

NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY

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Visit us online at www.WillaCather.org to browse our bookstore or sign up for our e-Newsletter.

Willa Cather Historic Sites Transferred to the Willa Cather Foundation in January

In a noteworthy historic property transfer, the Willa Cather Foundation has now assumed full ownership of the Willa Cather Historic Sites. This transfer from History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society) returns to local control all state-owned Cather-related sites in Red Cloud and Webster County after several decades of collaborative management.

The properties—all of which are on the National Register of Historic Places—were given to the State of Nebraska in 1978, and History Nebraska has worked cooperatively with the Willa Cather Foundation to operate the buildings since 1994. The sites are open for guided tours year-round and include Willa Cather's Childhood Home, Pavelka Farmstead, Farmers and Merchants Bank, Grace Episcopal Church, St. Juliana Catholic Church, and the Burlington Depot.

Trevor Jones, Director and CEO of History Nebraska, said the transfer will help strengthen Cather's legacy in Nebraska. "We are honored to have cared for these important properties for the last forty years. The Willa Cather Foundation is an excellent organization and by fully controlling this important historic site Willa Cather's important legacy will be shared more extensively nationwide," he said.

"We are grateful to History Nebraska and pleased to accept these important historic buildings," executive director Ashley Olson said of this unprecedented transfer. "Cather's relationship with Red Cloud and its citizens was strong and enduring, so it seems fitting that the Willa Cather Foundation can now work to restore and preserve these historic sites for the benefit of future generations."



The iconic Willa Cather Childhood Home, also a National Historic Landmark, is one of six properties in Red Cloud and Webster County now owned by the Willa Cather Foundation.



Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection Returns to Red Cloud

On February 28, Willa Cather Foundation staff members accepted a special delivery as History Nebraska deaccessioned their Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection. Consisting of approximately eight thousand archival pieces and museum artifacts, much of the collection is made up of items that were donated by Cather family members and acquaintances in our early years and later gifted to the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1978 with the Willa Cather Historic Sites.

Included in the collection is Willa Cather's high school diploma and other objects and ephemera such as the Cather family candle mold and leather cuffs belonging to Willa Cather's cousin, Kyd Clutter. Additional archival items include about two hundred letters written by Cather to friends and family and approximately 1,500 photographs of Cather, her family members, early Red Cloud, and the Cather sites.

The creation of a dedicated archive and museum space at the National Willa Cather Center alongside the growth and development of the Willa Cather Foundation has made it possible for us to once again own and preserve the WCPM Collection and the Willa Cather Historic Sites.

The collections and archives at the National Willa Cather Center make up a large and growing body of artifacts and manuscripts

related to the life and work and times of Willa Cather. We actively seek new donations of materials relating to Cather, her family, her literature and her literary prototypes, and other items that shed light on the period in which she lived and worked. To inquire about donating materials or to make an appointment to research the collections, please contact archivist Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org or 402-746-2653.



Hummer's Mathematical Game and Red Cloud Opera House tickets and coat check. OBJ-4-3560-2889 and 696. Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection. Printed in 1888, Hummer's Mathematical Game features the advertisements of Red Cloud's top businesses. On the reverse, a checkerboard has the names of many Red Cloud children penciled across the spaces. On the reverse of the Opera House tickets are advertisements for Merchant's Gargling Oil, a ubiquitous advertiser around the country between 1833 and 1928.

Willa Cather Statue to Represent Nebraska in National Statuary Hall



Willa Cather will one day be among the one hundred statues representing fifty states in the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

In addition to the symbolic Cather homecoming of properties and collections, it is our great pleasure to share that Willa Cather will be one of two Nebraskans to represent the state in the National Statuary Hall Collection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. This not only signifies Cather's importance to Nebraska but her national literary stature.

As a result of the passage of LB 807 in 2018, statues of Willa Cather and Ponca Chief Standing Bear will be installed in National Statuary Hall, replacing Nebraska's statues of Julius Sterling Morton and William Jennings Bryan, which have stood proudly for over eighty years and will be rehomed in Nebraska. The Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Selection Committee was created to select a sculptor, review and approve plans for the statue, and identify a method to obtain funding for the project. No state funds are allocated to the project, so a cash fund was created to accept private donations and will be administered by History Nebraska.

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Laurie Smith Camp, Senior U.S. District Judge, has already provided a generous donation and graciously shared her motivation. “As a life-long Nebraskan, I’m extraordinarily grateful to our state senators for their decision to recognize two courageous individuals, Ponca Chief Standing Bear and Willa Cather, who continue to inspire and influence a growing number of people world-wide,” Camp said. “I offered my support for Willa Cather’s statue because reading her novels and stories in the late 1990s changed the course of my life. The opportunity to support a work of art in Cather’s likeness, which will stand in our national Capitol for generations to come, was something I could not pass up, and the chance to participate in this moment was too sweet to lose.”

