

# Willa Cather REVIEW

Volume 62 | No. 2 | Winter 2021



“I always feel  
very deeply  
that I am a  
Virginian.”

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# Willa Cather REVIEW

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*On the cover:* Cather’s birthplace and Willow Shade, with an excerpt from a letter from Cather to Stringfellow Barr, Dec. 5, 1928 (*Complete Letters* no. 2049, The Willa Cather Archive, [cather.unl.edu](http://cather.unl.edu)). Birthplace image by Duffy Reese. Willow Shade photograph from the Elizabeth A. Shannon Collection, Willa Cather Foundation and Archives.



## Letter from the Executive Director Ashley Olson

Reflecting on the 17th International Cather Seminar, the stark contrast between the Shenandoah Valley of Cather’s first home in Virginia and the plains of Nebraska could not be more distinct. One can begin to imagine how a nine-year-old Willa Cather must have felt leaving a beautiful family home built by her grandfather, their beloved dog, and the familiar sight of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Arriving in Nebraska to farm life in a place she later described as “bleak and desolate” had to have been a traumatic experience.

I’m also struck by the dissimilarity between two of the dwellings occupied by the Cather family. Their brick home known as Willow Shade would have been a comfortable place for Cather to spend her early childhood, complete with its open porches, multiple fireplaces, and two stories of living space on an English basement. When Cather reached age ten in Nebraska, settling into a modest story-and-a-half home at 3rd and Cedar in Red Cloud was an upgrade after spending many months on a homestead in greater Webster County, but the new house was vastly understated compared to the home left behind in Virginia.

The dimly lit and rugged attic with its exposed cedar shingles—where Cather and her siblings slept—was nothing like the pleasant rooms with large windows overlooking the countryside on the second floor of Willow Shade.

It is a testament to her resiliency that Cather overcame her homesickness and later grew to appreciate her new surroundings. She became particularly fond of her “rose bower”—the bedroom partitioned off in the attic of the Cather’s Red Cloud home, which she adorned with wallpaper composed of bright pink roses, yellow wildflowers, and green and brown foliage.

Landscape and dwellings are but two of the early differences and dislocations experienced by Cather. We can only speculate about how her life may have been different had she not encountered these considerable changes as a child. It is no surprise that the events were imprinted in her mind and later found their way into her correspondence and literature.

For those who couldn’t join us for the scholarship and exploration that made up the International Seminar, I hope this issue of the *Review* will provide another glimpse into the complex world of Willa Cather. We are grateful to our codirectors Marilee Lindemann and Ann Romines, and site director John Jacobs, for a memorable week in Virginia. The hospitality of the Pumphrey family for opening their home at Willow Shade and the warm reception by the extended Cather family is also deeply appreciated.



## Letter from the President Glenda Pierce

Challenges. Changes. Loss. Resiliency. Willa Cather certainly experienced challenges, changes, and loss during her lifetime, including living through a pandemic. She not only showed remarkable resilience, but embraced the challenges and changes and made them a part of her being and her work. We can find inspiration and hope in reading her works as we confront our own challenges and changes.

The Willa Cather Foundation confronted the challenges and changes of 2020 with vigor and creativity, advancing our mission by delivering new content digitally and hosting our first digital Spring Conference. We have been able to reach new audiences by embracing the concept of digital delivery. We hope you have been enjoying our efforts, including the recently launched “Authors Showcase” and the beautiful photography

and excerpts from Cather’s works provided on social media. We are grateful to have a talented and dedicated staff.

The Cather Foundation experienced loss this year with the death of two dear friends and Advisory Council members—Judge Laurie Smith Camp and Lucia Woods Lindley. We honor their memories not only in these pages, but by continuing to advance the legacy of Willa Cather, a mission they both wholeheartedly and generously supported. (Our sadness was compounded by the news that Lucia’s husband Daniel Lindley followed her in death just days later.)

We are grateful to our many supporters who provide their time and treasure, even in difficult years. Thanks to their generosity, we are nearing the completion of our *Campaign for the Future* and have begun the important work of renovating and restoring our historic properties. We hope that all of you will help us continue to successfully meet new challenges by supporting us with your membership and donations. Thank you, and all the best throughout 2021!

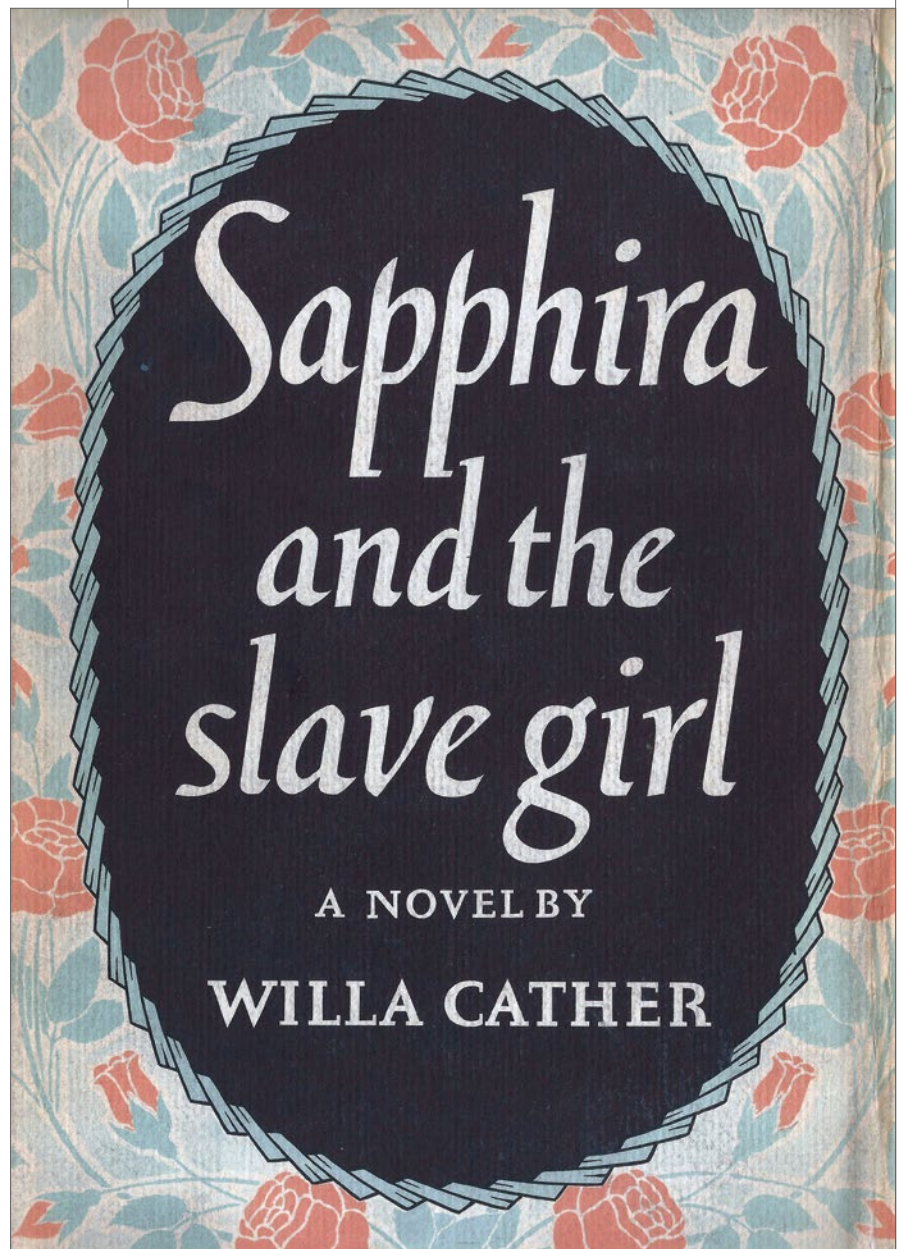


# Black Lives in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*: New Perspectives from Archaeology and History

*The 17th International Willa Cather Seminar was held in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Cather's birthplace and first home, in June 2019. In that year, Virginia was observing the 400th anniversary of slavery's establishment in North America, at Jamestown, Virginia. In the spirit of the seminar's theme, "Unsettling Cather: Differences and Dislocations," we thought this would be an occasion for looking again at how Cather portrayed slavery and enslaved persons in her Virginia novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, in the light of recent scholarship. The seminar's site director, John Jacobs, a professor at Winchester's Shenandoah University for the past 47 years, organized a panel to discuss this subject, including a historian, an anthropologist, a board member from a local African American history museum (none of whom had previously read Cather's novel), and a literary scholar. The seminar was held during the week of Juneteenth, an annual celebration of the emancipation of enslaved persons in the South, and was co-sponsored by Winchester's Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, which invited members of the local community to join us for this panel and the following discussion. As John Jacobs said as he introduced the panel, we hoped that it might "bring greater understanding not only of Sapphira and the Slave Girl, but of the nineteenth-century African American life that Cather portrays—or overlooks—in the book."*

*Now, nearly two years later, that discussion seems even more significant, as we Americans of 2021 struggle—as Cather did as she wrote her novel—with the complexities and challenges of our mutual history. Now we invite you, as our readers, to join in the discussion.*

John Jacobs, Marilee Lindemann, and Ann Romines  
—Directors, 17th International Willa Cather Seminar



# “As Much a Slave To-day”: Freedom’s Reality for the Shenandoah Valley’s African Americans in the Reconstruction Era

Jonathan A. Noyalas



John Trowbridge. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-US262-75503.*

Seventy-five years before the publication of Willa Cather’s *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, noted author John Trowbridge visited the Shenandoah Valley and viewed the aggregate impact of four years of hard war. As Trowbridge toured a region that experienced 326 military actions, he seemed aghast at the toll the conflict inflicted on the landscape

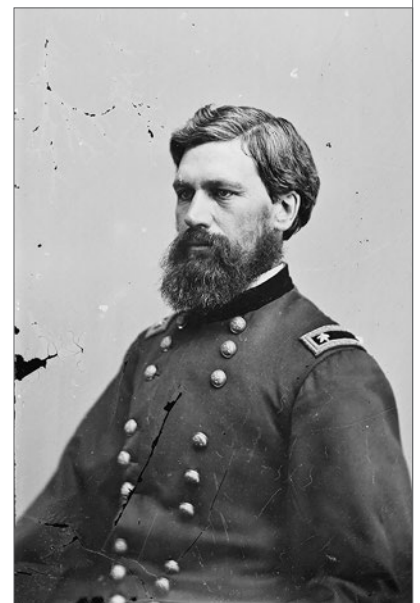
(*Shenandoah Valley Battlefields* i). Amid the desolation, however, he thought he witnessed something remarkable—that those who formerly supported the Confederate war effort seemed to accept the conflict’s results and that the region’s whites appeared to acknowledge African Americans as their equals. Trowbridge wrote of the scene in 1866: “The humble freedman . . . mothers and daughters of the despised race . . . [were] now citizens . . . free to come and go” (Trowbridge 69). Whether Willa Cather might have been influenced by Trowbridge’s musings or not is unknown, but Cather echoed Trowbridge’s observation in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*: “The Rebel soldiers who came back were tired, discouraged, but not humiliated or embittered by failure. The country people accepted the defeat of the Confederacy with dignity, as they accepted death when it came to their families” (270).

Neither Trowbridge’s 1865 observations nor the world Cather wrote about three-quarters of a century later matches the historical reality for African Americans in the Civil War’s aftermath in the Shenandoah Valley. Those who supported the Confederacy were not at all quick to let the conflict’s memory fade, nor were they eager to accept the war’s consequences or to accept African Americans as equals. In the estimation of Valley resident Watkins James, a significant portion of former Confederates, at least in the northern Shenandoah Valley where James lived and travelled, and where *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is set, harbored greater animosity toward African Americans than they did prior to the conflict’s outbreak. “Their feelings . . . towards the freedmen, are more hostile to-day than they were

at the close of the rebellion . . . there is an animosity between the rebels and negroes,” which James believed “would never be settled” (*Report on the Joint Committee* 40–42).

In the war’s aftermath African Americans in the Shenandoah, and throughout the South, knew they were “free,” but struggled to find a way to realize all that freedom entailed. As had been the case during the conflict, some of the Shenandoah Valley’s African Americans believed the surest way to securing freedom in the conflict’s immediate wake was to seek the protection of Union soldiers. As increasing numbers sought refuge with federal troops in the weeks following the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, officers, such as General Isaac Duval, fretted for the safety of African Americans and searched for answers as to how best support individuals once enslaved. On June 9, 1865, Duval penned a note to General Alfred T. A. Torbert, the overall commander of Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley, which painted a grim picture of the conditions the Valley’s African Americans endured: “The condition of Negro families in this vicinity is in my opinion becoming alarming. Large families of women and small children are . . . now roaming over the country . . . destitute and almost naked” (Duval to Torbert).

Less than two weeks prior to Duval’s candid assessment, General Oliver O. Howard, chief of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (popularly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau), appointed Colonel Orlando Brown head of the Bureau’s operations in the Old Dominion (Lowe 29). Brown organized Virginia into ten districts, initially including the Shenandoah Valley in its Sixth District, and sent Torbert clear orders from his desk in Richmond: “You will not allow the colored people to be turned out of doors. Call upon the military [to] prevent this. If any county has taken action against the interest of the negroes report it at once to this office” (Brown).



General Oliver Otis Howard. *Library of Congress, Brady-Handy Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-BH82-2903.*





SOME OF THE SERVANTS CAME BACK TO THEIR OLD HOME.

Illustrations such as this one, which appeared in Thomas Nelson Page's *Two Little Confederates* (1888), further solidified the myth of the happy slave.

