



*“It was over flat lands like this, stretching out to drink the sun, that the larks sang—and one’s heart sang there, too.”*

THE WILLA CATHER FOUNDATION

2013 Annual Report

## Preserving Our Past, Pioneering Our Future

The Willa Cather Foundation was founded as the “Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial” in 1955 through the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers led by Mildred R. Bennett, Cather’s first biographer.

Through our early focus on preservation of historic sites related to Cather’s life and work, we acquired and restored Cather’s childhood home, the Farmers’ and Merchants’ Bank, the Burlington Depot, St. Juliana Catholic Church, Grace Episcopal Church, and the Pavelka Farmstead.

In 1978, we deeded these properties and related collections to the Nebraska State Historical Society and began to focus more strongly on our educational mission. But with time our preservation work resumed; through outreach and the generosity of our extended family of supporters, we acquired the Harling House, the First Baptist Church, the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, and the Cather Second Home. And of course, the Red Cloud Opera House, which Cather visited frequently in her youth and is now our home.



*Above, clockwise:  
The Farmers’ and Merchants’ Bank, featured in A Lost Lady; Cather’s childhood home, featured in The Song of the Lark and other works; The Burlington Depot, a setting in numerous Cather works.*

*Prairie photograph on the cover by Jorn Olsen.*

Today, a partnership with the Nebraska State Historical Society enables us to continue caring for the historic properties initially amassed by our founders as well as our later acquisitions. In addition to providing tours and publishing our scholarly newsletter, we continue the delicate preservation of historic sites and collections. We sponsor educational conferences and seminars, grant scholarships, and maintain a vibrant regional arts center. We have grown into a unique organization dedicated to literature, arts and the humanities, with diverse activities serving more than 70,000 people annually.



*Left, Mildred Bennett in Cather’s room in her childhood home prior to its restoration. Above, clockwise from top: one of the Cather windows in Grace Episcopal Church; St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church; the Harling House, and the Pavelka Farmstead, both featured in My Ántonia.*

## A Center for the Arts

The Red Cloud Opera House played an important role in the creative development of the young Willa Cather. She performed on its stage and enjoyed the frequent theatrical productions that toured through Red Cloud; her interest in the arts was spurred by the experiences she had here in her youth.

“Half a dozen times during each winter . . . a traveling stock company settled down at the local hotel and thrilled and entertained us for a week,” she would write in a letter published in 1929 in the *Omaha World-Herald*. When she was fourteen, she and her friends presented *Beauty and the Beast* from the Opera House stage. And later, in 1890, she gave her high school valedictory oration here.

In the same 1929 letter Cather wrote, “When I go about among little Nebraska towns . . . the thing I miss most is the opera house. No number of filling stations or moving picture theatres can console me for the loss of the opera house.” The Red Cloud Opera House was dark for over 80 years, until restoration by the Cather Foundation in 2003 brought new life to the old building. Today, we proudly use this restored facility to create rich educational and cultural experiences for our many visitors, from near and far.

In 2013 our Opera House began its 11th season of events in the Opera House gallery and on its stage.



*Left: Cather (in top hat) in the cast of Beauty and the Beast. At top: scenes from Our Lives, Our Stories: America's Greatest Generation, a special traveling exhibit organized by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Above: The Red Cloud Opera House.*

## A Mission to Educate and Inspire

Willa Cather said that *O Pioneers!* marked “the first time I walked off on my own feet— everything before was half real and half an imitation of writers whom I admired.” Her novel of life on the Nebraska frontier established her reputation and marked a turning point in her artistic development. In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the novel’s publication and its being named the 2013 “One Book One Nebraska” selection, we were proud to help inspire readers young and old to discover (or rediscover) the novel. Thousands of students and readers nationwide used our enrichment materials and discussion guides to supplement their reading of this memorable work.

2013 marked the 58th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference and the 14th biennial International Cather Seminar. By enabling generations of Cather enthusiasts and scholars to immerse themselves in her work and life and influences, these popular events have greatly expanded the ranks of Cather readers and deepened their understanding of her work.

“Fortunate Country: *O Pioneers!* and the Prairie Homestead Legacy” was the theme of the 2013 Spring Conference. Great Plains author Dan O’Brien, Nebraska-born filmmaker Charles Fairbanks, and cowboy entertainer and chuck wagon cook Kent Rollins headlined the event.