Creighton University sculpture professor and renowned midwestern sculptor Littleton Alston has won the Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Competition, which drew more than seventy artist applicants from throughout the U.S. It is Alston’s intention to capture the essence of Cather in sculptural form, as well as her keen intellect and sensitivity. Alston was particularly struck by photos of Cather, noting “the twinkle in her eyes, and the sense that she was a vividly intelligent individual. I aim to capture her standing, as if surrounded by nature, at home in the Nebraska prairie.”

Of the one hundred statues representing fifty states, Cather’s likeness will join six other women currently represented, including Helen Keller and Sakakawea. The Cather statue is expected to be installed in 2020. We will share news regarding its creation and the installation ceremony as the process unfolds. A special thanks to Willa Cather Foundation member Peg O’Dea Lippert, for



Willa Cather, 1921, photographed at Omaha’s Rinehart-Marsden studio. PHO-4-RG1951-204.

conceiving the idea of proposing Cather for inclusion in Statuary Hall, and to State Senators Tom Brewer and Burke Harr for their work on LB 807.

My *Antonia* Touring Production Concludes Centenary Celebration



Antonette Skupa Turner poses with the cast of Illusion Theater’s *My Antonia*.

More than 150 students attended a matinee performance of Illusion Theater’s production of *My Antonia* on February 19, followed by an evening performance for those who braved the persistent Nebraska winter weather. As the old saying goes, “The show must go on”—and it did.

Illusion Theater of Minneapolis, led by producing directors Michael Robbins and Bonnie Morris, brought the novel to life in several elemental scenes. Universal themes of home and homesickness, love and loss, longing and returning, and cultural integrations and clashes were beautifully presented in this production.

“What a pleasure it was to bring Illusion’s production to Red Cloud,” said producing director Bonnie Morris. “*My Antonia* was

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My *Antonia* Touring Production Concludes Centenary Celebration

continued

inspired by the people, the land, and this Nebraska town, and what a privilege for us to play it for the place and the people who know Willa Cather's book so well." Morris also said the cast and crew were especially honored to have met Antonette Skupa Turner, Anna Sadilek Pavelka's ninety-nine year old granddaughter.

Morris enthused that being on the Red Cloud Opera House stage was the perfect culmination of the four-city tour of *My Antonia* that first went to Lincoln, Scottsbluff, and Kearney. The production toured as part of the Lied Center's Arts Across Nebraska program.

The day before the performance, Morris conducted student workshops at Red Cloud Community Schools. Students from Red Cloud, Franklin, Blue Hill, and Smith Center enjoyed the matinee performance. Through the support of the Philip and Helen Cather Southwick Fund at the University of Nebraska Foundation, complimentary copies of the novel were distributed to attendees at the matinee and evening performances. The performances were a moving tribute and an appropriate end to the 100th anniversary celebratory year of *My Antonia* and related events in 2018.

Savages & Princesses: The Persistence of Native American Stereotypes to Premiere at the National Willa Cather Center

On the first stop of a six-year tour, the exhibit *Savages and Princesses: The Persistence of Native American Stereotypes* will be on display at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska, from April 6–May 25. This important cultural exhibit brings together contemporary Native American artists, with the goal of countering ubiquitous stereotypes and images. The *Savages & Princesses* exhibit and associated programs aim to counteract the disappearance of Native portrayals and

embrace Native Americans' power to replace the stereotypes that permeate the current pop culture landscape. Recognizing that stereotypes often occur without conscious awareness, the exhibit's panels explore common stereotypes about Native peoples that are falsehoods, and the truths behind them. The exhibition's artists use the unexpected—humor, emotion, or shock—to encourage viewers to question and challenge stereotypes, even unspoken, unacknowledged ones.

Originally presented at Tulsa's 108|Contemporary in 2016, the exhibition is organized by Exhibits USA, a program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. Additional support for the exhibit comes from Humanities Nebraska, the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and Rhonda Seacrest.

The public is invited to attend a reception celebrating the exhibit's opening on Saturday, April 13, at 6:00 p.m. The reception will be preceded by a reading and book signing by author Walter Echo-Hawk and followed by a theater, music, and storytelling production by Native American folklore troupe Mahenwahdose.



Juanita Pahdopony, *Kitsch Me, I'm Indian!* 2016; cast concrete, acrylic, aluminum cones, buckskin, rhinestones, paper, 9 x 27 x 8 inches; Courtesy of the artist.

Special Programming Slated for April 13 to Accompany *Savages & Princesses* Exhibit

In conjunction with the *Savages & Princesses* exhibit, the National Willa Cather Center will host a special cultural presentation on April 13. At 5:00 p.m., author Walter Echo-Hawk will discuss his book, *The Sea of Grass: A Family Tale from the American Heartland*. His lightly fictionalized family history tells the story of ten generations of his Pawnee family, a people whose lives were shaped by the land, animals, and plants of the Central Plains. Echo-Hawk is a Native American attorney, tribal judge, author, and law professor who was instrumental in the passage of landmark laws—such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) and American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments (1994). A book signing and reception will follow. The book talk and reception are free and open to the public.