Whether aware of Brown's order or not, formerly enslaved people are known to have appealed to ex-enslavers to be permitted to remain with them in the war's immediate aftermath. These once-enslaved individuals, however, did not petition former enslavers to stay out of a sense of loyalty to their enslavers or affinity for being enslaved. Formerly enslaved people returned because they believed it their best option for survival. As historian Chandra Manning has argued, freed people returned because they had nothing and former enslavers had everything (Manning 267). Despite the reality, advocates of the Lost Cause—those who promulgated the myth that enslaved people were loyal, faithful servants during the Civil War, and that slavery had nothing to do with the conflict—held up the return of people once enslaved as evidence of loyalty. The manipulation of historic reality aided Lost Cause advocates to further advance the agenda that African Americans preferred being enslaved and were intensely loyal to those who enslaved them. Various authors, such as Thomas Nelson Page, fueled this false narrative in the Civil War's aftermath (Page 152–153; Blight 284–288).

While *Sapphira* is not set in the postwar period, except in its epilogue, Cather's portrayal of the relationship between enslaver and enslaved reinforces the Lost Cause narrative that enslaved people exhibited loyalty to enslavers. For example, Cather writes that some of those whom Henry Colbert enslaved "begged to stay on at the Mill Farm after the miller had freed all his wife's slaves" (284). While it is true that some enslaved individuals remained with enslavers during the conflict, scholarship suggests they did so not out of loyalty to enslavers or some perverted affinity for being held in bondage, but enslaved people remained out of loyalty to themselves. Whether during the conflict or in its immediate aftermath, African Americans navigated a complex world where they had to balance their desire for freedom with the practicality of survival (Reidy 64–65, 112–116). One such Shenandoah Valley person who opted to remain with her former enslaver was Susan, once enslaved by the Ashby family of Front Royal. Susan remained with and worked for her former enslavers for three years after the Civil War's end, not because she was loyal to them, but because she viewed it as her best opportunity to save money. With the wages Susan earned as a housekeeper for the Ashbys, along with compensation she received from doing other odd jobs for individuals in Front Royal, Susan saved enough money to buy "a neat little house" three years after the war's end (Ashby 311–312).

While some, such as Susan, believed their best option to secure a better future meant laboring for several years for the family who once enslaved them, others opted to find employment elsewhere and oftentimes, as was the case throughout the South, turned to the Freedmen's Bureau for assistance in finding work. Although Freedmen's Bureau officials reported little difficulty in finding jobs for African Americans who sought their help, officials exerted little control over the wages a white employer was willing to pay. As a result, financial compensation varied widely. Some formerly enslaved individuals in the Winchester area, such as Thomas Leitz, who labored for the Barton family at Springdale, located south of Kernstown, fared decently, earning \$15 per month, the highest reported monthly wage in the Valley in the war's immediate aftermath (Leitz). Formerly enslaved Caroline Thompson received the lowest reported monthly wage laboring for Winchester's Conrad family, \$3 per month (Thompson).

Some Freedmen's Bureau officials who negotiated labor contracts for formerly enslaved individuals such as Leitz and Thompson believed that, while they might aid African Americans in the short term, the key to realizing freedom's full potential was education. Bureau official Captain T. A. McDonnell believed that the "thirst for education" among people once enslaved "will soon

... relieve him [the formerly enslaved person] from the thralldom under which he has so long and patiently suffered and enable him to demand and obtain a fair remuneration for a fair day's toil" (McDonnell to Brown).

By the end of 1865 the Freedmen's Bureau in the Shenandoah Valley, with support from the American Missionary Association, the Old School Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the New England Baptist Society, established nine schools throughout the Valley between Lexington and Harpers Ferry. By the end of the year those schools enrolled 1,403 students (Report of Freedmen's Schools). While students were eager to learn and teachers keen to help students, the establishment of these institutions confronted significant opposition from whites (Reilly 34). That enmity manifested in various ways. Sometimes, those who once supported the Confederate war effort lashed out at Freedmen's Bureau officials, who recorded that verbal thrashing in monthly reports. Other angry white persons broke into and damaged school rooms. On some occasions these persons physically assaulted students and teachers, threatening death if they did not shutter schools (Freedmen's School Report April 1868; Report on the Joint Committee 42-43). Despite threats and harm, the number of Freedmen's Schools throughout the Valley increased. By the end of 1868, forty-two schools operated throughout the region (Monthly School Report).

The following year, a reporter for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* journeyed to the Shenandoah Valley and witnessed firsthand how the region's African Americans, regardless of the numerous obstacles they confronted, persisted in their quest to realize freedom. The correspondent, undoubtedly an admirer of John Brown, wrote that, with all of the efforts of the Valley's African Americans to ameliorate their condition, Brown's "soul is marching on, in the freedmen's schools . . . that soul is still marching on, no longer in war and emancipation, but in the elevation . . . of the colored race" (*National Anti-Slavery Standard*).

While Cather offers no portrayal of the role education played in ameliorating the lives of African Americans, the novel does highlight the successes some formerly enslaved people

enjoyed in the Civil War's aftermath. For example, Sampson, who worked at "a wonderful good place up in Pennsylvanny, in some new kind of mill," seemed to enjoy some stability (282). Although the cook Lizzie's ultimate fate is unclear in *Sapphira*, Cather notes that Lizzie had a "good place at the Taylor House hotel in Winchester," as did her daughter (281). Not all of the African American characters in *Sapphira* were so fortunate. After killing an African American man in a saloon in Winchester, Tap was arrested and ultimately executed for murder. Cather not only portrayed Tap as a drunk, but perpetuated the myth of the happy, loyal slave when she wrote that Tap was someone who "hadn't been able to stand his freedom" (282-83).

While some of the formerly enslaved people depicted in *Sapphira* enjoyed a degree of success, echoing the historical

This Agreement made and given this  
Second day of January 1866 between W. W. Barton  
on the first part and Thomas Leitz of the second  
part  
That said W. W. Barton party of the first do  
agree to give said Leitz party of the second  
for two months beginning the second day of January 1866  
and ending the second day of November 1866 in services  
as a garden hand. In consideration of which service he  
Barton agrees to pay said Leitz Fifteen (15)  
dollars for month. Extra wages for working on morning  
and garden and back grounds. also the privilege of putting  
in at said Barton place one acre of ground for truck that  
to be given at said Barton place as also is the patch and  
garden ground said Barton furthermore agrees to rent the  
house to said Leitz which said Leitz now  
occupies at two dollars for month and to furnish  
firewood at fifty cents for cord to be hauled at  
said Barton place  
Witness our hand and seal  
Wm. W. Barton  
Thomas Leitz

Contract between the formerly enslaved Thomas Leitz and the Barton family. Papers of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives and Records Administration.



reality for African Americans in the Shenandoah Valley, any accomplishment they achieved dissipated as southern state governments were redeemed and a segregated society rampant with injustice toward African Americans became the norm by the mid-1870s. Although constitutionally free, African Americans in the Shenandoah Valley, as was the case elsewhere, confronted a life in the postwar era that oftentimes echoed slavery's harshness. The reality of life for African Americans was certainly not remotely close to the world Cather imagined in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. In fact, one resident of Warren County, Thomas Ashby, did not see any substantial change in the quality of life for the lion's share of African Americans half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth guaranteed citizenship and voting rights, respectively. Ashby wrote, "While slavery has been abolished in the sense of property interest, the negro is in all those personal characteristics . . . as much a slave to-day as he was before the Civil War. He still struggles in poverty . . . as degraded as any laboring class can become" (Ashby 108).

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# Setting History Straight: Josephine School Community Museum and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

Adeela Al-Khalili

In 1995, Josephine City, in Clarke County, Virginia, was recognized by the Virginia and the National Registers of Historic Places. The 1999 road marker, placed at the corner of Josephine and Church Streets in Berryville, reflected what local whites wanted to believe about this historic site. That sign read, in part:

To improve the lives of former slaves, Ellen McCormick, widow of Edward McCormick of Clermont [a Clarke County plantation], established this African American community of 31 one-acre lots early in the 1870s [for \$100 apiece with 6% interest]. . . . By 1900, Josephine City had become an oasis for Clarke County's African American residents and included a school, grocery store, gas station, boarding house, restaurant, cemetery, and two churches.

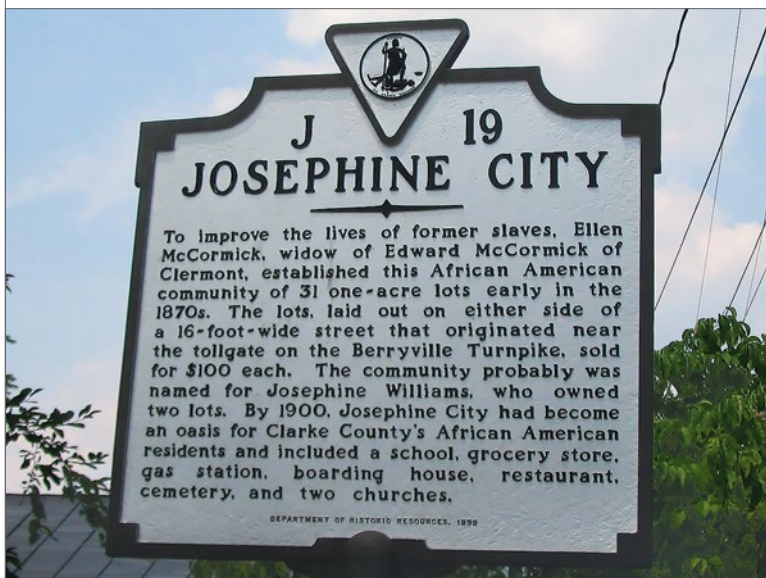
Let's compare Mrs. Ellen McCormick with the title character, Sapphira Colbert, of Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Cather was born in 1873 into a relatively prosperous white family in neighboring Frederick County, and she spent her first nine years near the area where Josephine Street was established.<sup>1</sup> *Sapphira* was the last of her novels, published in 1940, and it was largely based on stories she remembered from those early years. The novel is set in antebellum rural Virginia, near Winchester, so it reflects prevailing racial attitudes, some of which remained in the late 1930s, when Cather wrote the book. The "slave girl" of the title has no name at first, although we quickly learn that Cather has no trouble using racist terms, such as "darkies," "yellow girl," "pickaninny," and "nigger," when referencing the enslaved persons at the fictional Colbert

plantation (based on Cather's great-grandparents' property). No doubt the real Ellen McCormick and "Miss Sapphy" had many traits in common as slave-holding mistresses: making sure the slaves comported themselves with industry, buying and selling them as the need—or caprice—arose, visiting and entertaining friends (with dark-skinned servants close at their beck and call) in their privileged lifestyles.

In the novel, the capture of Sapphira's oldest slave, Jezebel, from Africa is deemed a "deliverance" from cannibalism to the ameliorating effects of white society (110). Certainly all Africans are better off here than in "heathen" Africa, the white minister suggests at Jezebel's burial (104). I laughed when I first read this, because I think "Old Jezebel" was so angry and bitter about having been kidnapped into slavery that she gave ample reason for the white people to leave her alone! When Jezebel's mistress comes to visit her on her deathbed, the old woman has been refusing to eat, and Miss Sapphy asks if there is any food "that would taste good" to her. Jezebel replies, with a "sly chuckle" and "a flash of grim humour," that she might "relish . . . a li'l pickaninny's hand" (90). Is she trying to shock her white mistress, or to suggest that she still relishes fond memories of life in her cannibal tribe in Africa, before she was enslaved?<sup>2</sup>

Sapphira's husband, Henry Colbert, laments that, if Sapphira's slaves were granted freedom, "Where would they go? How would they live? They had never learned to take care of themselves or to provide for tomorrow" (110). Henry is a more sympathetic character, who does free his wife's slaves after her death and arrange jobs for them. Nevertheless, he remarks to Sapphira, "there are different ways of being good to folks. . . . Sometimes keeping people in their place is being good to them" (264). While we may never know if the actual Mrs. McCormick thought the same way as the fictional Sapphira, our 1999 road marker does suggest that, even in the last year of the twentieth century, Black people were believed to have been incapable of self-sufficiency without the help of whites. Post-Civil War Virginia was not a time of resetting the scales of justice with the charity and good will that President Lincoln envisioned, but of salvaging the resources and reputations of former white owners.

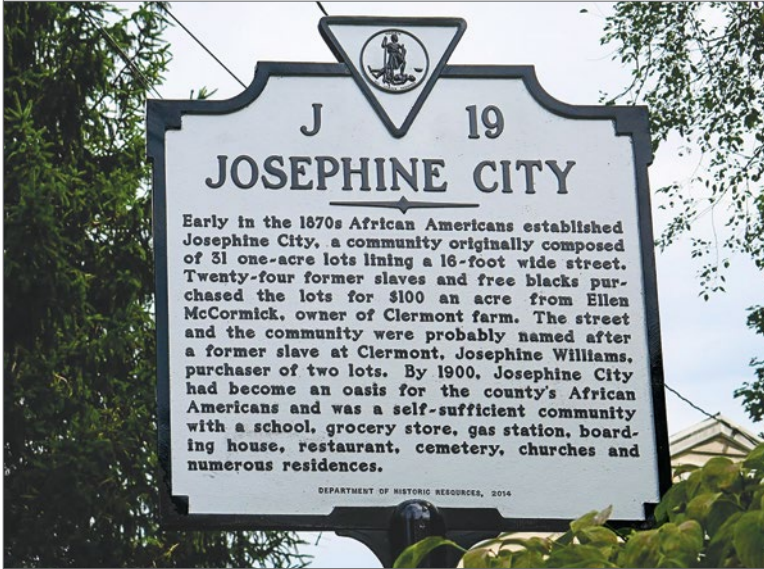
Recently, the true facts of the freedmen's and freedwomen's settlement in Berryville have been uncovered, revealing that Mrs. McCormick's motives were entirely self-serving. At the end of the Civil War, money was needed to maintain Clermont farmlands



The original 1999 marker. Photograph by Craig Swain. Historical Marker Database, HMdb.org.



and to bail Widow McCormick out of foreclosure. The corrected wayside marker, erected by the Department of Historic Resources in 2014, now reads: “Early in the 1870s African Americans established Josephine City, a community originally composed of 31 one-acre lots lining a 16-foot wide street. Twenty-four former slaves and free blacks purchased the lots for \$100 an acre from Ellen McCormick, owner of Clermont farm. The street and the community were probably named after a former slave at Clermont, Josephine Williams, purchaser of two lots. . . .”