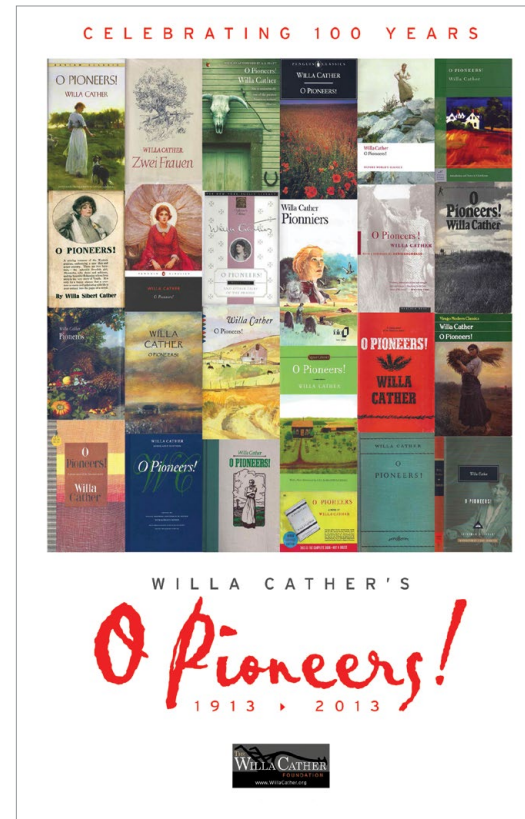
In partnership with Northern Arizona University, we hosted “Willa Cather: Canyon, Rock, and Mesa Country,” the 2013 International Seminar in Flagstaff, Arizona. Over 70 papers were presented by scholars representing 26 states and seven countries. The event included a memorable pilgrimage to Walnut Canyon National Monument (Panther Canyon in *The Song of the Lark*). Christian E. Downum, Professor of Anthropology at Northern Arizona University and Walnut Canyon specialist was the keynote speaker.



The Cather Prairie was a popular destination for Spring Conference participants, who also enjoyed the bluegrass music of MAW, a string band out of Lawrence, Kansas. Conference keynoter was popular Great Plains author and rancher Dan O’Brien.

## Recognizing Young Scholars

Since 1987, we have awarded 36 scholarships totaling more than \$147,500 through the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship program. 2013 marked this scholarship’s 27th anniversary. We were also honored in 2013 to establish a new scholarship fund through the generosity of our long-time friend, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner. The scholarship established in her name honors the legacy of her grandmother, Anna Sadilek Pavelka, prototype for Antonia Shimerda Cuzak in Cather’s novel *My Antonia*. Our four talented scholarship recipients shared their original essays at an award presentation during our Spring Conference, now a longstanding tradition.

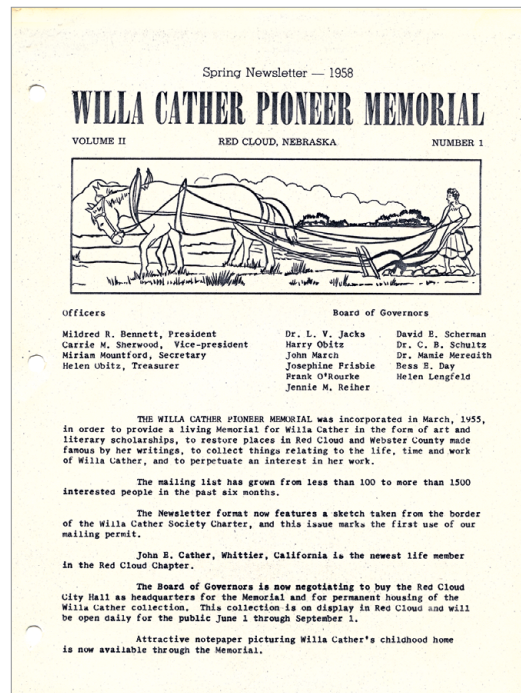
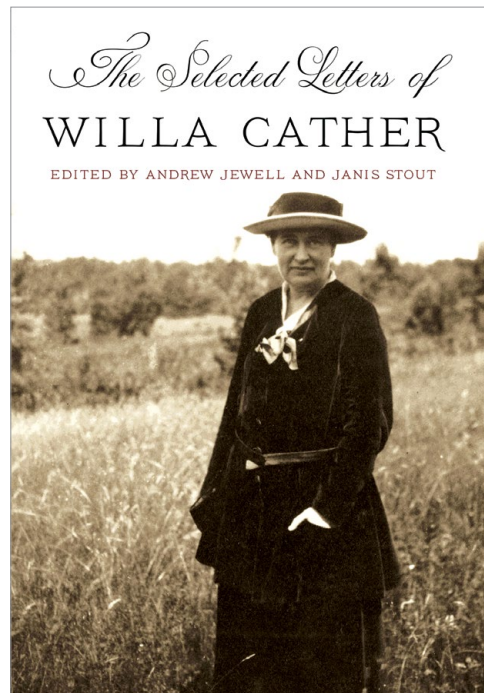


Above: Antonette Willa Skupa Turner—“Toni” to her many devoted friends—presented the first annual scholarship honoring her grandmother, Anna Sadilek Pavelka, to Jordie Theye of Diller-Odell High School.