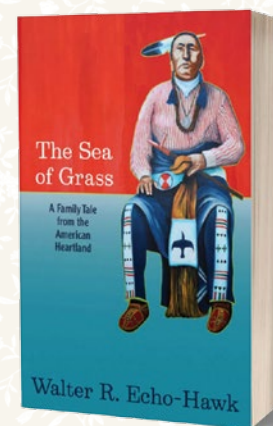
At 7:00 p.m., Mahenwahdose, a Native American folklore troupe, brings traditional Native stories and songs to the Red Cloud Opera House stage. Each performance features traditional flute, drum, and comedy, and helps to keep alive the stories of Native American people. Tickets to Mahenwahdose are \$10 in advance for adults, and \$5 for students. Free matinee performances for students are also scheduled for Friday, April 12, with advance reservations required. Contact Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org for more information and to RSVP. Mahenwahdose's appearance is generously funded by Mid-America Arts Alliance, the National Endowment for the Arts, Rhonda Seacrest, and the state arts agencies of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.



Mahenwahdose will perform at the Red Cloud Opera House on April 13.



Walter Echo-Hawk—author, attorney, tribal judge.



The Sea of Grass: A Family Tale from the American Heartland, available in our bookstore (on site and online) for \$25.95.

Join Us in Virginia for the International Cather Seminar

June 17–19, 2019, the International Cather Seminar returns to Cather's first home, Frederick County, Virginia, where her extended



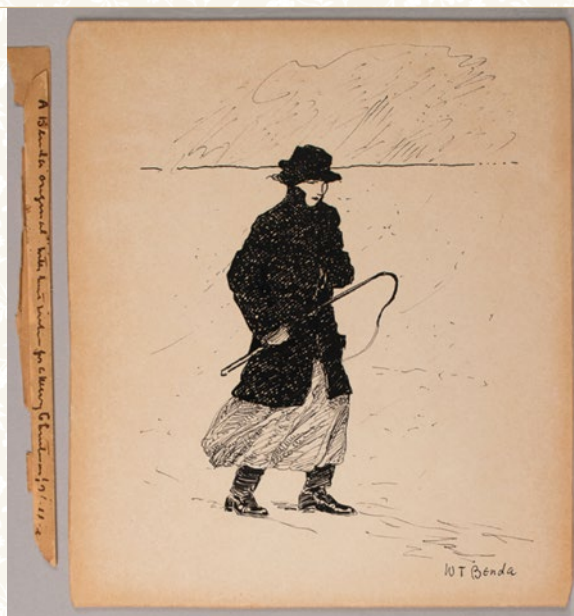
Willowshade, Willa Cather's first childhood home.

family had been settled since the 1730s. In addition to lectures by historians and scholars and scholarly paper and panel discussions, the Seminar will visit many sites in Winchester and the surrounding area that were important to Cather's family, and other Virginians, as they experienced the persistence of slavery, the French and Indian War, the Revolution, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. We will also be welcomed by the current owners to Willow Shade, Cather's first childhood home, and enjoy a tour and meal at Capon Springs, a fascinating place where Virginians used to "take the waters" in the 19th century. Seminar participants will spend a day in Washington, D.C., with opportunities to visit the new National Museum of African American History and Culture and other museums relevant to Cather's writing. For more information or to register, call 402-746-2653 or visit www.WillaCather.org.

An Opportunity to Help Conserve our Collection

Would you like to directly support our preservation mission? Through ongoing collections assessment and in partnership with the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha, we have identified a number of collections pieces that are in need of expert attention. An original W.T. Benda illustration from *My Antonia*, which had been cut and framed decades ago, will be cleaned and re-matted, so that all the original material will be visible and protected. Other pieces include the many beautiful paintings and sketches made by Cather's childhood friends, the Miner family, including "Moonlight Scene," which has graced the Miner House parlor for years.

The total cost for conserving the Benda illustration and the four pieces of art by Carrie and Mary Miner is estimated at approximately \$7,000, and we are asking for tax-deductible contributions from our members and friends to help us move



"Lady with Whip," by W.T. Benda, original illustration for *My Antonia*. *OBJ-50-1004. James and Angela Southwick Collection.

ahead with the conservation work. The conservation will include activities such as surface cleaning, stabilization, re-securing in frames, or creating custom window mat housings for safe display and preservation of the artwork.

"We have been slowly working through our highest priority pieces for art conservation," says archivist Tracy Tucker, "but these represent only our most critical needs. There are dozens of pieces that need extra care—everything from reboxing and documentation to extensive conservation like the recent repair to 'The Water Carriers,' a double-sided painting owned by Cather and Lewis."