The 2014 marker. Photograph by Linda Walcroft. Historical Marker Database, HMdb.org.

It seems extraordinary to me that thirty people of color, most of whom had recently been enslaved, could have amassed that much money (equal to more than \$2,000 per lot today). It is probable that the McCormick slaves were rented out and managed to save some money over time. Like the skilled mill worker Sampson in Cather’s novel, many could have been skilled laborers who moonlighted in their “free” time. (Why didn’t Sampson take up Henry Colbert’s offer to free him and find him a job in a Philadelphia mill? Perhaps he wanted to retain familial ties. Or perhaps it was “better to stay with the devil you know.”) Many of Josephine City’s residents grew fruits and vegetables and even raised pigs and chickens, to sell. Josephine herself was a seamstress on the McCormick plantation. It was she who took the initiative to approach Ellen McCormick about Blacks interested in buying some land after the property failed to be purchased at two auctions.

In Cather’s novel, while “self-respecting negroes<sup>3</sup> never complained of harsh treatment” by their owners (22), they certainly worked diligently, all the while surely dreaming of a better life for themselves and their children. Even Sapphira’s most faithful slave, the housekeeper Till, is glad for her daughter’s

Underground Railroad escape to Canada, she says, for “if she’s up there . . . she’ll have some chance” (245). And some of the newly freed people in Clarke County had their own ideas for advancement at home in Virginia, which included creating their own insular community where racism would never inhibit opportunities for a better life.

Josephine City flourished because of the combined skills and competences of all those dedicated industrious people toiling in very tough circumstances that few of us could ever imagine surviving. They would have been used to hard work and sacrifice. Sending away young and vulnerable family members, such as Nancy, was a heart-rending decision, but a necessary one, if it meant getting away from what Cather referred to in a letter as the “Terrible,” with a capital T, condition of abused powerlessness (Letter to Roseboro’). Such conditions would have been paralleled in Berryville, Winchester, and other places in the Shenandoah Valley. Although Cather remarks that in the “thinly settled district between Winchester and Romney, not a single family had ever owned more than four or five negroes” (25), larger nearby plantations, such as Clermont and Belle Grove, owned many, many more. In Cather’s novel, Sapphira and her husband own twenty or more slaves. Recently I learned that Smithfield Farms in Clarke County now runs an organic food store out of a building that once housed over sixty slaves!

Today, still standing at the northeast end of Josephine Street, you will find the original two-room school for children of former slaves and free people of color, built by and for folks living in Josephine City and nearby Pigeon Hill, Bundy, and Liberty Street communities. In 1882, residents constructed this one-story frame elementary school, which would later be moved by horse-drawn wagon to its present location. Years later, it was used as an agricultural/vocational building, once a larger brick structure, the Clarke County Training School, was completed in 1930.

A minister, the Reverend Edward T. Johnson, was instrumental in expanding the school’s curriculum to high school. The church has always played an integral part in uplifting the hope and aspirations of the Black community. In *Sapphira*, it is a free Black minister who meets Rachel and Nancy at the river and conducts Nancy on toward Canada via the Underground Railroad. Ironically, in Cather’s novel Henry Colbert bemoans the impotence of religion to deter white people from the practice of slavery. Cather seems to reflect that same sentiment when she describes the pitifully dilapidated condition of the little country church, “a forlorn weather-boarded building with neither spire nor bell. . . . It looked like an abandoned factory left to the mercy of the weather” (78) and bereft of redemptive value. This church is attended by local white Baptists and their slaves, including Henry

Colbert and the Colbert slaves. The slaves, segregated in the balcony, dominate the singing in the church, led by the Colberts' cook, Lizzie, who has a powerful voice, and her daughter Bluebell. For the white minister, "the singing was the living worship of the Sunday services; the negroes in the loft sang . . . with such fervent conviction. . . . When Lizzie rolled out the last verse and sat down, the young preacher looked up . . . with appreciation. He often felt like thanking her" (80–81). The energy and "fervent conviction" of those Black singers, who bring a dilapidated church to life, also helped to create and sustain the Josephine School.

In 1944, the segregated school was rechristened the W. T. B. Williams School in honor of a native who served as the first dean of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Between 1949 and 1966, the school was known as the Johnson-Williams Intermediate School. With the advent of integration, the building was repurposed as the Johnson-Williams Intermediate School for all the county's middle-school children, finally closing its doors as an educational facility in 1987. The red brick building was converted to senior citizens' housing in 1992, while the original clapboard building opened its doors in 2003 as the Josephine School Community Museum, the first, and only, institution dedicated to the enduring Black community in Clarke County. One room is devoted to celebrating history through artifacts and exhibits, while the other is a reproduction of the multi-aged classroom of the early 1900s. A library contains over five hundred books, journals, and audiovisual materials.<sup>4</sup> Josephine Street remains a vibrant residential neighborhood. However, it was annexed in 1988 to the town of Berryville, under the protest of many of the descendants of the original residents.

Willa Cather's recollections in *Sapphira* in many ways mirror the lives of African Americans we celebrate today in the Josephine School Community Museum. The original community in Josephine City maintained, in addition to the school, its own streets, lights, economy, and civic activities. In a tradition of self-sufficiency and motivation never conceived by many local whites of the time, ball games were played, God was praised, children were loved and educated, and businesses flourished. It is easy to imagine someone like the competent, organized housekeeper Till running a boarding house with her husband Jefferson in Josephine City, or the cook Lizzie catering meals from her own kitchen, or Sampson choosing not to uproot his family to Philadelphia, but instead to refine his skills as a breadwinner with several side hustles, or even the recalcitrant Bluebell singing Bible hymns on Sunday in the absence of prying white eyes. Of course, many went West or North in search of opportunity. For instance, Nancy, the "slave girl" of Cather's title, was helped to break free entirely from

Sapphira's mistreatment by escaping to Canada, thwarting a possible rape by Sapphira's nephew.

We invite you to come learn about our own Berryville icons, such as Thomas Laws, who helped secure a Union victory during the Civil War. Then there is Juliet, one of the few known enslaved people who sued for her freedom but ultimately lost her case because of a tampered will. Read how Ella Phillips Stewart became the first female *and* African American pharmacist in Pennsylvania and then refused to return an invitation to an event honoring prominent Virginians when it was discovered that she was Black. Then there was Lucy Diggs Stowe, the first female dean of Howard University.

Traditions of excellence and community service characterize the early residents of Josephine City, those brave people who helped make a way out of no way for themselves and their descendants. Our little museum is only one of dozens of grassroots projects around the state and country whose goals are to uncover and promote the stories of local African American accomplishments. We are glad that Willa Cather compiled her family stories, including those that were "not nice" for little white girls to tell, even if it took her forty years before she wrote them into *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. The truth, as they say, is out there.

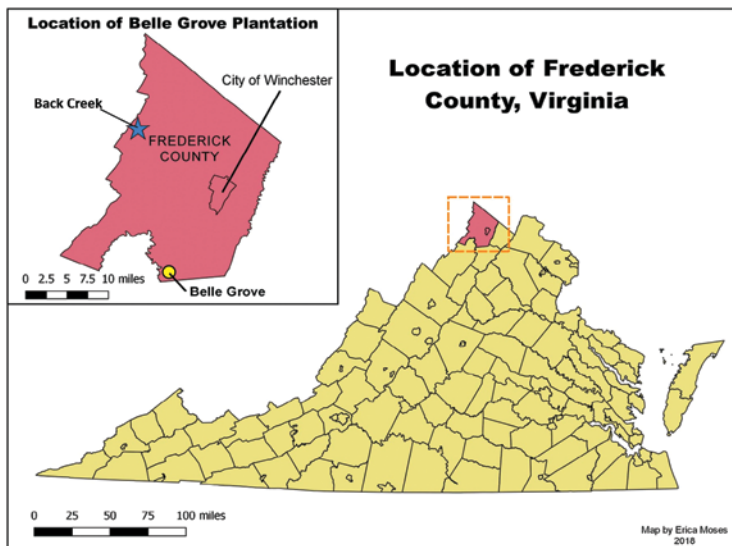
## NOTES

1. Clarke County was originally a part of Frederick County.
2. For a fuller discussion of this episode, see Romines.
3. The word "negro" is never capitalized in this 1940 novel, although by 1930 many well-known American publications, including the *New York Times*, were capitalizing the word, and in 1933 the U.S. Government Printing Office required capitalization of the word in all official government publications.
4. To explore the resources and programs of the Josephine School Community Museum, visit [www.jschoolmuseum.org](http://www.jschoolmuseum.org).

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Belle Grove Plantation and Back Creek, Virginia.

For a novel where many of the characters are enslaved, Willa Cather’s *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is remarkably devoid of enslaved life. By enslaved life, I mean women and men making lives for themselves within the confines of slavery. Nancy and the others enslaved by the Colberts, aside from a few passages, are portrayed as people who “never learned to take care of themselves or to provide for tomorrow” (*Sapphira* 110). In this essay, I argue that comparing Cather’s fictional Back Creek to the historical realities of Back Creek and the surrounding Shenandoah Valley shows us that enslaved Shenandoahans were not the flat characters of Cather’s imagination, as they found ways to take care of themselves and plan for their futures. I demonstrate this using archival documents and archaeological data from an early-to-mid-nineteenth-century slave quarter at Belle Grove Plantation, located sixteen miles south of Back Creek.

Perhaps the best place for us to start is Cather’s description of the slave quarter at Mill Farm. “From Easter on there would be plenty of flowers growing about the cabins, but no grass. The ‘back yard’ was hard-beaten clay earth, yellow in the sun, orderly only on Sundays. Throughout the working week clothes-lines were strung about. . . . The ground underneath was littered with old brooms, spades and hoes. . . . The children were always playing there, in company with kittens, puppies, chickens, ducks . . . [and] turkey gobblers” (24–25). While Cather does not mention why these yards lacked grass, this would have been the result of enslaved women regularly sweeping their yards to create and maintain them.

This tradition originated in West Africa (Heath and Bennett), and we excavated one such yard at Belle Grove, indicating that swept yards existed in the Shenandoah Valley. Swept yards provided space for enslaved people to wash clothes, repair tools, and raise poultry, like the chickens, ducks, and turkeys Cather mentions.

Enslavers typically issued each adult a peck of cornmeal and a pound of meat per week. For most enslaved people this was just enough food to keep them alive and working, making hunger a constant part of enslaved life. To stave off hunger pangs and round out their diets, enslaved Southerners kept small gardens, raised poultry, gathered nuts, and hunted game. Archaeological evidence from Belle Grove demonstrates that enslaved people in the region actively produced and acquired food for themselves, as we have found corncobs and seeds; chicken, duck, and turkey bones; walnut shells, and bones from wild game, including deer and rabbit (Oliver, Seminario).

We can reasonably assume that enslaved people in Back Creek also grew, raised, gathered, and hunted food for themselves. It is important to remember that they would have done so despite working from sunup to sundown at least six days a week, dragging themselves to their gardens in the dark after a grueling day to feed themselves and their families. This strongly suggests that the enslaved people on whom Cather based her novel not only took care of themselves and planned for their futures but went to tremendous efforts to do so. Yet Cather imagines the Mill Farm’s quarter as being filled with flowers, something pretty for white people to look at but which did little to stop the hunger felt by those the Colberts enslaved. She does not discuss whose poultry wandered through the yard, allowing the reader to assume that they were the property of the Colberts instead of the people they enslaved.

Some enslaved people produced more food than they needed and sold this surplus to their enslavers, local merchants, or other white people. For instance, several people enslaved at Belle Grove sold poultry to their enslavers (Blosser 192). While buying one’s freedom was an option, this was incredibly expensive, relied on enslavers agreeing to this, and often the newly freed people were



Plant remains from Belle Grove: a) walnut shell, b) peach pit, c) corncob, d) seeds. Bird bones from Belle Grove.

legally required to leave the state, separating them from their families. So instead, some enslaved people bought things to make their lives a little bit more bearable. Twelve merchants' ledgers from the Shenandoah Valley dating from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century document some of these transactions, including fifty-four instances of enslaved people selling food and 441 instances of them buying commodities, with alcohol, coffee, molasses, sewing materials, and sugar being the most commonly purchased items.<sup>1</sup> Because these records are relatively few and far between, with enslaved people making up just 1.6% of the 30,0930 transactions listed in the ledgers, archaeology can help round out our understanding of enslaved Shenandoahans as consumers. At Belle Grove, for instance, we found sixty-five buttons, parts of two parasols, a brass bracelet, gunflints, and ceramics.




Hand-painted teacup from Belle Grove slave quarter. Photograph by Erica G. Moses.