## Spreading the Word

What began in 1957 as a simple newsletter to highlight Cather Foundation happenings has grown into an informative and respected journal combining scholarly work and Foundation news, allowing our members to encounter thoughtful explorations of Cather and updates on Foundation activities. The *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* is published three times annually and distributed to Foundation members.

Volume 56.2, published in spring 2013, was an extraordinary issue commemorating a special and long-awaited moment in Cather studies: the April 2013 publication by Cather's chosen publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, of a volume of her letters, edited by Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout. In this issue, Stout and Jewell told the intimate story of their work on this new book and shared their personal favorites among the letters they chose for publication. In addition, invited guests including Cather family members, scholars, and Foundation representatives each chose a favorite Cather letter and described why they found that letter particularly revealing and important. Together, the choices and commentary of our contributors offered a delicious sampling of Cather's letters to help whet appetites for the riches that awaited us in the book that *Time* named one of its top 10 books of 2013, *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*.



Then and now: An early edition of the Foundation's newsletter, left, and our Spring 2013 edition, above.

## A New Era

Willa Cather’s influence is undeniable; her work endures. A Pulitzer Prize winner, she is one of the greatest 20th century American authors. As appreciation for Cather and her hometown grows, we are creating a state-of-the-art archive, museum and arts center called The National Willa Cather Center.

After several years of careful planning and preparation, we have begun preliminary work on the “Moon Block” building in historic downtown Red Cloud. When restored and joined to the adjacent Red Cloud Opera House, it will become the National Willa Cather Center—a world-class venue that will celebrate Cather’s life and legacy and anchor a vital center for exploration of the arts and humanities. It will bring travelers, students, and economic development to south-central Nebraska for years to come, and will foster new scholarship and an array of public educational initiatives. The facility’s focus will be a museum, archive and a collection space. The building will also include main-street retail spaces as well as apartments for visitors who come from across the globe to experience the world that Cather memorialized in her works.

Documentary filmmaker and lifelong Willa Cather enthusiast Ken Burns is the honorary national chair for our fundraising effort. According to Burns, “The Center will have something for everyone. As an archive and museum, it will become the permanent home to some of Willa Cather’s most personal treasures, items made famous in her stories, and artwork inspired by her vision of the prairie. For scholars, it will be a chance to explore, firsthand, some of her most insightful original works and papers.”

Thanks to the support of nearly 350 foundations and individuals who have invested in the project, we have raised over \$5.9 million of our \$6.7 goal, bringing our capital campaign to 89% complete. Pending completion of the campaign, the final phase of construction could begin as soon as spring 2015 to bring the facility to completion in 2016. We look forward to celebrating the grand-opening—and a new era for the Cather Foundation—with our friends and supporters very soon.



Photo by Cable Risdon

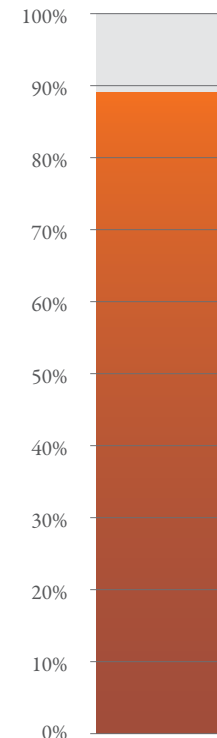
### The National Willa Cather Center



Red Cloud Opera House

The Moon Block

### National Willa Cather Center Capital Campaign



**Goal: \$6,700,000**  
**Raised: \$5,939,402**  
*(as of November 18, 2014)*

## Financial Summary 2013

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2013 and 2012

	2013	2012
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$444,867	\$327,727
Investments	2,338,348	1,364,741
Accrued interest receivable	29	33
Pledges receivable, net	558,196	384,663
Contributions receivable, net	1,124,025	33,020
Assets in charitable remainder trust	511,941	437,197
Bookstore inventory	42,401	41,212
Property and equipment, net	2,655,315	2,382,461
Art and historic structures	181,485	178,985
<b>Total assets</b>	<b><u>\$7,856,607</u></b>	<b><u>\$5,150,039</u></b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Accrued expenses and taxes withheld	\$22,669	\$27,630
Deferred revenue	1,128,765	30,826
Split interest charitable remainder trust	428,282	365,698
Capital lease obligations	10,701	13,758
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b><u>\$1,590,417</u></b>	<b><u>\$437,912</u></b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Unrestricted	\$2,653,215	\$2,289,201
Temporarily restricted	1,565,277	806,590
Permanently restricted	2,047,698	1,616,336
<b>Total net assets</b>	<b><u>6,266,190</u></b>	<b><u>4,712,127</u></b>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b><u>\$7,856,607</u></b>	<b><u>\$5,150,039</u></b>

