

NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY



VOLUME 9 ISSUE 2 | OCTOBER 2020

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

Restoration Work Underway at the Pavelka Farmstead and Burlington Depot

The National Willa Cather Center distinguishes itself from every other American literary site by maintaining the largest collection of nationally designated historic properties related to any American author. Since the transfer of six sites from History Nebraska last year, our primary goal has been to restore them for generations to come, through our *Campaign for the Future*.

Thanks to your generous contributions, that goal is being realized as work has been underway at the Pavelka Farmstead and Burlington Depot since spring. With 77% of our \$6.5 million goal raised, we are not only focusing on long-term preservation goals, but also on expanded programs, exhibits, and visitor amenities.

A memorable setting from the final scenes of *My Antonia*, the Pavelka Farmstead had a new composite shake roof installed. An enclosed entryway was removed, and the porch was restored to its original open layout. The house was carefully moved from its foundation to allow for stabilization and excavation of a small crawl



The Pavelka Farmstead following foundation restoration and stabilization.

space to accommodate mechanical systems. The interior of the home was altered slightly to return the first floor layout to its period of significance.



Work-in-progress on exterior painting at the Burlington Depot.

The Burlington Depot, through which Cather traveled on her return visits to Red Cloud, has had a complete exterior facelift with the removal of siding and trim that had been plagued by dry rot. New insulation and sheathing was added, along with new siding that matches the original size and profile. Windows were also restored, and installation of a new climate control system and exterior painting will be completed this fall.

Plans for additional capital improvements at Willa Cather's Childhood Home, the Farmers and Merchants Bank, Grace Episcopal Church, St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church, and the J.L. Miner House are also underway. As we advance our mission, we are grateful for your support of our restorations, and we look forward to the new visitor experiences that will emerge within them.

Gifts to the *Campaign for the Future* can be made online at www.WillaCather.org or by mail. Pledges to the campaign are payable over a 5-year period, and naming and recognition opportunities are available. For more information, please contact Ashley Olson, Executive Director, at 402-746-2653 or aolson@willacather.org.



Willa Cather
CENTER

Experience Willa Cather's World in New Ways

Autumn is one of the best times of year to visit Red Cloud. Sunrises linger over the brick façades of Webster Street, while sunsets are especially dramatic at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. As Cather herself wrote in *The Song of the Lark*, "In October, the days were bathed in sunlight and the air was clear as crystal."

Since reopening in July, we have added several new offerings for our guests. Thanks to generous CARES grants awarded through the National Endowment for the Humanities and Humanities Nebraska, our staff has developed virtual programming, new interpretive signage, and new tour formats—all of which present unique opportunities to reach wider audiences.

Visitors may choose from our traditional guided tour formats, outdoor-only tours led by a guide, or completely self-guided experiences. For our more extensive, guided itineraries, visitors should contact Rachel Olsen, Education Coordinator, at rolsen@willacather.org or 402-746-2653 to make reservations.



An autumn sunset at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie.

Guests who prefer not to be hemmed in by reservations can take advantage of our walk-in tours of the Willa Cather Childhood Home; these drop-in tours take place at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., and 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. All guided tours begin at our bookstore. Self-guided materials for our most independent guests are available on our website or on display outside the entrance to the National Willa Cather Center. According to Olsen, "Whether visitors want to explore Red Cloud's greatest hits or immerse themselves in Cather's B-sides, we have an experience for every level of interest."

Current off-the-grid travel trends point to Red Cloud in that it offers a small rural experience with historic and cultural attributes, unique lodging and dining, and a spectacular prairie landscape far removed from the urban bustle. Visitors to Red Cloud have a variety of lodging options, including the Cather Second Home Guest House and Villa Willa, both available for booking through AirBnb.

Plans for 'Hotel Garber' Are Taking Shape



The hotel will be located next door to our Farmers and Merchants Bank, a site on the Cather tour.

Plans are underway to rehabilitate and adaptively reuse a downtown building for the creation of a twenty-six room boutique hotel. Located in the historic Potter-Wright building

next door to our Farmers and Merchants Bank, the hotel will be called Hotel Garber. Its namesake, Silas Garber, was a founder of Red Cloud and the prototype for Captain Forrester in Cather's *A Lost Lady*.

The hotel will increase the supply of overnight accommodations available in Red Cloud, enabling visitors to spend extended time exploring local attractions. A spacious lounge area on the first floor and a modern meeting space for up to sixty-four guests will add life and vibrancy to downtown Red Cloud. Memorable guest rooms will spotlight artwork featuring Red Cloud from days gone by, while the lobby area will also exhibit historic fixtures from the town's rich past.