The ceramic evidence is particularly compelling, as we found fragments of at least 274 imported English ceramic vessels. Of these, 65.32% do not match ceramics from the plantation's manor house, which indicated that they were likely bought by the enslaved people who lived at Belle Grove's "Quarter Site B" (as they could not have come second-hand from their enslavers). This includes sixty-eight teawares, mostly cups and saucers along with at least one teapot and a sugar bowl. For the enslaved people of Cather's imagination, the Colberts were the sole source of anything which we might consider a luxury item. For instance, she describes Till's collection of "lace caps and fichus, and odd bits of finery such as velvet slippers with buckles" that had belonged to her enslaver, or the boots that were given to her husband Jeff (284). Furthermore, Sapphira bemoans Jeff's preference to go barefoot "like some mountain trash" despite "that old pair of Mr. Henry's [her husband's] boots" she gave him (35), suggesting that such items were wasted on most enslaved people. What we have at Belle Grove is evidence that this was often not the case in the Shenandoah Valley, as some enslaved people spent their hard-earned money on items like teawares.

Historical documents from Back Creek suggest that the people Cather relied upon for her information on the region knew that enslaved people bought things for themselves. Between 1849 and 1860, merchants in Back Creek recorded twenty-six transactions with enslaved people (Homer and Nelson, *Account Book, 1849–1851*; Homer and Nelson, *Account Book, 1856–1858*; Gore). Two of these are especially important. On February 19, 1859, Rachel Boak bought butter, sugar, and eggs the same day that an enslaved man bought a gallon of molasses (Gore 128). A year and a half earlier, a woman enslaved by Jacob Seibert bought a whitewash brush (Homer and Nelson, *Account Book, 1856–1858* 185). Boak was Willa Cather's grandmother and Seibert was Boak's father (Cather's great-grandfather). Cather says that her version of Back Creek is based on stories told by her family, and by her Seibert great-grandparents' former slave, "Aunt Till," who knew that enslaved people acted on their own to purchase a variety of items. Therefore, it is interesting, to put it mildly, that these types of activities are not only missing from *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* but that the way Cather underdevelops her enslaved characters as people who could not take care of themselves or plan for their futures precludes the possibility that these transactions could have occurred in Back Creek.

Finally, in the novel, Rachel Blake states that no enslaved person "had ever run away from Back Creek, or from Hayfield, or Round Hill, or even from Winchester" (219). However, runaway advertisements in the *Winchester Republican* show that between 1821 and 1832 at least twenty-seven enslaved people escaped from Frederick County, where Back Creek is located. This number includes four from Winchester and four from within five miles of Winchester. Judy, a 35-year-old enslaved woman, even escaped from Back Creek (*Winchester Republican*). Most of the people escaped without help from white Shenandoahans. For instance, Daniel Lockhart, who escaped the Winchester area in



Itan away from the subscriber on the 1st of August last, a negro woman named JUDY, 35 years old, complexion inclining to yellow, stature rather small, good countenance, and somewhat down look. She was for 2 or 3 years the property of Jona. Carlile; formerly of Winchester, and has relations near Battletown and Snickers' ferry, tho' she may have made for Alexandria or a free state. I will give 50 dollars for her apprehension, if taken out of Virginia, 20 if out of Frederick county, or 10 if in the county, and all reasonable charges also if brought home.

ROBERT MUSE.  
Timber ridge, Jan. 7, 1831. Stp

Runaway advertisement for "Judy," from the *Winchester Republican*, Jan. 13, 1831. Timber Ridge was a range of hills near the Back Creek community. Stewart Bell Jr. Archives Room, Handley Regional Library, Winchester, Virginia.



1847, stated that after the man that enslaved him “whipped my wife and children. . . I could not stand this abuse of them, and so I made up my mind to leave” (Dew 46). He made it into Maryland without receiving help from a single white person. Lockhart’s account stands in stark contrast to Cather’s Nancy, who never considered seeking her freedom until the idea was proposed to her by a white woman, whose escape was planned with no input from her, and who at one point was forced by Rachel Blake to continue her journey. These twenty-seven women and men acted on their own to free themselves from people like the Colberts.

The archaeological and historical records show that enslaved Shenandoahans made lives for themselves. To prevent hunger and to ensure the survival of their families, they planted crops, raised poultry, gathered nuts, and hunted wild game. Many were so successful at this that they were able to sell some of this food, and to use the proceeds to buy necessities and small luxuries. And when the daily degradations they endured became too much, some sought their freedom. While assessing why Cather underdeveloped her enslaved characters is beyond the scope of this essay, I can definitively say that her portrayal of enslaved Shenandoahans is far from accurate.

#### NOTE

1. These ledgers are from the Baler Store (1860–1861), Clark Cather (1841–1842), James Griffith (1860–1862), Mahlon Gore (1858–1860), Homer and Nelson (1849–1851 and 1856–1858), Edward Sperry (1838–1839), and unknown merchants in Charlestown (1795 and 1796–1797), Middletown (1806), Strasburg (1845–1849), and Winchester (1799–180 and 1842–1845). All are available in the Turban Archives at the Shenandoah County Library in Edinburg, Virginia and the Stewart Bell Jr. Archives at the Handley Regional Library in Winchester, Virginia.

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## Willa Cather’s Virginia

Ann Romines

Willa Cather was born, in 1873, as a fifth generation white Virginian. Her Virginia ancestors had squatted, surveyed, built, laid out roads, fought in the French and Indian, Revolutionary, and Civil Wars, owned slaves, opposed slavery, fought Indians, worked as farmers, housekeepers, nurses, millers, hotelkeepers, teachers, and legislators. Clustered around the little village of Back Creek Valley (now Gore), they had made their homes and raised their families in the Shenandoah Valley for more than 140 years. Having immigrated from Ireland, England, and Germany in the eighteenth century, they represented major white ethnic groups

in the area, as well as the region’s dominant Protestant religions: Church of England/Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, Quaker. From 1730 onward, Willa Cather’s family was deeply involved and implicated in the white culture of her Virginia birthplace.

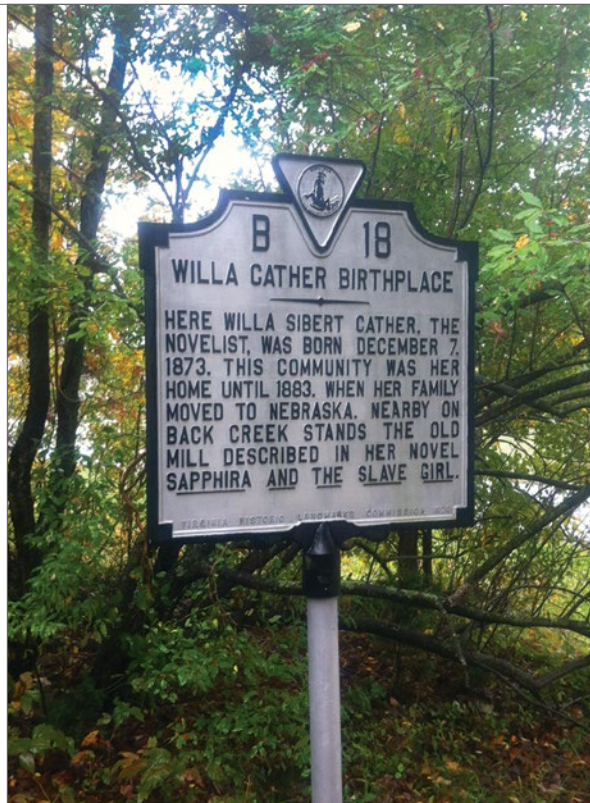
Willa was her young parents’ first child, and she was surrounded, nourished, educated, and indulged by parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, friends, and servants (both white and Black). According to her companion Edith Lewis, with whom Cather shared early memories, “her Virginia life



was one of great richness, tranquil and ordered and serene,” free “from all tension and nervous strain.” Yet, Lewis continued, there was also something “smothering” about the fixed conventions and propriety of this child’s world, and when a visiting judge patted Willa’s curls and talked to her in “the playful platitudes one addressed to little girls,” she suddenly retorted: “T’s a dang’ous nigger, I is!” (12–13). This outburst, echoing racist language that she must have heard at home, seems a momentary attempt both to shock her well-mannered mother and to claim otherness, as a Black person (almost certainly male) who threatened the fixed hierarchy of class, race, and gender in little Willa’s world. She could have had almost no knowledge of what the world of such a “dangerous” Black person

might be like. The African Americans she probably knew were household servants, especially “Aunt Till,” who appears in the autobiographical epilogue of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, telling Willa fond stories about the lives of her great-grandparents, who had been Till’s owners. But little Willa heard no stories from Aunt Till—or apparently from anyone else—about her great-grandmother’s abuse of Till’s “slave girl” daughter, Nancy. When the visiting adult Nancy asks what became of Martin Colbert, the white nephew who had been imported by Sapphira to rape her slave girl, Willa’s grandmother—who knew about Sapphira’s abuse and had helped Nancy escape from it, via the Underground Railroad—glances at Nancy “in a way that meant,” as Willa knew well, that this “was a forbidden subject” (283). There were some stories, about the dangers of Black female lives, that little white girls in loving, prosperous Virginia families did not and usually could not hear.

But Willa Cather was a person with a lifelong appetite for stories. She was also a fiction writer, who invented stories, and had been one for more than forty years when she began to write *Sapphira*. She knew that tensions could erupt when one published family stories—she had learned that early, when she based a fine story on her family’s first year on a Nebraska farm. Her elders vehemently protested, saying “it isn’t nice to tell such things” (*Selected Letters* 80). Cather wrote almost nothing of her Virginia family and local stories until her older relatives and her parents



The marker designating Cather’s birthplace was erected by the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission in 1970.

were dead and she herself, as their oldest child, was the family elder.

When *Sapphira* was published in 1940, Cather sent an advance copy to her old friend, Viola Roseboro’, a writer and editor who was also a born Southerner, “hoping that something [in the novel] would ring true” to her friend’s “inward self.” She wrote, “Not very much of it is actually fiction. It is so largely made up of old family stories and neighborhood stories that I scarcely know where my own contribution to it begins. The epilogue is literally true, every word of it” (Letter to Viola Roseboro’). In other letters, Cather had deplored the untruths of popular stories “of the South and of slavery: the old costumes, the old high-stepping language and ‘mansions’, the old Uncle Remus dialect.” It was the

factual “truth” of her epilogue, Cather believed, that validated her novel; without it, “the whole book would be constructed, not lived” (*Selected Letters* 587). What Cather hoped Roseboro’ would pick up on, as a discerning white Southerner, was “something else which eludes and eludes . . . I mean the Terrible, domesticated and a part of easy every-day life. That’s what I was thinking about” (Letter to Viola Roseboro’). That “Terrible” something is surely slavery, and the tensions that are interwoven with it in the intimacies of family and household life. Later that same month, Cather wrote to her friend and former editor Ferris Greenslet that “the institution [slavery] was neither a torture prison, nor a benevolent training school. It had its pleasant domestic surfaces. Underneath? Well, ‘down with us’ we didn’t think much about the underneath” (*Selected Letters* 593–94).

Cather told her brother Roscoe, her closest family confidant, that the excitement of “Nancy’s Return,” in the epilogue, “seemed to change me from a baby into a thinking being” (*Selected Letters* 591), at the age of five. As that thinking child grew up to the age of nine at Willow Shade, during the fraught years of Reconstruction and its aftermath, she could have amassed many stories. The house itself told stories. It was built by Willa’s grandfather William Cather, in 1851, and its very architecture tells us that its builder was not and did not intend to be a slaveowner, since the house has a basement kitchen.<sup>1</sup> A slave-owning house would almost certainly have had a detached kitchen, as did the Colbert



house in *Sapphira*, reinforcing the separation between white owners and the enslaved workers who prepared their food and served them. Also, an upstairs bedroom closet at Willow Shade has a false bottom, offering a possible hiding place for an enslaved person attempting escape through the Underground Railroad. (Another Cather house in the area also had such a hiding space.) It is hard to imagine that young Willa did not discover this hidden space and ask questions about the stories it might tell.

Stories from “Aunt Till” were also a major source for her Virginia novel, Cather acknowledged. In the novel’s epilogue, young Willa heard from Till about the “fine folks” that her great-grandmother left behind when she came from a prosperous Loudoun County plantation to backwoods Frederick County where, Till said, “nobody was anybody much” (287). Till’s cherished “keepsakes” from her former owners, “lace caps . . . odd bits of finery” and the brooch in which her master’s and mistress’s hair were intertwined, sparked other stories that found their way into the novel. Till is praised in this book as a storyteller: “Her stories about the Master and Mistress were never mere repetitions, but grew more and more into a complete picture of those two persons” (284–85). But who could have told young Willa the title story of her novel, of a cruel, aging female slaveowner and her “persecution” of her innocent pubescent “slave girl”? Cather also writes that Till’s manner of speaking and “hints that she dropped unconsciously” (286) pointed to other untold stories—such as that of the enduring tensions between *Sapphira* and her anti-slavery daughter—which do emerge in the novel. Growing up at Willow Shade, Willa must have had early lessons from both her white and Black elders in hearing (and remembering) stories that were not quite spoken. And we may wonder, too, if Till’s hints were really dropped “unconsciously,” as the adult Cather continued to assume.

When Nancy returns from Canada for a visit to her childhood home in the novel’s epilogue, she makes a powerful impression on young Willa. She is a new story: a self-possessed, successful, elegant, and articulate Black Northern woman, obviously unlike



Willa Cather as an infant. James and Angela Southwick Collection, National Willa Cather Center, SLI-50-202.

anyone this little girl has ever encountered. She demonstrates that you can come home again, even to a home where you were enslaved, and that coming home does not necessarily mean that you have to stay there—truths that Willa Cather wrestled with throughout her life and her fiction. Yet the five-year-old Willa, however dazzled by Nancy, does not question why this guest and her mother, eagerly welcomed with the “pleasant domestic surfaces” of Virginia hospitality, cannot sit down to dinner with the white family at Willow Shade. Instead, Till and Nancy are served “the same dinner,” by the same Black maid, at a second, separate table. “The Terrible,” rooted in Virginia’s long history of white supremacy and compulsory segregation, is still in place, and accepted by this child. Willa Cather spent her first, influential years in a Reconstruction South where Jim

Crow laws were rapidly obliterating the new freedoms of formerly enslaved persons and where a white majority, often led by women, was laboring to memorialize and valorize the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy, and to educate white children to do the same (Clinton 182–83).<sup>2</sup> Although Willa’s father’s family had been Union supporters in the Civil War, a family hero was Willa’s maternal uncle, James William Boak, a young Confederate casualty who is buried at Stonewall Confederate Cemetery, where Winchester still observes Confederate Memorial Day on June 6, a date that Cather remembered and included in her epilogue.

