives all of her published works on Cather.

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When Willa Cather wrote about struggling pioneers she was writing about real people, and theirs is a continuing story being lived by real people. The Nebraska Pioneer Farm Award was presented at the Webster County Fair in August to descendants of families who started a century of farm ownership when Webster County was first settled. Among the recipients is the grandson of Mr. and Mrs. George P. Cather, who were Willa Cather's uncle and aunt, the "Whealers" of *One of Ours*; Mrs. Cather, Willa's beloved Aunt Franc, appears again in "A Wagner Matinee." Their grandson and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Carol Lindgren, continue to farm the original 400 acres.

Other award winners were Mr. and Mrs. Carrol Turner who farm the land homesteaded in 1874 by the Turner family. Mrs. Turner is the granddaughter of the pioneer woman who is Willa Cather's *My Antonia*; her grandfather is "Neighbour Rosicky," one of the short stories in *Obscure Destinies*.

THE MEMORIAL AT WORK

During the course of a year the Memorial not only helps the hundreds of students who come to Red Cloud, but we also send out study aids and information in reply to the many, many requests that come through the mail. Here is an interesting one:

Mrs. Luisa Castelli of Bergamo, Italy, asked the Memorial for information to assist her with the thesis she is doing on Willa Cather. She learned about the Cather Memorial in Red Cloud from the March, 1974, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC containing the article, "Nebraska—The Good Life." In her August 5 letter Mrs. Castelli said, "As a matter of fact I came to love this part of the States through Miss W. Cather's works." She added, "I am writing you only now, because I have received my NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC very late due to the strike of our Post Office."

Incidentally, Robert P. Jordan, author of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC article, reprinted recently by READER'S DIGEST, reports the number of readers worldwide would be close to 75 million.

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Miss Josephine Frisbie and Mrs. W. D. Van Meter prepared a MY ANTONIA table display for the WCPM that was shown at the Flaming Festival in Omaha. The Flaming Festival is a fund raising event for the Omaha Home for Girls, and this year thirty exhibitors displayed unique and imaginative table settings. The WCPM table was one of several from historical museums throughout Nebraska and Iowa. The event was at Peony Park Ballroom, Sept. 19, and was sponsored by the Omaha Church Women United.

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Four television stations and 14 radio stations in Nebraska and Kansas are currently broadcasting in their public service time slots a brief but informative story on Willa Cather and the Cather Memorial.

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

WORLD TOPICS YEAR BOOK, 1974, a pictorial survey of important news and cultural events of 1973, with a feature on Willa Cather and centennial events honoring her was sent to the WCPM by Marilyn Robb Trier, Editor.

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial is among the TREASURES OF AMERICA, the 1974 Reader's Digest Association big, beautiful illustrated guide.

In the Summer 1974 PRAIRIE SCHOONER, the University of Nebraska literary quarterly, is "Willa Cather: A Portfolio," essays by James E. Miller, Jr., Elizabeth Gates Whaley and L. Brent Bohlke.

"Willa Cather: The Light Behind Her Books," by Margaret Howe Freyberg in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring, 1974, was sent to the WCPM by James R. Mathes.

The May, 1974, issue of the Russian language AMERICA ILLUSTRATED, published for distribution in the Soviet Union by the Press and Publications Service, United States Information Agency, contains "Willa Cather's Pioneer Country" by Anthony Bowman with photographs by Lucia Woods.

THE ART OF WILLA CATHER, Reassessments and Recollections, edited with an introduction by Bernice Slote, University of Nebraska Press, contains the main addresses and papers presented at an international seminar on Willa Cather held at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as part of the Willa Cather Centennial Festival. Included are addresses by two Pulitzer Prize winners, Leon Edel and Eudora Welty, by the distinguished British historian Marcus Cunliffe, and by Alfred A. Knopf, Miss Cather's friend and publisher for more than a quarter of a century. Among other contributors are James E. Woodress, J. M. Gervaud (France), Donald Sutherland, Aldo Celli (Italy), Hiroko Sato (Japan), and James E. Miller, Jr.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

One member, Ella C. Lewis, in California, is so proud of her association with the Cather Memorial that she writes: ". . . historical societies are springing up everywhere trying to 'save what is left'—yet you had the foresight to do this before it became the 'Vogue'."

We know you are proud, too, and concerned about maintaining and improving the nearly 20 years of efforts to fulfill the aims of the Memorial.

In 1955, the dedicated people who founded the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial had \$160 and a vision of what must be done to preserve Willa Cather landmarks. Last year for the six buildings owned by the WCPM the maintenance cost alone was more than \$6,500.

In 1955 the founders dreamed of having a Cather collection, a place to put it and a way for it to be studied and enjoyed. Last year \$10,000 was spent making the wealth of Cather resources and memorabilia available—to be used and enjoyed: operating the Museum, the archives, the research files, the tours; printing the Newsletter, the study materials, and keeping in touch with Cather enthusiasts around the world.

This total, \$16,500, was the bare minimum necessary to maintain what we have—to stay in one place—last year. This year, 1974, prices have gone up and that minimum will be larger.

Maintaining what we have is imperative. Making improvements is important also—in the buildings, in the area of study and research, in the tour system, in the Museum operation—all of these, and more, are in need of additions and improvements. Additional Cather landmarks need attention. Right now we have a chance to save the Antonia farmhouse and fruit cellar—if? and the ONE OF OURS setting, the "Wheeler" house, is in danger of slipping out or reach.

If the Willa Cather Memorial is to continue as an active, independent organization, we must increase

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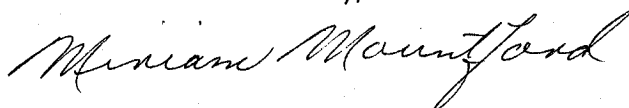
the number of members. Please join in a membership campaign during the few months remaining before the organization reaches its twentieth anniversary.

First, renew your own membership in the highest financial bracket you can manage. Then, influence a friend to become a member. Convince two or three others to join. Give memberships as Christmas gifts, as birthday presents, as a thank you remembrance.

And think about this: are you really a dues-paying member? or does writing that check slip your mind?

Please, make the effort. Please, make good use of the enclosed envelope. Don't let the WCPM slip out of existence by neglect!

Sincerely,



YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

- By being a Cather Memorial Member and financial contributor:

BENEFACTOR \$1,000 and over

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Patron	\$100.00
Sustaining	25.00
Husband and wife	15.00
Individual	10.00
Newsletter subscriber	5.00
Student	3.00

- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

All memberships include a subscription to the Newsletter; all except Newsletter subscribers and student memberships have free admission to restored buildings.

Special group memberships (such as clubs or businesses) are available. Write to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for details.

LARGER DONATIONS AND BEQUESTS (DELAYED GIVING) TO THE MEMORIAL ARE WELCOME. (Consult your attorney for advice on your particular form of legacy.)

ALL MEMBERSHIPS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND BEQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

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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