Hotel Garber is planned as part of a collaborative agreement for heritage tourism development between the Red Cloud Community Fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation, the City of Red Cloud, the Chamber of Commerce, and the

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Willa Cather Foundation. The project will continue to diversify the local economy, creating an estimated ten new jobs and generating over \$365,000 in local sales and lodging taxes during the first decade in operation. Financing is being sought through both charitable donations and equity investments.

To learn more or support the project, please contact Executive Director Ashley Olson at (402) 746-2653 or aolson@willacather.org or Red Cloud's Tourism Director, Jarrod McCartney, at jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com.

Nancy and Bernie Picchi Give Major Gift and Issue Challenge



Nancy and Bernie Picchi, pictured after becoming caretakers of the J. L. Miner House in 1990.

Long-time supporters Nancy and Bernie Picchi recently made a major gift to our *Campaign for the Future* with a generous pledge of \$50,000 that was issued as a challenge prior to this year's Willa Cather Spring Conference. The goal was simple: match the pledge dollar-for-dollar with other private support. Thanks to conference-goers near and far, the Picchi challenge was successful, exceeding its initial goal with contributions totaling \$123,270 to aid in

the restoration of the Willa Cather Historic Sites.

A bibliophile and librarian, Nancy Picchi first visited Red Cloud with her sister in 1988. They made the long trip from New York by train, seeing the swath of countryside that Cather would have come to know when traveling from residences on the East Coast to visit family and friends in Nebraska. Upon learning of Nancy's interest in historic preservation and her husband Bernie's career in investment research analysis, Foundation founder Mildred Bennett appealed to Nancy to purchase the J. L. Miner House, also known as the Harling House in Cather's *My Antonia*.

With continued encouragement by Foundation staff, Nancy and Bernie agreed to purchase the house after an impromptu visit in 1990. On a hot July afternoon, they met Jennie Miner Reiher's two sons and their wives, Robert and Hilda Reiher and Charles and Darlene Reiher. With the foresight of the Reiher's, select original furnishings and collection materials were sold with the house, under the condition that the materials remain in Red Cloud. From the moment the Picchis bought the house

and these items, they committed themselves to eventually donating them to the Willa Cather Foundation. Following more than a decade of intensive research to aid restoration efforts of the exterior façade, the Picchis gifted the preserved home and its notable collection to the Foundation in 2001.

Of this labor of love, Nancy Picchi recently recalled, "I feel so fortunate that Mildred Bennett shared her dreams about what the Cather Foundation should and could become with me in 1988 and 1989." She continued, "Heeding her request that Bernie and I purchase the Harling House changed our lives in wonderful and unexpected ways."

The Picchi's recent gift is earmarked for additional restoration efforts at the Harling House. Period-appropriate gasolier-style lighting will be sought for the parlor and dining rooms, alongside additional efforts to seal the building envelope and restore the interior. Thanks to the Picchis, the home is a permanent feature on the Foundation's guided town tour of Cather's Red Cloud. Executive Director, Ashley Olson, remarked that donors like Bernie and Nancy Picchi are "a rarity." She continued, "Thanks to their passion and commitment, a treasured literary landmark and associated collections will be preserved for future generations to experience and enjoy."



The J. L. Miner House, pictured today in all of its splendor.

Newly Conserved Artwork Returns



W. T. Benda's pen and ink illustration for Book IV of *My Ántonia*, and inscription.

Through the generosity of several of our longtime supporters, we were excited to complete several conservation treatments of artwork from our holdings. One of these was an original W.T. Benda illustration for Willa Cather's novel *My Ántonia*, lovingly presented to a friend. The inscription, which reads "A Benda original, with best wishes for a Merry Christmas! Willa" had been cut off and

pastored to the back of the frame which held the drawing itself. At the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center, paper conservator Hilary LeFevere cleaned and repaired damage to the paper surface itself before mounting the illustration and inscription in a

new mat for storage and display. The National Willa Cather Center is home to six of the eight original Benda illustrations, several of which have undergone similar cleanings.

From the J. L. Miner house, several works of art original to the family were also in need of conservation. A painting by Carrie Miner Sherwood and another, credited to



A sketch by "M. Miner" was cleaned and stabilized for future display.

both Julia Miner and Retta Ayre Miner, had long graced the front parlor of the home; a girl blowing bubbles, sketched by "M. Miner," overlooked the dining room. Along with the hand-painted china and the handmade lace and hardanger on display, these paintings and sketches helped visitors understand the culture and beauty that accompanied the Miner family to the little frontier town of Red Cloud.