As Cather worked on her last novel between 1936 and 1940, she seems to have been especially concerned with its African American characters, almost all enslaved. She did extensive research for the book at the New York Society Library, especially on the Middle Passage. (In fact, Cather was one of the first American novelists to attempt to narrate that passage from Africa to North America.) She was determined, she told Roscoe, to get her enslaved characters’ speech right—“that speech was in my brain like a phonograph record.” In 1938, Cather “went South to verify” that Black speech (*Selected Letters* 587–88); this was her last visit to her Virginia birthplace. Writing her novel, she was very carefully attentive to changes in Black speech in



various situations. Janis Stout demonstrates that “the nature of the slave characters’ speech in *Sapphira* varies a great deal. . . . Not only is there a contrast between the speech of house slaves and field hands, but some individuals vary their speech according to situation while others . . . do not” (33).

Later, worried about how readers would respond to her Black characters, Cather drastically revised the conventional jacket blurb copy that her publisher had suggested. The book’s “chief theme,” she wrote, was the “persecution” of Nancy by Sapphira, and “Sapphira’s African slaves, who are . . . the most interesting figures in the book. . . . They are attractive to the author as individuals” (Porter 294). If this is so, why is our access to the full consciousness of these Black characters so limited? Yes, there are scenes from Till’s and Nancy’s points of view, but they leave crucial questions unanswered: for example, why does Till refuse to tell Nancy who her father was? Why does Nancy refuse to tell her mother about her relentless pursuit by a would-be rapist? There is obviously a complexly functioning community among the persons enslaved by Sapphira, but we are not allowed inside it. Nor do we have interior access to two of the most interesting and powerful figures in that community—old, African-born Jezebel and Lizzie, the cook. Toni Morrison, among others, has regretted such omissions. She concludes that, “In her last novel [Cather] works out and toward the meaning of female betrayal as it faces the void of racism. She may not have arrived safely . . . but to her credit she did undertake the dangerous journey” (28).

When I was researching the Scholarly Edition of this novel, and the “dangerous journey” of its writing, I was especially interested in the character of Till, whom Cather described in her letter to Ferris Greenslet as “no pitiable figure to me—nor to herself. Dignity, personality!” (*Selected Letters* 593–94). Using Virginia slave censuses (which listed enslaved persons only by their age, gender, and owner’s name) and the inventory of

Jacob Seibert’s (human) property after his death, I was able to confirm that Till had been enslaved by Cather’s Seibert great-grandparents at least from 1850 up to Emancipation. And then, in the 1870 U.S. census—as recorded by the census-taker, Willa Cather’s father—“Matilda Jefferson” (Till’s husband, in the novel, is named Jefferson) was listed as an illiterate<sup>3</sup> mulatto domestic worker, aged fifty-eight, in the household of her former owner, Ruhamah Seibert (*Sapphira*). When I saw those words—MATILDA JEFFERSON—I was so excited that I burst into

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SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Back Creek Township, in the County of Fredricks, State of Virginia, enumerated by me on the 31 day of August, 1870

Post Office: Back Creek Valley C. F. Cather

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		10	11		13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
						8	9		11	12								
Name		Age		Sex		Profession, Occupation, or Trade		Place of Birth		Parents		Education		Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic		Color		
1	11	Benjamin	16	M	at Home			Virginia										
2	27	Henk David	60	M	Farmer		150	Va										
3	4	Mary C	20	F	at Home			Va										
4	4	Mary C	20	F	at Home			Va										
5	4	Mary C	20	F	at Home			Va										
6	4	Mary C	20	F	at Home			Va										
7	27	John C	22	M	Farmer		150	Va										
8	4	Melinda A	21	F	at Home			Va										
9	4	Alice J	24	F	at Home			Va										
10	27	Seibert Ruhamah	79	F	Keeping House		1500 500	Va		1	1							
11	4	Jamuel	45	M	Miller		1500	Va										
12	4	Mary C	35	F	at Home			Va										
13	4	Lizzie	12	F	at Home			Va										
14	4	Jacot J	14	M	at Home			Va										
15	4	Robert	13	M	Farmer, Merchant			Va										
16	4	Susan	50	F	Keeping House			Va										
17	4	Alice	22	F	at Home			Va										
18	4	Kate	13	F	at Home			Va										
19	4	Robert	8	M	at Home			Va										
20	4	Jefferson Matilda	58	F	Domestic Servant			Va										
21	4	Amanda	13	F	Domestic Servant			Va										
22	4	Amanda	13	F	Domestic Servant			Va										
23	27	George	27	M	Rich. Merchant		300 250	Maryland										
24	4	Eliza V	27	F	Keeping House			Virginia										
25	4	William C	1	M	at Home			Va										
26	27	Sorannah	35	F	at Home			Va										
27	4	Mary C	24	F	Keeping House			Va										
28	4	William N	13	M	at Home			Va										
29	4	Kristina C	13	F	at Home			Va										
30	4	Mary J	8	F	at Home			Va										
31	4	John E	4	M	at Home			Va										
32	4	Joseph A	1	M	at Home			Va										
33	27	George	70	M	Farmer		300 350	Maryland										
34	4	Eliza	57	F	Keeping House			Va										
35	4	Joseph W	28	M	Farmer			Va										
36	4	Matilda A	27	F	at Home			Va										
37	4	John Hamlet	50	M	at Home			Va										
38	27	Sorannah	68	F	at Home		250	Va										
39	4	Mary A	60	F	Keeping House			Va										
40	4	Isaac H	24	M	Farmer			Va										

No. of dwellings, 7. No. of white females, 16. No. of males, foreign born, —. No. of families, 7. No. of colored males, 1. No. of females, —. No. of white males, 24. No. of females, 2. No. of blind, —.

No. of issues, 1 11 1 435 11

The page of the 1870 United States Federal Census listing Matilda Jefferson and Amanda Jefferson, as recorded August 31, 1870 by census enumerator C. F. Cather. National Archives and Records Administration, Ancestry.com.



tears at the microfilm reader. Here was the real Till, an African American storyteller who had been an actual, important figure in Cather's early life. In my excitement, I didn't pay much attention to the next name on the census page. But now it leaps out at me. After Matilda Jefferson, listed in the traditional parent-child census format, was "Amanda Jefferson," also a mulatto domestic worker, age thirteen, illiterate.<sup>4</sup> The fictional Till has only one child, Nancy, and Sapphira arranged her marriage to Jefferson, an impotent "capon man," so that her housekeeper would not be distracted or deflected by child care (45). Did the real Till have another daughter?

In Cather's novel, Nancy left Virginia in 1856, made it to Montreal through the Underground Railroad, and established a successful free life there. In the next actual year, 1857, Amanda Jefferson was born, and Till was forty-five. When Nancy returned to visit her mother, as recounted in Cather's epilogue, more than twenty years had passed, and Willa Cather was five, so that year would have been 1879. Recently, I discovered something that happened in the previous year. On February 24, 1878, in Winchester (eleven miles from Willow Shade), Amanda Jefferson died, at age twenty-one, of consumption (tuberculosis), the same disease that killed three of Willa Cather's aunts and other members of the Cather family. Amanda's death certificate was signed by William S. Love, the Cather family doctor, who delivered Willa. A little over a year later, Willa Cather tells us in her epilogue, on a windy spring day, Nancy arrived at Willow Shade for her visit. Perhaps she joined her mother in mourning the recent death of a sister she had never known.

I cannot yet fully prove all this, of course. But I think it does powerfully suggest that Till's story was far more complex than Cather's depiction of her, in her sixties, fondling the relics of her dead owners and retelling their stories to a privileged white Virginian child. Willa Cather recognized Till's dignity and compelling personality—but how could the resources of Cather's white female childhood, those old stories that she wrote into her last novel, do justice to the fullness of Till's life story? In her last completed novel, Willa Cather labored to tell the stories of Sapphira, her slave girl, and the slave girl's mother—and to do honor and honesty to the Virginia into which she was born. She began that dangerous, necessary journey—but in 1940, she could not complete it. There is much work left for us to do.

## NOTES

1. According to architectural historian John Vlach, by the mid-nineteenth century, most slave-owning households had detached kitchens: "the detached kitchen was an important emblem of hardening

social boundaries . . . created by slaveholders that increasingly demanded clearer definitions of status, position, and authority" (43). William Cather, like his parents, opposed slavery, and the house's basement kitchen is an indicator of that. However, the steep basement stairway to the Willow Shade kitchen also offered possibilities for separating kitchen workers, and the sounds and smells of their work, from the house's white owners.

2. Catherine Clinton reports that "During and after Reconstruction, women across the South worked to redeem their fallen nation." They "campaign[ed] to dot the nation with markers to preserve Confederate values and memories," sponsored prizes for children's essays extolling Confederate virtues, and insisted on textbooks for southern children that would provide "a truthful history of the war" (182–83).

3. In the novel, the fictional Till is literate, although literacy was illegal for Virginia slaves, and her owners are aware of this. After Henry Colbert's death, she inherits some of his books. Was the real Matilda Jefferson actually illiterate, or did she think it best to claim illiteracy to a white census taker from a prominent local family?

4. It is also interesting to note Amanda Jefferson's illiteracy at the age of thirteen, as recorded in the 1870 census. Jonathan Noyala's essay in this issue discusses the "Freedman's Schools" available to Black children (and adults) in the Shenandoah Valley during Amanda's Reconstruction-era childhood there. But at thirteen, Amanda was already laboring as a domestic worker, and she had apparently never been taught to read.

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# Wee Winkie Goes to Washington: Cather's Early Impressions of the Nation's Capital

Timothy W. Bintrim

Most readers of this journal will be able to recite from memory the first stanza of the nursery rhyme “Wee Willie Winkie,” written in 1841 by William Miller, the Scottish “Laureate of the Nursery,” and here rendered in American English:

Wee Willie Winkie runs through the town,  
Up stairs and down stairs in his night-gown,  
Tapping at the window, crying at the lock,  
Are the children in their bed, for it's past ten o'clock?

Remembering just this first stanza from childhood, readers may assume Wee Winkie is a short-statured, underdressed alderman enforcing his town's curfew—not a young truant out past his bedtime. Winkie's role as disturber of the domestic peace is manifest only in the poem's second stanza:

Hey, Willie Winkie, are you coming in?  
The cat is singing purring sounds to the sleeping hen,  
The dog's spread out on the floor, and doesn't give a cheep,  
But here's a wakeful little boy who will not fall asleep!

(Electric Scotland, “Wee Willie Winkie”)

Addressing a near-universal truth of parenthood—that children of a certain age are too tired to be awake, yet too wired to go to bed—Miller's poem raced across the world after early appearances in its original Scots in *Whistle-Binkie, a Collection of Songs for the Social Circle*<sup>1</sup> (Robertson, 1841) and *Popular Rhymes, Fireside Stories, and Amusements, of Scotland* (Chambers, 1842) (Opie and Opie 424–25). The Whistle-Binkie collection was one of a number of popular anthologies under that name issued in Glasgow through the 1830s and 1840s, gathered in a collected volume in 1853 and revised and expanded in 1878, when Willa Cather was five (Nash 26–27). Although I cannot say for sure that the Cather family library contained Miller's poem in one of these or other popular compilations, Bernice Slote confirms that “Winkie” was a nickname Charles and Jennie Cather gave their headstrong, peripatetic daughter—a child who pushed curfews and social boundaries (“The American Woman: Willa Cather Centennial,” “The Secret Web” 6–7). Slote explains that “Willa was principally known as ‘Willie’ (or Daughter) in her family, but she was also called Winkie, as her cousin Bess Seymour later recalled in a letter I have seen” (“Secret Web” 6–7).<sup>2</sup>

In 1973, Slote made a fascinating discovery among some papers kept by the Cather family of clippings from the *National*

*Stockman and Farmer* published by Axtell, Rush, Orr and Co. in Pittsburgh, presumably marked by Cather and sent home to her siblings. Slote determined that for about ten months, between August 1896 and June 1897 while editing the *Home Monthly*, Cather had moonlighted as youth editor of its sister publication, the *National Stockman and Farmer*, a well-respected farming paper. In fact, this unsigned work as youth editor may be Cather's first appearance before a national, as opposed to a regional, audience. Among these clippings from the *Stockman's* weekly two-page “Our Young Folks” department were “pieces of [Cather's] own, or variations of them, reprinted from the *Home Monthly*; other biographical references; and several stories by friends from the University of Nebraska to whom she had



Willa at the approximate age of “Wee Winkie,” ca. 1878. Photograph by Wortham and Bowley, Winchester, Virginia. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries.



written for manuscripts” (“Secret Web” 6).<sup>3</sup> Slote’s favorite of these fugitive pieces was “Wee Winkie’s Wanderings” (Nov. 26, 1896), a short story she says is “certainly by Willa Cather and probably autobiographical” (“Secret Web” 6).

In the story, Winkie, who bears a strong resemblance to Willa around the age of five, sits in the dooryard of what is recognizably Willow Shade, tired of playing with her “sullen” dolls, who are acting grumpy because they are overdue for their naps.