The care and historic preservation of our collections and buildings is ongoing. If you are interested in sponsoring the conservation for any of these paintings, or other projects, please contact executive director Ashley Olson at 402-746-2653 or aolson@willacather.org for details.



The Infant of Prague. OBJ-296-001. University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries Collection. Willa Cather Foundation Special Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center

Infant of Prague Donated and Restored

In December 1940, Willa Cather gave her last known interview in the living room of her Park Avenue apartment. Writing for the *New York Herald Tribune Books*, authors Stephen Vincent and Rosemary Benét note a "charming image of the Infant Jesus of Prague on the bookshelf." In the summer of 2018, this cast plaster replica of the 16th century original came to the National Willa Cather Center in over fifty broken pieces, discovered by a Cather researcher at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln who helped to bring this and several other personal objects of Cather's into our collection.

Replicas of the Infant of Prague are numerous, and the Church of Our Lady Victorious has hosted thousands of pilgrims annually, since the Infant's permanent placement in 1641. These visitors flock to the elaborate fabric- and wax-covered wooden Spanish statue to see its elaborate robes (which change with the liturgical season) and to petition for blessings and miracles before the Infant. Our replica, though much cruder than the original, has on the underside, written in pencil, "Mrs. Ruddy," helping to establish a strong provenance linking this piece to Willa Cather: Mrs. Emmeline Ruddy was Edith Lewis's nurse. We are grateful to both the University and the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center for their help in making this piece available to Cather's many readers.

Staff Additions and Changes

Last fall, we were pleased to welcome two new hires: **Carla Post** as **Program Coordinator** and **Catherine Pond** as **Marketing Coordinator**. Carla organizes and promotes performances, gallery exhibits, and other events at the Red Cloud Opera House while Catherine is responsible for foundation marketing, communications, and social media.



Carla Post

Carla received a M.A. in music performance from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and is organist at St. Paul Lutheran in Blue Hill. She also has a B.A. in journalism from Kearney State College, has published in music journals, and has been a music and substitute teacher in area schools, including Red Cloud. She writes a blog on local history called “The Pauline Project.”

Catherine has worked for various historic sites and non-profits in donor and public relations and continues as a freelance writer contributing to a variety of magazines and other media. She has



Catherine Pond

her M.A. in historic preservation from Boston University and a B.A. in art history from Wheaton College in Massachusetts. While growing up in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, Catherine discovered the wonders of Willa Cather.

In other recent news, **Rachel Olsen** has been promoted to **Education Specialist**. Rachel will continue serving as a tour guide with additional time allocated toward assisting with preparations for conferences and seminars, as well as coordinating school and group tours. Rachel has a M.A. in English from Kansas State University with a certificate in Women’s Studies and was a full-time faculty member and directed the writing center at Oklahoma City Community College. She began her new position on March 1.



Rachel Olsen

Prairie Exploration Backpacks Now Available



To make your visit to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie a memorable experience, you can now borrow a fully-outfitted backpack from the National Willa Cather Center. Our sixteen backpacks are each stocked with binoculars, a magnifying glass, drawing pad and pastels, journal, pen, and prairie field guides for viewing wildflowers and birds. Spring and early summer are ideal times to experience the grassland birds and emerging flora of the prairie landscape. This is a perfect opportunity for you to have an immersive experience in Nebraska’s natural realm. Stop by the National Willa Cather Center to check out a backpack or call to reserve in larger numbers—and don’t forget your cameras and picnic baskets. Our free “borrow a backpack” program was made possible through a grant from the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund and the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation.



Willa Cather
CENTER

**New Logo. Same Beloved Writer.
Unwavering Dedication to our Mission.**

The National Willa Cather Center is now the registered tradename of the Willa Cather Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

We have a new name and a new logo, but we remain dedicated to promoting Willa Cather’s legacy through education, preservation, and the arts.

Follow our work at
www.WillaCather.org

Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter:
The National Willa Cather Center
[@WillaCatherFdn](https://www.instagram.com/WillaCatherFdn)

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The National Willa Cather Center
413 North Webster Street
Red Cloud, NE 68970

COMING UP!



Walter Echo-Hawk

Book Talk: *The Sea of Grass: A Family Tale from the American Heartland*
Saturday, April 13 at 5:00 p.m. – Free

Mahenwahdose

Native American Stories and Music
Saturday, April 13 at 7:00 p.m. – \$10 adults / \$5 students

64th annual Spring Conference

Willa Cather and the Theater
May 30th to June 1st (see enclosure!)

17th International Seminar

Unsettling Cather: Differences & Dislocations
June 17-21, 2019

Visit us online at www.WillaCather.org for information on upcoming events.



Arts programming presented with the support of the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.