After years on display, the pieces had begun to darken and show early signs of environmental damage. At the Ford Center, pieces were removed from their frames and cleaned. Small repairs were made to damaged paint and paper, and pieces were stabilized for long-term conservation. Our continued thanks to John and Amy Dempsey, Bridgett Susie Sisson, Melissa J. Homestead, and Dr. Mary Ruth Ryder, whose support helped us to undertake these projects.



After treatment to adhere loose and flaking paint, "Lady of the Lake" will return to the parlor of the J. L. Miner home.

Educators' Scholarship Recipients Recognized

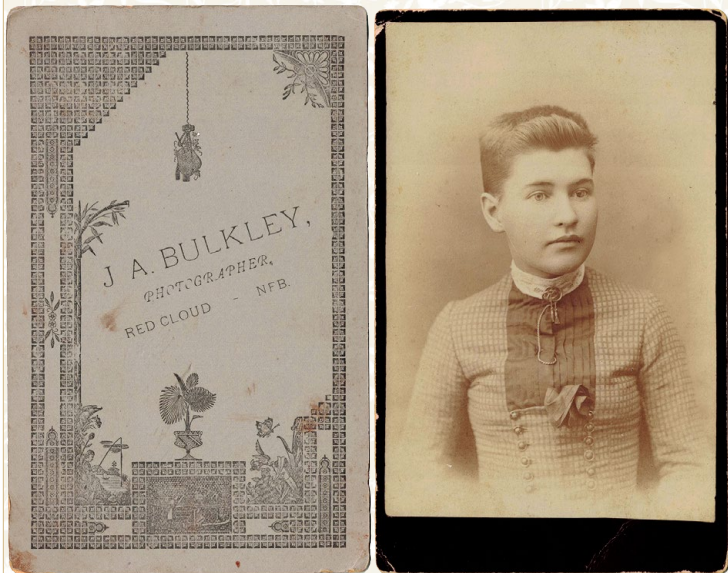
The National Willa Cather Center awarded three Educators' Scholarships this year. Kelsey Baldrige of Omaha, Nebraska; Jessica Chipman of Alexandria, Minnesota; and Megan Helberg of Burwell, Nebraska, have all crafted unique approaches to bringing Willa Cather to their classrooms.

Designed to help offset the cost of attending Spring Conference, this year's recipients had access to all virtual content at no cost and will be able to enjoy a complimentary visit to Red Cloud at a later date. Even with the travel

limitations, Jessica Chipman notes, "It was an honor to attend, and exactly what I needed to jumpstart the first draft" of her theater adaptation teaching project.

Our educators' scholarships are made possible thanks to the generosity of the Thistlewood Foundation. If you are—or someone you know is—an educator who hopes to introduce Willa Cather to the classroom, we encourage you to apply! For more information, contact Education Coordinator Rachel Olsen at rolsen@willacather.org.

New Photos Join the Jack & Irma Cather Family Collection



A young Willa Cather cabinet card, photographed by John A. Bulkley of the Bulkley Gallery, circa 1888.

Throughout the year, we've continued to receive periodic additions to the John E. (Jack) and Irma Cather Family collection. While cataloging these items, a number of lovely photographs came to light, including a John A. Bulkley portrait of teenaged Willa Cather, circa 1888. Bulkley, a Civil War veteran from Illinois, operated a photography studio in Red Cloud for only a short time beginning in early summer 1888. The portrait is notable for its richness of detail, from the

love knot brooch to Cather's windowpane check dress, but it's her intent gaze that makes this image unforgettable.

An unknown photographer captured a very different type of image with this snapshot of Red Cloud's high school football team, circa 1909. Printed on an uncirculated postcard, a handwritten note on the back of the card identifies Jack Cather, Willa Cather's youngest brother, at center. We would love to identify the other young men pictured here or add images like this to our collection of early Red Cloud photographs. If you have items of interest, please contact Archivist Tracy Tucker at tucker@willacather.org.



Jack Cather (center, holding the ball) leads the Red Cloud High School football team in this circa 1909 postcard image.