Hearing the clicking of the mowing machine in the meadow, Winkie asks if she may go ride it alongside Father. But Mamma, not wanting her sleepy daughter to be stung by yellow jackets (or to fall off the machine into the cutting bar), decides it is time for Winkie’s own nap. Irritated at Mamma’s sensible suggestion, Winkie threatens to run away. To Winkie’s chagrin, Mamma decides to teach Winkie a lesson. She agrees that running away to the mountains sounds like a splendid project, ties Winkie’s dolls and some cookies in a kerchief, claps her “wide, white sun hat with the blue ribbons” on her little head, and urges her daughter to make haste so she may reach the mountains before nightfall.



Willa with her bow and arrow, ca. 1882. Photograph by G. W. Davis, Washington, D.C. Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries.

Bewildered by Mamma’s actions, Winkie wanders down the dusty Hollow Road, then wanders back, but cannot make herself cross the first big hill and lose sight of home. Crestfallen, she returns to the family doorstep:

Her dress was wet with the dew of the long grass, and her shoes were scratched by the briars, and her ears were full of dust. But mamma washed her and gave her her supper, and tucked her into her little bed and never said a word about her running away, and neither did Winkie.

This takes us back to the final stanza of Miller’s nursery rhyme (here adjusted for gender):

Weary is the mother who has a dusty child,  
A small short little child, who can’t run on [her] own,  
Who always has a battle wi’ sleep before [she’ll] close an eye  
But a kiss from [her] rosy lips gives strength anew to me.

Grounding my argument on another, little known item from the “Our Young Folks” department of the *National Stockman and Farmer*, I propose that the Cathers’ daughter, whom I will call “Willa” Winkie to distinguish her from Miller’s male protagonist, not only resisted bedtime in Back Creek, but also a few years later, in the company of her parents and younger brothers Roscoe and Douglass,<sup>4</sup> ran about a much larger town at Eastertide—the nation’s capital. Thanks to family photographs donated by Helen Cather Southwick, we know that on one such excursion, “Willa” Winkie was outfitted in a white cotton dress trimmed with lace and set off with a sash about the waist. This well-known photograph of Willa, posing with a bow and arrow as Longfellow’s Hiawatha, was taken when she was eight or nine by photographer G. W. Davis in Washington, D.C.; one of the prints of this image is hand-tinted and shows the sash as blue. The National Willa Cather Center now owns the dress, as pictured in a recent *Willa Cather Review*.<sup>5</sup> The blue sash, alas, is missing.

Childhood visits to Washington, D.C. have not been reported by Cather’s biographers, an absence curious enough to be noted during the Seventh International Seminar at Shenandoah University in 1997. At the time, Christopher Sten of The George Washington University expressed surprise that Willa’s first recorded visit was in May 1898, when she was twenty-five (25). Today, a growing body of evidence hints at an earlier date.<sup>6</sup> A letter in Janis Stout’s *A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather* alludes to social visits with relatives living in the District of Columbia (no. 1053, 155–156). And in the April 1, 1897 number of the *National Stockman and Farmer*, there is an intriguing, 250-word “Editor’s Talk” item in the “Our Young Folks” department, titled “Easter in Washington,” that, like “Wee Winkie’s Wanderings,” is unmistakably written by Willa Cather.

Although published on April Fools' Day, "Easter in Washington" does not appear to be a joke. The piece recalls Easter Mondays past when the author traded colored eggs on the South Lawn of the White House. If the editorial is factual, "Willa" Winkie could have met President James Garfield and first lady Lucretia Garfield in 1881, and President Chester Arthur and his sister, Mary Arthur McElroy, in 1882. But neither could be counted as her first glimpse of a first couple. Mildred Bennett determined, based on family interviews, that Charles Cather took his daughter, two months shy of her fifth birthday, to see and hear President Rutherford Hayes and first lady Lucy Hayes at the Frederick County Agricultural Fair on October 16, 1878 (Bennett 7; Noyalas 16, note 91). Her

father promised that if she watched and listened carefully, "she would see history made" (Bennett 7). Charles assured his young daughter that the president "was a brilliant man [who] had graduated with the highest grades in his class, and that he knew many languages" (7); Colonel Hayes had also served with great gallantry in the Union Army during the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, having had several horses shot from under him and being wounded four times. Hayes had studied with biologist Louis Agassiz and with the poet Longfellow, whose long poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) would inspire Willa's photographic portrait in Washington, D.C., four years later (Murphy 64). Willa Winkie's proximity to the first couple when she was almost five—and probably again when she was eight and nine—not only makes her childhood seem more cosmopolitan, but also explains her self-possession at age twenty-three when she plotted to meet another first lady-to-be, Ida McKinley, in Canton, Ohio, while researching a profile for the *Home Monthly*.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Miss Cather from Pittsburgh was confident she could buttonhole a first lady because "Willa" Winkie of Back Creek had already done so.

Like the epilogue to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, "Easter in Washington" places the adult author firmly in the story as a child:

While Easter is considered largely a children's holiday everywhere, in our national capital it is made especially so and the city is fairly turned over to the little folks. One of the most



A scene from the White House Easter egg roll, 1889. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-94495.

curious and beautiful customs is the gathering of the children on the low green hillside back of the White House to play and exchange eggs. As I used to participate in this gathering myself I know a good deal about it, at least as it used to be.

On this one day, the city that was once a major slave market apparently achieved an integration of race, condition, and social class seldom seen elsewhere in America (Arbelbide). Journalists were amazed that the combination of a religious holiday and a spring-break-like playdate erased social boundaries.

According to historian Peter Jensen Brown, first lady Dolley Madison is often credited with hosting the first private egg rolls on the White House lawn in the 1810s, but there is little agreement about which administration made the egg games public. Adding to the confusion, egg rolls were held at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue—in the vicinity of Congress as well as on the White House lawn—and at the National Zoo. Historians do agree that after Easter Monday 1876, Congress, in a fit of pique, temporarily suspended the tradition (Brown).

From 1872, according to the [Washington] *Daily Patriot*, "Girls and boys, black and white, big and little, darted in and out of every nook and cranny, romping with noisy glee, and cracked Easter eggs and munched their lunches in the Rotunda, littering the floor with debris in utter disregard of the assembled wisdom and majesty in either wing of the building" ("The Children's Holiday," *Daily Patriot*, Apr. 2, 1872, quoted in Arbelbide). But in 1876, the crowd swelled to ten thousand, perhaps because a





A young Black boy holds hands with a young white girl at the White House Easter egg roll in 1898, in a photograph taken by pioneering female photojournalist Frances Benjamin Johnston. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-46453.*

Originally able to participate in the Easter event, Black children were eventually excluded and not permitted to join the festivities again until 1954, at the insistence of first lady Mamie Eisenhower (*"The Curious History of the White House Easter Egg Roll"* by Kat Eschner, *Smithsonian.mag.com*, April 14, 2017).

short story in *St. Nicholas Magazine* drew national attention to the previously local festival (Brown).<sup>8</sup> Youths who should have known better hauled each other up and down the soggy terraces, tearing up the grass just months before the grounds were to be showcased for the nation's centennial. The damage to Congress's front yard was estimated in thousands of dollars. Uncle Sam was understandably incensed.

The next day, Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont introduced a bill "to protect the public property, turf and grass of the Capitol Grounds from injury" by banning horseplay on the grass. Senator Robert Enoch Withers of Virginia opposed the measure, voicing "strong sympathy with [the] children . . . [and urging that they] continue in the enjoyment of what seems to be almost a prescriptive right acquired by custom." But the gentleman from Virginia was in the minority. The bill passed and was signed into law by President Grant (Arbelbide). On Easter Monday 1877, would-be egg rollers in pinafores and short pants were turned away by the Capitol Hill police. The following year, 1878, the first Easter of Rutherford Hayes's presidency, torrential rains kept the children from addressing Congress's ban.

The great test of Hayes's presidency would come in 1879, when a few days before Easter, he was hailed by a diminutive Jim Acosta during his daily walk. Archivist C. L. Arbelbide, quoting a contemporary newspaper account, writes that Hayes "was approached by a young boy, who exclaimed, 'Say! Say! are you going to let us roll eggs in your yard?' Astonished at the matter and manner of this inquiry, [the President] replied, 'I don't know. I'll have to see about that.'" After his staff filled him in, "the President 'good-humoredly instructed the officer in charge of the grounds to make no objection if the children came on Monday with their eggs'" (Arbelbide). Thus, only two or three years before Willa Winkie's own visits, other children had reestablished the Easter tradition.

The rolling hummocks around the White House inspired a more gentle style of play than the mudslinging on the terraces of Capitol Hill. The mounds of the South Lawn, designed by Thomas Jefferson, were "[a shape] that children could not resist wanting to climb. At their summits, egg rollers could launch their hard-boiled eggs to the valley below while others opted for rolling themselves down . . . despite their fancy clothes" (Arbelbide). Each year, new games evolved and old ones were repeated, "games such as 'Egg Pecking,' . . . 'Egg Ball,' 'Toss and Catch,' and 'Egg Croquet.' First-timers had to be alert to [cheaters] attempting to peck [break their opponents' eggs] with a lye-soaked egg (which hardened the shell) or a china egg. An impromptu posse of older egg rollers would discipline the offender" (Arbelbide). Cather does not mention egg pecking in "Easter in Washington," but she does confirm that older siblings stepped in as enforcers when egg deals went sour:

Sometimes these [colored egg] trades are not satisfactory and some little fellow will want to "trade back" and the other one won't agree, and then there is trouble. Then again some boy will break a girl's eggs by accident and her brother will turn in and smash the boy's eggs. Sometimes the girl herself will do a little smashing on her own account.

While this girl avenger goes unnamed, we may infer what Winkie would do.

The high point of the afternoon, Cather concludes, was the children's audience with the first couple: "Generally in the middle of the afternoon the President and his wife come out and walk about nodding and smiling at the little ones. The children to whom they speak feel highly honored." Here she may be conflating memories of several visits. On April 18, Easter Monday 1881, James and Lucretia Garfield presided over the festival. Because James Garfield served only two hundred days before he was shot by Charles Guiteau on July 2, the Easter egg roll was one of his few public functions; he even recorded it in his diary (Garabrandt).

By the next Easter Monday, April 9, 1882, Chester Arthur had been sworn in as Garfield's successor. A sharp dresser with side whiskers and a shaved chin, Arthur looked and acted presidential. Because his wife had died before he took office, he lived at the White House with his daughter Nell, then eleven, who reportedly attended the 1882 festivities. The office of first lady was filled by the president's younger sister, Mary Arthur McElroy, who during the winter left her children and husband in Albany to direct entertainments at the White House. Cather's recollection that the president went "about nodding and smiling at the little ones" fits Arthur's mannerisms. His biographer notes, "While walking or riding the streets of Washington, Arthur seemed pleased by salutations and invariably acknowledged them by lifting his hat and making an elaborate bow, without regard to the social status of the citizen involved" (Reeves 273).

A 1931 letter from Willa Cather to Mrs. C. S. Hunter of Washington, Pennsylvania, suggests other reasons her family may have made a trip to Washington an annual tradition. A mature Cather confirms that she is the daughter of Jennie Boak Cather and that she remembers Mrs. Hunter's kin, Aunt Susan Hackney and her daughter Kat[ie] Gamble (Stout no. 1053, 155–56). According to research by Kari Ronning, Willa's maternal Aunt Susan "was born in Virginia and married Robert B. Hackney. The couple lived for a time in the District of Columbia, where three of their children were born in the 1850s, before moving back to Virginia. At the time of the 1870 census, Susan and her husband and their younger children were living in the household of Ruhamah Seibert, Willa's great-grandmother and prototype for Sapphira Colbert. Widowed in the 1870s, Susan Hackney moved back to Washington, D.C. by 1880, with several children, including her youngest, Katie (born 1857), whose married name was Gamble." Ronning concludes, "[Willa] probably knew the Hackney family in Virginia in the late 1870s; the Cathers

probably visited 'Aunt Susan' in Washington, D.C. . . . before leaving for Nebraska" (Kari Ronning email to Ann Romines, June 29, 2016). In other words, Susan Hackney was the Seiberts' daughter and Jennie Cather's aunt.

While "Willa" Winkie's wanderings about Washington cannot yet be mapped in detail, scholars should now be alert to trails of trampled grass and eggshells.

*Editors' note: An early version of this essay was presented at the 17th International Cather Seminar in Winchester, Virginia, in June 2019. We were preparing this issue for publication at the time of the criminal attack upon Congress on January 6, 2021. This attack was launched from the Ellipse, behind the White House, where Willa Cather may have attended Easter egg rolls. In our view, Bintrim's essay is a welcome reminder of the countless positive events, happily remembered by many Americans, that have been held on or near the Ellipse since Cather's youth, such as the lighting of the national Christmas trees, university commencements, and annual Easter egg rolls.*

## NOTES

1. A whistle-binkie is a bagpiper who can be hired to play at parties.
2. At least one other Cather sibling bore a nickname derived from a nursery rhyme. Bernice Slote, referring to Cather's sister, told Mona Pers that "Bobby Shafto was Elsie's nickname and [Willa's] poem is about and for her" (*Willa Cather's Children* 16). Cather's *Home Monthly* poem "Bobby Shafto" revises the nineteenth-century English nursery rhyme of the same title, rendering Bobby not as a dandified nobleman but as an unkempt little sister.
3. My unpublished dissertation, *Recovering the Extraliterary: The Pittsburgh Writings of Willa Cather* (Duquesne University 2004), details her writings for the *National Stockman and Farmer*, her unsigned and pseudonymous writings in the *Home Monthly*, and the contributions of friends from the University of Nebraska from whom she solicited manuscripts. See especially pages 27–163.
4. Roscoe, born in 1877, would have been four or five; Douglass, born 1880, would have been one or two.
5. Cather Foundation Archivist and Education Director Tracy Tucker observes that the neck opening seems small, even for a petite nine-year-old. She notes, "The dress has no label of any type. The seams are machine-sewn, but the button holes are hand-sewn. The layers of lace ruffles are whip-stitched to the bodice, and there is a large overlap of lace inside the dress (where it's been turned down) and in fact this lace covers one of the bodice buttons, as though ruffles were added to make the dress fancier, or perhaps to lengthen it to account for a growth spurt" (email to the author, June 27, 2019).
6. Among evidence that Charles and Jennie Cather traveled with their young children is the mention in Stephen Vincent Benét and



Rosemary Benét's 1940 interview with Cather that among her most cherished and earliest memories was of a visit to George Washington's estate at Mount Vernon. The Benéts wrote that "She has always remembered the beautiful stairway, the maze, and the swallows nesting by Washington's tomb" (136). Mount Vernon is about twenty miles from the nation's capital. The nesting swallows would also indicate a springtime visit.