*The financial statements of the Willa Cather Foundation are audited annually by an independent public accounting firm. A copy of the audited financial statements and the Foundation's tax filing (Form 990) may be obtained by contacting the Foundation's office.*

### STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the years ended December 31, 2013 and 2012

	2013	2012
<b>REVENUE AND SUPPORT</b>		
Contributions and memberships	\$1,686,837	\$821,787
Nebraska State Historical Society appropriations	68,430	70,430
Grants	258,817	361,758
Sales and admissions	99,347	80,173
Rent income	37,188	39,691
Conferences and seminars	88,910	32,003
Change in value of split interest	12,159	3,800
Royalties income	8,097	12,642
Other income	11,713	14,075
Interest and investment gains	124,963	126,709
<b>Total revenue and support</b>	<b><u>\$2,396,461</u></b>	<b><u>\$1,563,068</u></b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>Program</b>		
Cost of sales	\$49,432	\$34,273
Education and scholarships	93,415	26,321
Preservation of sites and collections	15,627	17,252
Historical center operations	145,115	142,587
Opera House and programming	144,459	149,169
Cather prairie operations	19,664	24,844
<b>Supporting</b>		
Management and general	222,072	225,611
Development and fundraising	152,614	153,509
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b><u>\$842,398</u></b>	<b><u>\$773,566</u></b>
<b>INCREASE IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>1,554,063</b>	<b>789,502</b>
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>\$4,712,127</u>	<u>\$3,922,625</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$6,266,190</u>	<u>\$4,712,127</u>

## Support

The following individuals and organizations were donors to the Willa Cather Foundation in 2013. Space does not permit us to list donations under \$50.00, but we are grateful for these contributions. Every gift is important to us.

### \$100,000 and Above

Holland Foundation, Omaha, NE  
Garnet Lewis, Red Cloud, NE  
A descendant of Frank H. Woods, Chicago, IL

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Joanne Berkshire, Omaha, NE  
Mammel Foundation, Omaha, NE  
The LeRoy W. Thom, Jean E. Thom, & T-L Foundation, Hastings, NE  
Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE  
James P. & Angela J. Southwick, Heber City, UT

### \$25,000 to \$49,999

The Theodore G. Baldwin Foundation, Kearney, NE  
Pinnacle Bancorp, Inc., Central City, NE  
Hamann Family Fund, Elkhorn, NE  
Bruce & Gerry Lauritzen, Omaha, NE  
James & Trish Schreiber, Meadow Vista, CA  
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### \$15,000 to \$24,999

Bailey Lauerman, Lincoln, NE  
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Nebraska Arts Council, Omaha, NE  
Paul G. & Annette L. Smith, Omaha, NE  
John A Yost & G. Wade Leak, New York, NY

### \$5,000 to \$9,999

President & Mrs. George W. Bush, Midland, TX  
John W. Carson Foundation, Encino, CA  
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Cather Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE  
Don & Marilyn Deitemeyer, Doniphan, NE  
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## To Our Friends and Supporters

Here we share news of a busy 2013, even as an equally event-filled 2014 is already drawing to a close. We do stay busy. But we cannot miss this opportunity to express our thanks to the many individuals and partners and organizations whose loyalty and support help make our work possible. You fuel our efforts to promote appreciation of Cather's life and works, and preserve the historic settings and archives associated with her timeless writings. Your belief in our work helps us keep the doors open and lights on for future generations—including, we might hope, young writers and artists who might find their own inspiration in the treasures we can share.

2013 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of *O Pioneers!*—not Cather's first novel, but her first great one, and one that marked a turning point in her artistic development and her career. And here at the Cather Foundation we have a sense that we are at our own turning point. We are approaching our 60th anniversary (our first bylaws are dated March 26, 1955); while we look back with pride at what this modest organization has accomplished, we can feel that the dawn of the National Willa Cather Center will mark a new era. 2015 will be a year of heavy construction and new beginnings, and we're hoping you will join us in this new adventure. Come spring, we'll tidy things up for another celebration: the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Song of the Lark*. (Because great art deserves a party.)



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The State of Nebraska owns six Cather-related properties and a number of inventoried artifacts and documents located in Red Cloud. The properties—collectively referred to as the Willa Cather State Historic Site—are jointly preserved by the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Willa Cather Foundation. The Cather Foundation acquired the sites in its earlier years and continues to manage them alongside its own properties.