Collections Assessment Underway

In recent months, we were excited to learn that the National Willa Cather Center was one of seventy-five institutions in the United States selected to participate in the Collections Assessment for Preservation, or CAP, program during 2020. This program assists museums to improve the care of their collections by providing financial support for a general conservation assessment of artifacts and buildings. Working with a team of preservation professionals, our staff will document current preservation conditions and procedures and identify conservation priorities and challenges for the years ahead.

"When we planned for the return of the WCPM sites and collection materials, we knew that a high-level assessment of collections would be in order," archivist Tracy Tucker said.

This assessment process, she says, is an important first step in evaluating and improving collections care across all of our historic sites. "Through this process, we hope to prioritize our many conservation efforts and identify solutions that will be helpful at every site."

The assessment consists of two days of extensive interviews with staff and board, site visits, a review of documents and policies, site plans, and photographs. A final report will recognize strengths, as well as challenges, and will identify priorities for immediate and longer-term conservation and collections care. The CAP program is administered by the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation through a cooperative agreement with the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

2020 Scholarship Awards to High School Seniors

The National Willa Cather Center is thrilled to announce our 2020 recipients of the Norma Ross Walter, Antonia, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, and the Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson scholarships. The students presented their essays virtually during the 65th annual Spring Conference. Each young scholar recorded a video reading of their essays and attended a live Q&A session hosted on the Spring Conference digital platform.

- **Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Winners**
First place: Sedona Cheloha, Omaha Central High School
Second place: Audry Salber, Roncalli Catholic High School
Third place: Grace Sorenson, Chadron High School
- **Antonia Scholarship Winner**
Theodore Jansen, Omaha Westside High School
- **Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship**
Sylvia Dierking, Platteview High School
- **Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson Scholarship**
Makayla Dinkler, Silver Lake High School

Norma Ross Walter was a frequent visitor to Red Cloud and lifelong Cather fan. The scholarship established by her generous bequest supports young women seeking higher education. Antonette Turner generously established both the Antonette Willa Skupa Turner scholarship that bears her name, and the Antonia scholarship, named for the famed Willa Cather character for which Anna Pavelka, Turner's grandmother, served as the prototype. Jack Wilson created a scholarship in memory of his parents to assist Webster County students seeking agricultural or secondary education degrees, in honor of the Wilsons' respective careers.

Scholarships awarded through the Willa Cather Foundation since 1987 total more than \$185,000 and have assisted almost seventy students studying English and History. For more information about our scholarship funds, please contact Education Coordinator Rachel Olsen at rolsen@willacather.org. Application forms for 2021 are available at www.willacather.org and annual deadlines are January 31 and February 28.

Conservation at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie



Garan Coons, entertainer from the Oglala Lakota and Navajo tribes, performed at the Red Cloud Opera House on September 11. While the outdoor performance was cancelled due to rain, we were later able to photograph Coons and his Many Moccasins Dance Troupe at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Our thanks to the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation for their support of this program.

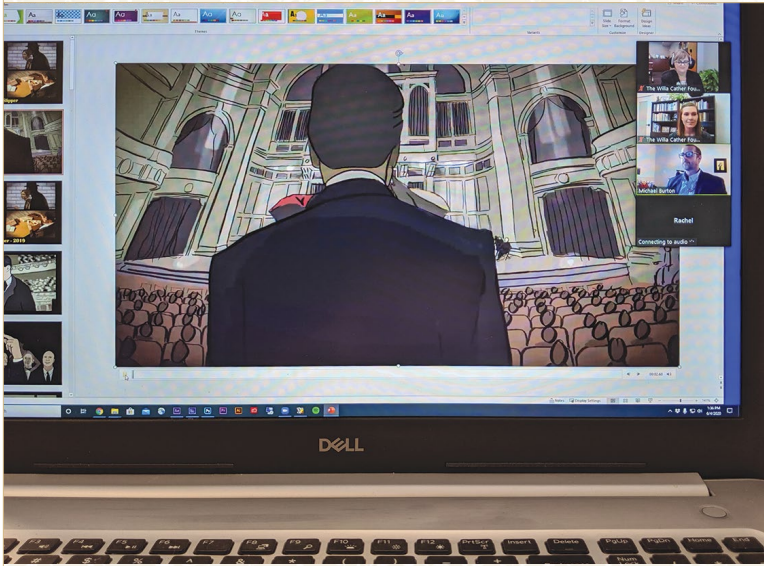
In Nebraska, an estimated 98% of land has been converted to cropland while the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is among the 2% that remains untilled. Our preserved 612 acres on the Nebraska-Kansas border provides space for hiking, experiencing wide open vistas, viewing wildlife, and discovering native grasses and forbs. Here you can also catch unique sunrises and sunsets and experience dark-sky viewing of the heavens. Our prairie conservation efforts have continued this year with controlled burning and news of a conservation easement.