7. As Cather told Mrs. Mariel E. Clapham Gere in a letter dated July 13, 1896, she planned to travel to Canton, Ohio, the next week to collect information on the youth of Ida McKinley for a proposed "scoop," a dual profile of the potential first ladies: Ida McKinley and Mary Baird Bryan (*Complete Letters* no. 0026). This article, titled "Two Women the World Is Watching," appeared in the September 1896 *Home Monthly* under the pseudonym Mary K. Hawley. First lady biographer Carl Sferrazza Anthony claims that in 1896, "After failing to secure an interview with Ida [McKinley], Willa Cather of *Home Monthly* magazine had to sneak into a luncheon to speak directly with her" (87). Anthony cites Janis Stout's Cather biography as his source, but Stout did not make this claim nor speak with Anthony. Anthony is charged elsewhere with being loose with his sourcing, so the claim of Cather crashing the luncheon needs further verification. Anthony did not respond to my inquiries.

8. Peter Jensen Brown identifies the story in *St. Nicholas Magazine* as "Fred's Easter Monday" by Helen C. Weeks, April 1875, 356–358. Having found scant mention of the egg festival in digitized newspapers, Brown reasons that "*St. Nicholas* [had] a national distribution and tens of thousands of readers. 'Fred's Easter Monday' was at the time, likely the most widely read account of Washington, D.C.'s Easter Monday egg rolling traditions ever published." Interestingly, the protagonist is an invalid white boy who was persuaded to leave his sickbed and join the games by a friendly and solicitous African American boy. At the story's conclusion, Fred confesses his excursion to his mother and does not get into trouble.

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# Songs and *Sapphira*: An Interview with Barbara Davis

Barbara Davis and Ann Romines

In June 2018, I attended a Juneteenth event at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Virginia, near Willa Cather's birthplace. I was particularly impressed by one of the museum's docents, singer Barbara Davis, who ended the program with an unforgettable rendition of the song that's often described as the "African American National Anthem," "Lift Every Voice and Sing." That summer, John Jacobs, Marilee Lindemann and I were planning the program for the 17th International Willa Cather Seminar, to be held in Winchester the next summer. Cather's Virginia novel, *Sapphira*



Barbara Davis

*and the Slave Girl*, was to be a central text for the seminar, and we were hoping to focus new attention on the enslaved characters in that book. *Sapphira* includes a number of songs, almost all sung by enslaved singers. We thought about including some of those songs in the seminar's program—but we realized that all the songs sung by enslaved persons in this novel were performed for mixed or white audiences and had apparently white origins—even the hymn sung by Black singers at the 1856 funeral of enslaved, African-born Jezebel, "The Sweet By and By," was published by a white author in Boston, in 1868.

The twenty-some persons owned by *Sapphira* and her husband obviously have a close and complex community, although Cather never lets her readers fully enter that community. We began to wonder what songs members of that Black community might have composed and sung among themselves, and how such songs might become a part of our seminar program. I thought immediately of Barbara Davis, the African American singer I'd heard at the Juneteenth program. I learned that she was a local woman, a minister at a historic Black church, Mount Carmel Baptist. Barbara kindly agreed to read *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* for the first time, and then met John and me for lunch. We began to talk about what songs the enslaved community in Cather's novel might have sung among themselves—songs that Cather did not choose or know to include in her novel, perhaps some of the spirituals that W. E. B. Du Bois called "sorrow songs." The first song Barbara suggested was "Steal Away." She softly sang a few lines for us—and as those unforgettable notes rang out among the noontime clatter of a busy restaurant, we knew what we wanted Barbara to do for the seminarians who would be visiting Willa Cather's birthplace in 2019 and thinking again about Cather's 1940 Virginia novel, in which she claimed that the

"most interesting characters" were those who were enslaved by *Sapphira*, a character based on Cather's own maternal great-grandmother.

The following year, on the last night of the seminar, after a week of discussions of the Virginia roots of Willa Cather's life and career, our celebratory banquet began with a performance by Barbara, wonderfully accompanied by Ruby Ford, a pianist from her church, that evoked the voices of Lizzie, *Sapphira*'s enslaved cook, and her daughter Bluebell, the novel's two most frequent and gifted singers. We heard bits of the songs they sang for *Sapphira*'s white visitors, such as "Home, Sweet Home," the

most popular song in nineteenth century white America. And then we heard a group of songs (chosen by Barbara) that were composed and sung by enslaved persons, songs that expanded our ideas about what might have gone on in the enslaved community on *Sapphira*'s plantation, pointing to shady corners that Cather did not acknowledge. Barbara sang for a mesmerized audience who, by the end, were clapping and singing along with "Wade in the Water." When participants evaluated the seminar, more mentioned and praised this performance than any other plenary program.

More than a year later, that memory is still vivid for Barbara Davis, as it is for me. Barbara agreed to talk with me about it, and our conversation follows.

**Ann:** How did that evening feel for you?

**Barbara:** That evening had a profound and introspective effect on me. It also had a spiritualness that could be felt. My platform is the church. The Lord has blessed me to be a part of the great commission and He gave me the opportunity to be used that night in a way that I never would have hoped or imagined. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Not the color of . . . skin but the content of . . . character." That is what I felt that night as Ruby, Curtis [Barbara's husband, who managed the sound] and I ministered in song. It was extraordinary. The connection with the audience was extremely high. Maybe Bluebell and Lizzie became real. If they became real, could it be possible that other facets of the enslaved experience became more than words on a page? I still feel the beautifulness of that night. Felt the Spirit of the Lord there.

**Ann:** What was it like for you to read Cather's novel for the first time?



**Barbara:** I had never heard of *Sapphira*. Had heard of Willa Cather and knew that she was born here and was a famous novelist, but that was all I knew. And I was educated locally—I went to the African American Douglas School and then, after integration, to John Handley High School. My first reaction to the book was curiosity. How were enslaved people who lived where I live going to be portrayed? Also, I related to the way Willa describes the local landscape, such as different kinds of flowers that grow here and the streams and mountains that surround Winchester and the Back Creek area. Just reading about Nancy and her escape route and how all this takes place in Winchester and the surrounding area made for a remarkably interesting read.

**Ann:** Which characters interested you the most?

**Barbara:** Rachel, and of course Sapphira and Nancy, but it was Jezebel who fascinated me. Her seeing the annihilation of her family and village. Her march in shackles to the slave ship. I made that walk with her. Making it through the Middle Passage. Surviving the attacks on the ship. From the Gold Coast to Baltimore. Having her name changed to a name that means “immoral” or “shameless.” Never hearing herself called by her given name. I am reminded of the Prophet Daniel and the three Hebrew Boys that had their Judean names changed to Babylonian names by their Babylonian captors. It did not break their spirit or change who they were. That is the feeling I get with Jezebel. Unlike Nancy, her great-granddaughter who escaped to Canada, Jezebel had nowhere to run. Had to find a way to communicate. She had a life Nancy and Till [Nancy’s mother and Sapphira’s longtime enslaved housekeeper] could not fathom, even though theirs were very hard. So Jezebel was my favorite character in the book because she was a definite survivor. For some reason, I connected with her.

**Ann:** Do you think Cather treated her enslaved characters fairly? Which characters would you want to know more about?

**Barbara:** Hard question. She is the writer and developed characters as she saw them. But I have to say that I don’t think she treated enslaved characters fairly. I found them one-dimensional and pretty predictable, never straying too far from stereotypes. That seemed to be what she wanted her readers to think and feel. For instance, in the passage where Sampson breaks down and refuses when Henry offers him freedom, I got the view of a Happy Negro with a lazy wife, not wanting to leave his kids and the mill, even though he was a slave there. Another character I would like to know more about is Tansy Dave, who ran away from Sapphira’s plantation when he couldn’t marry the woman he loved but kept coming back when he needed food and care. I wish Cather had broken away more from the typical enslaved narrative. For instance, when Nancy is picking cherries, the novel says she laughed “a soft darky laugh.” I can understand the difference in the language of the enslaved, which is unlike anything I’ve heard in my own Black family and community, but

I’m still trying to figure out what a “darky laugh” would sound like. I really wish Cather had not used the N-word so much. It was painful for me to read; I cringed every time I saw that word. I took into consideration the setting of the book and the time it was written, but I still feel the use of the N-word was over the top.

**Ann:** How do you think our musical program responded to these issues?

**Barbara:** Our musical program was from an enslaved perspective. “Steal Away,” “Deep River,” “Wade in the Water,” “Sun Up to Sun Down.” These are not songs enslaved people could sing openly. They tell of heart stories, of people longing to be free. I do not think Willa wanted to fully address the real issues of slavery. The songs she chose show that she wanted her readers to think a certain way about enslaved people. I chose songs for our program that would convey a realness of enslaved people. From Jezebel being on the auction block (“No more auction block for me” is a refrain in “Sun Up to Sun Down”). To Nancy having to “wade in the water” as she fled to Canada. I feel they sang these songs or similar ones in private, where they could pour out their souls to the Lord.

I believe Willa did not choose to raise her readers’ consciousness about the peculiar institution. Picking more meaningful songs could have changed the narrative of the novel. You can sing songs about crossing over to glory when you die, such as “The Sweet By and By” at Jezebel’s funeral, but you can’t sing about freedom on this side, alive. Maybe she was not sure how she felt herself.

**Ann:** Would you recommend *Sapphira* to readers in your community, here in Winchester?

**Barbara:** Since reading *Sapphira*, I have had several people ask if it was recommended reading. My answer is yes. I think that Willa wrote memories of her white childhood here in Frederick County. She probably got more right than wrong.

**Ann:** What would you especially like to say to readers of *Sapphira*?

**Barbara:** I’d tell them there is more to the story. “Life is bigger than enslavement.” Understand that people you are reading about are not “slaves” but “enslaved.” Jezebel was not a slave at home, on the Gold Coast of Africa. Look deeper for the rest of the story.

**Ann:** Has reading the novel changed your mind in any way?

**Barbara:** Reading the novel and participating in the seminar has given me a fresh perspective. To sit in on some of the lectures helped me to better understand who Willa Cather is. Her legacy can help us to understand the experience of living an entitled life that is entwined with a history of slavery, such as her memories of being a young girl waiting for “our Nancy” to come “home.” The seminar gave me hope. Faith in God’s people to always seek the truth.

*A performance by Barbara Davis, featuring some of the songs she discusses here, will soon be available on the Cather Foundation website, [www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org).*

# My Life, My Story, and Who I Am

Yicel Hernandez

In 2009, at the age of eleven, I got out of my small Mexican town of about five hundred residents, for the first time. My family and I had been accepted to become legal residents of the United States. To receive our papers we had to travel to another state, one that was closer to the U.S. and Mexican border. That state, Chihuahua, is about 607 miles away from Guanajuato, the state where I was born, almost a day if you put it in hours. Taking a plane was expensive, and since we were not and still are not rich, we had to ride the bus. I absolutely loved the experience. Through the window I was able to see a new world. Each state we passed had something unique. I had the opportunity to observe enormous mountains, dams, vineyards, huge skyscrapers, and even some volcanoes. At night, the view was fascinating. The lights of the buildings illuminated the horizon and stars gave each city some company.

My siblings didn't enjoy the trip as much as I did. They hated it, especially my oldest sister, Maria. Since we were an odd number, five people, one of us had to share a seat with a stranger. The unlucky one was Maria. She sat next to an old man, who at night couldn't stop snoring and during the day couldn't stop talking or eating. To make the journey worse, she experienced travel sickness for the first time; she kept vomiting the entire way. I can recall when the man offered her a piece of a smelly egg sandwich and she had to run as fast as she could to the latrine in the back of the bus. She came out of the restroom trembling and looking all pale. I felt her pain, but not even that made me trade my spot. The thought of being offered a piece of that disgusting sandwich gave me a stomachache.

We stayed a week in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. During that year the city was one of the most violent in the country. Killings and shootings occurred nearly every day and night. For that reason our parents prohibited us from going outside the hostel where we were staying. The only thing I did was watch television. I became bored by the second day and was wishing to return as soon as possible to my home. Nevertheless, our appointment was three days away. The day of the appointment we were asked a bunch of questions. If you answered them correctly, you passed. And if you gave the wrong response, you would be asked to leave. Luckily,

we passed, because we all said the right answer to, I would say, the most important question: "We promise on the name of God that we have never been in the United States." That, according to friends and relatives who had been through the process, was what the immigration officers wanted to hear. They check that information and lying could result in refusal of permission to enter the U.S. or to get a permanent resident card. A few months later, after returning to my mini town where the roads are made of dirt and rocks, and high schools and universities are nonexistent, our papers were sent to our home. We didn't use them until a year later.