A spring burn of approximately 300 acres helped to control invasive native and non-native species, particularly smooth brome grass and eastern red cedar trees. With a re-established annual burn rotation, native grasses and forbs on the prairie thrive, providing crucial permanent and stopover habitat for many prairie specialist species, from migratory grassland birds to fritillary and monarch butterflies.

The Nebraska Land Trust's purchase of a 1,147-acre conservation easement from Brandon and Kami Meyer ensured the grassland next to the Cather Prairie will be forever protected. The Willa Cather Foundation identified the land as a potential site for conservation and helped to advocate for the easement as the Nebraska Land Trust managed the lengthy process. "When visitors arrive at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, they have the rare opportunity to see a 360-degree view of undeveloped land, said Executive Director Ashley Olson. "We are pleased to have played a small role in facilitating this conservation easement and are certain future generations will marvel at the unbroken horizon and unplowed prairie described in Cather's writing."

Our continued thanks to the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation and the Gifford Foundation for their support of our prairie programming and conservation efforts.

Cather Enthusiasts Attend Our First Virtual Spring Conference



Artist and filmmaker Michael Burton delivers a virtual artist talk at the conference. This animated scene portrays Marshall McKann at the Carnegie Music Hall, as described in Cather's "A Gold Slipper."

The 65th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference began unlike any other Spring Conference before it: with a nearly empty building. The COVID-19 pandemic made gathering in Red Cloud impossible, but through a digital event platform, 273 attendees participated in our very first, entirely online conference.

Guests from around the country enjoyed paper presentations, live Q&A sessions, invited speakers, gallery talks, and even a virtual cocktail hour, from the comfort of their own homes. Fittingly, this year's conference theme, "Un/Tethered: Cather on the Cusp of the 1920s," unknowingly foreshadowed this moment when we were all simultaneously deeply tied to our homes and disconnected from the places and people we wished to visit.

As attendees logged on and settled in, the conference opened with a virtual gallery talk by artist Michael Burton, whose multimedia exhibit based on Cather's short story, "A Gold Slipper," treated guests to animated film clips, costumes, and beautiful drawings that brought Cather's story to life.

Cather scholars, educators, and students presented their research virtually, complete with live Q&A sessions. Papers included rich historical connections, analysis of art, economics, and even the unspoken symbolism of jellyfish in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. There were virtual exhibits and artists' talks by Dianne Duncan Thomas and Joanna Blich. Duncan curated the *Celebration of Women* quilt exhibit to commemorate women's suffrage. Blich created illustrations for the forthcoming anniversary edition of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*.

Other highlights included a keynote address about noted Cather prototype Olive Fremstad by Alex Ross, music critic and author of *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*; a presentation by historian Erica Ryan about the tensions that fueled the social, cultural, and economic upheaval of the 1920s; and a discussion of early 20th century womens clothing by fashion expert Sue McClain. The conference concluded with a virtual cocktail hour, fundraiser, and "Flicker of Fame," an imaginative radio show adapted from *Youth and the Bright Medusa* by theater troupe Lone Tree Live.

The National Willa Cather Center would like to thank Diane Prenatt (Marian University) and Elaine Smith (University of South Florida) for serving as conference co-directors, and we are also grateful for support from the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Humanities Nebraska, and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Cather Project.

Save the Date

THE 66TH ANNUAL WILLA CATHER SPRING CONFERENCE

WILLA CATHER
AND POPULAR PRINT CULTURE

June 3rd-5th, 2021 In Red Cloud, Neb.

Willa Cather Center

THE B. B. MCGUIRE COMPANY, NEW YORK AND LONDON

Make plans to take part in our 66th annual Spring Conference in June 2021! More details and a full call for papers are available on our website.

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

COMING UP!



The Ensemble Theatre — *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

A classic Depression-era children's novel adapted for the stage.
Friday, November 6, at 7:30 p.m.

Mesner Puppet Theater — "Jingle Jamboree"

A holiday-inspired puppet show for preschool and elementary audiences
Saturday, December 19, at 10:30 a.m.

Bell-issimo — Holiday Handbell Concert

Bell-issimo returns with a special holiday performance!
Saturday, December 19, at 7:30 p.m.

Visit us online at www.WillaCather.org for information on upcoming events and health and safety precautions.



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