In August of 2010, my dad finally made the decision to take us with him to the U.S., where he had been residing even before I was born. The farewell was heartbreaking. On the day of our departure every member of my mother's and father's family was there to see us depart. My loved dog, Toby, whom I took care of as if he was my child since the day he was given to me, was the only one absent. Mama Maria, my grandmother, said that Toby knew what was coming, so he left in order to avoid the bitter moment. It was something to believe, because after we left she said he got back home and stayed sad a couple of days. Tears and hugs were the order of the day. No one held in their feelings and it was like a funeral, with loud sobbing. The common expression "Don't leave us" was repeated again and again. When the truck that was taking us to the bus station started, my smallest cousins started running behind it, but once it accelerated and got to the main road they no longer followed us. In the distance I saw the small figures waving their tiny hands and in return I waved back and shouted "See you soon. I promise we'll come back." I never imagined that it would take us two long years to see them again. Nor did I realize what I was leaving behind. Today, though, I know exactly what I abandoned: my home, the small town where I was born, the mountains, the smell of dirt after the rain, the authentic Mexican food made by my grandmother, some of my childhood friends, Toby who was killed the year after I left, the opportunity to create more memories in the place where I belong, my country, and pretty much my soul.

Through the course of the years I had already learned that life was difficult, yet when I arrived to this country, specifically to Omaha, Nebraska, the word "difficult" turned almost to "impossible." My father chose to bring us here because he had, or at least he thought he had, found a home where we could all fit and start a new life. However, when we got to the place where we were supposed to live, the woman, who was my parents' childhood friend and was going to rent the house to us because

This essay was originally presented at the 2018 Willa Cather Spring Conference on June 2, 2018, as part of a panel entitled "Young Voices in Nebraska: Modern Immigration Narratives on the Great Plains."



she was moving to a better area, changed her mind and didn't move out. My dad was desperate. We all were. He tried to convince the lady to keep her word, which she had given him before he proceeded to put his wife and children through this unforgettable situation. *Why did we come to this country in the first place? We have our home, we don't have to be begging for shelter,* I thought, as the fear and anger rushed through my body at that moment. We had no place to go and I didn't want to sleep in my dad's car. Since she was my parents' friend and was ashamed of what she had done, she offered to let us sleep some days at her home and then to find us somewhere to go. She found us a basement. We lived there for four years because we weren't able to afford something better.

After moving in, my dad had an accident at his work and cut two fingers in half. The fingers looked like a sausage sliced on the middle, except that instead of having barbecue or salsa, my dad's fingers had drops of blood that created puddles where he put them. That prevented him from working for a year. The following year our car got stolen and we were literally obligated to buy a rusty truck from the owner of the basement where we were living because it was inexpensive and no one else would have sold us something cheaper. Till this day we still use the truck, even though it's almost falling apart. All these misfortunes have kept us on the same spot since we moved here: without a new car that the entire family fits into and without a home. Nobody in my family has built up credit, and my parents keep working long hours in order to sustain their five kids. I don't blame God for the bad luck and neither do I complain about the life I have, because I know others have it worse than I do. Instead I embrace my struggles and make them my motive to wake up each morning and keep working to reach what everyone calls "the American Dream."

School was tough. Actually it was more backbreaking than anything else. I got into seventh grade without any knowledge of what the hell English was and thus I was assigned to ESL classes. Those classes were awesome because all the students were just the way I was. Each one was struggling with the language. Some had the same background as I did, and most important, they all loved speaking Spanish. Outside of those classes, however, everything was painful. Not speaking English meant constant laughs, discrimination, judgment, and embarrassment. Speaking English in public became one of my biggest fears.



Yicel Hernandez was one of our readers during the *My Antonia* marathon reading in Omaha, Nebraska, Sept. 22, 2018, celebrating the novel's centenary. Photograph: Tracy Tucker.

This is something I don't tell people. In fact, I have only told one of my best friends, and I know for sure that if I tell this to the rest of those I know they will think it's stupid. Even I think it's ridiculous. It's foolish to say that I have to practice what I have to say before speaking out loud. It's also unbelievable that I let others think I'm quiet or unsociable when I'm not, and the only reason I do it is because I want to avoid conversations where I can mess up the words and let the other persons notice how thick my accent is or how nervous I get. I'm a different person when I talk in Spanish. In Spanish I can be loud, I can be funny, I can be friendly, very talkative, and extremely outgoing. I can pretty much be myself.

For years I've been trying to completely let go of this fear, this trauma

that has prevented me from participating more in school, from making friends, from making connections with professors, and from getting involved in the American culture. It's hard getting rid of it, especially because I still see how people judge others because of how they talk. People say "You shouldn't care about what others have to say," but it's not easy to ignore the negative comments or the laughs of others. Maybe one day, once people stop letting out their stupid opinions and comments, I'll be able to be myself in two languages. In the meantime I'll make sure that those I know, either friends or family members, who are going through a similar situation don't end up like me: afraid of fully expressing their opinions.

By 2016, six years after we arrived in Omaha, I had almost finished my senior year of high school there. On April 22 of that year, at exactly 8:37 a.m., I received the following email:

Dear Yicel Hernandez Mena,

Thank you for applying for the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation Scholarship for the 2016–2017 school year. The Scholarship Selection Committee appreciates the time you invested in your application.

Every year we receive applications from many more qualified students than we are able to support. Unfortunately, you were not selected as a recipient of the scholarship.

Thank you for your interest in our scholarship program and best wishes in your future educational endeavors.

Sincerely,

The Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation

At that specific moment, I was doing something that for the first time I was good at. I was playing number one single at a junior varsity tennis tournament. The day was just perfect! The sun was out, my team was prepared, I was prepared and we all had hope of winning. When I received this email I was afraid of getting the response I didn't want. Something inside me was telling me not to open it, to wait until I got home, but the desperation to know what it contained overtook me. As a result, I received the worst news that a hard-working student can get: "Sorry you didn't get the scholarship but keep working." Was that supposed to motivate me? No it was not going to. For a second I said to myself, "Yicel, it's fine, don't worry, you will get other opportunities." But once that second was over, reality hit me. I cried like a baby and let my friends and coach see how weak I really was. They tried to comfort me; everyone gathered around me and started hugging me and saying "Sorry." They told me, "Please don't cry, you will get more scholarships and you will go to college." Weeping and frustrated, I responded. "How?! Just tell me how? I haven't gotten any other scholarships and the end of the year is almost over. I had my hopes on this one . . . everyone gets this scholarship . . . why didn't I get it? Why?! I'm stupid, that's why! I'm never good enough!" They asked me, "You have a backup, don't you?" and I answered, "The Goodrich Scholarship, but do you think I'm going to get it? If I wasn't good enough for this one, I'll never be enough for that one."

Two weeks later I started crying again. This time, however, they were tears of joy. I remember running outside, where my sister Maria, who had cried with me the night I lost the Buffett Scholarship, and my mom were sitting. My mom said: "Ay mija, you have no faith. I told you something better was waiting for you." And my sister said, "Ay Güerita te nos vas a la UN-O!" (Yay blondie you're going to UN-O!) Tears kept running down my cheeks as I hugged the letter and thanked God for what he had done.

Life is something complicated. Sometimes I wonder what's my purpose in this world and in other times I try to make myself believe that I actually have a function and that I matter in this universe. I do not know if it's true or not yet. I'm glad I have the opportunity to have those doubts because if I ever make a change or an impact in something or, much better, in someone, I'll be able to tell my persona that if I hadn't have existed, none of that would have happened. I'm thankful, however, for what I have lived throughout these twenty years. My mom has a saying—"Everything happens for a reason"—that I guess is true. I assume she had me for a reason, I moved to the U.S. for a reason, I cried nights while learning English for a reason, I met specific persons for a reason, I lost the Buffett Scholarship but got the Goodrich Scholarship for a reason, and I'm writing this essay for a reason. I am who I am, and I am where I am, thanks to all the adventures and ordeals I've been through. I'm content with my past. The future awaits and I hope at the end of my journey I can end up content with what I will do, achieve, and live.

## Postscript, September 2020

It has been two years since I spoke and shared my story at the Willa Cather Spring Conference in 2018. I hadn't read my text since then, and today when I do so, tears come out again. I am grateful for everything that has happened since then. Throughout these two years, many things have changed. I no longer consider my story as special as it was to me before, because I have met others that have been through much worse. I am happy, however, that I wrote it and I was able to share it with many others; it's an excellent way to remind me where I come from and where I'm going.

In that text, I wrote, "if I ever make a change or an impact in something or, much better, in someone, I'll be able to tell my persona that if I hadn't have existed, none of that would've happened." Well, today I can tell those words to myself because I am making a little bit of a change in the lives of many. I graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor's in foreign language and literature with a Spanish concentration, a minor in English, and one in business, as well as a TESOL certificate. With such certification, I got a job as an ESL instructor and have been teaching English to adult learners in South Omaha. It's a wonderful job. I love my students, their commitment, and their stories. I am more than thankful that I am part of their education and that I am teaching them not to be afraid of speaking the language and how important it is to know it. I also got a job as an administrative assistant at a Catholic school, thanks to Troy Romero, one of my Goodrich Scholarship Program professors. I will always be thankful for the support that I have received from the program because if it wasn't for them and Todd Richardson, another Goodrich professor, I wouldn't have been part of this *Willa Cather Review*.

In regard to my family, we are living better moments. We finally got a home and a family car where the seven of us fit! We all have a stable job, except, of course, my younger siblings, who are still in school. We have not seen our family in Mexico for two long years, but if God permits, we will see them this year.

Willa Cather's *My Antonia* portrays a story like mine and like that of many other immigrants coming to the United States. What we all do have in common is that we all struggle severely when we first get here. We are emotionally and financially unstable. We miss home, we don't understand the language or the culture, and we're constantly trying to fit into the standards established by this society. Some of us are lucky enough to get ahead in life, as Jim did by becoming a lawyer. But others may face even more difficulties that restrain our dreams, as it happened to Antonia, who did not get an education and had to be working to help her family. Whatever the case is, we came to this country for a reason. Whether it was for necessity or by choice, we are here to leave a mark. I truly hope that, whenever the time is right, my mark is as beautiful as the one Antonia left in the memory of Jim Burden.



# Selections from the Newly Acquired David Porter Willa Cather Collection

Robert Thacker

The National Willa Cather Center has recently added five items to its archives acquired from the collection of David H. Porter. A longtime member of the Board of Governors, a significant Cather scholar (*On the Divide* [2008], historical editor of the University of Nebraska Press Scholarly Edition of *Lucy Gayheart* [2015], and other works), and a classicist and musician besides, the late Porter (1935–2016) amassed an impressive antiquarian Cather collection of over 150 items. It contained first editions, fine art editions—including some of Cather’s own—ephemera, biographies, and other secondary books. It was placed on offer after his death, so the Foundation has acquired its selections: two copies of Cather’s first book, *April Twilights* (1903), a promotional anthology connected to its publication, her personal copy of the *The Borzoi 1920*, and finally, Cather’s autograph notes and a typescript suggesting changes to the dustjacket blurb of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). All are apt additions to the archives and certainly complement our existing holdings, most especially with regard to Cather’s poetry.

Each of the copies of *April Twilights* is in fine condition and each contains ancillary material. One includes the revised autobiographical “Literary Note” Cather wrote about herself and first published in *The Writer* (June 1900); as Porter argued in a series of articles first appearing in these pages and then in *On the Divide*, it proved to be basis of Cather’s initial self-presentation and, as well, was significantly drawn on by reviewers of that first book. The second copy, once the property of Frederick B. Adams Jr., an early collector of Cather and also a director of the Morgan Library, contains a publisher’s publicity announcement for *April Twilights* with a portrait of Cather and a description of the book on one side and an order form on the other. It also includes a small piece of paper signed by Cather and an envelope she addressed.

The third item is directly connected to *April Twilights*. Prior to Richard G. Badger’s publication of it in April 1903 he also published in late 1902 or early 1903 a sixteen-page booklet anthology, *The Garden of the Heart: A Garland of Verses*, to advertise his poets; it samples poems by a dozen Badger poets, among them Cather (her poem “Paris” is reproduced). It also quotes the *Kansas City Star* on the publisher: “A discriminating publisher of uncommercial books.” While Badger has often

been called “a vanity publisher” (a phrasing not yet current when *April Twilights* appeared), most publishers at the time, including well-known houses, took money from aspiring authors to defray printing costs, so Cather was far from alone in 1903.

One of the reasons Cather left Houghton Mifflin for Alfred and Blanche Knopf in 1920 was that it was clear that the Knopfs were shaking up and reshaping publishing in this country. They believed reviews and advertising sold books, and that books should be beautiful objects. Once the firm was established in 1915 the couple went about their revolutionary aims with zeal and panache. That they published a celebratory and self-promoting volume, *The Borzoi 1920*, just five years in is vivid proof that the Knopfs were intent on showcasing their authors, Cather, Joseph Hergesheimer, and H. L. Mencken among them. Cather’s copy is the forty-eighth of one hundred copies printed on handmade paper made for the Knopfs’ friends. It first publishes her “On the Art of Fiction” and also Mencken’s “Willa Cather.” As Porter details in *On the Divide*, a central aspect of Cather’s move to the Knopfs was their willingness to consult her regarding the ways her books were made, presented, and advertised. Thus the final item acquired by the Center is a draft dust jacket blurb the Knopfs submitted to Cather for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. The submitted page shows her autograph corrections and, on a second page typed by Cather herself, she offered altogether new language for the central portion of the blurb. That language, with the corrections, was on the final jacket.

Taken together, these five items are important additions to our archives and will be significant resources to visiting scholars in the years to come. Much the better too, they will serve as fitting remembrance of David H. Porter: a man who loved the classics and Cather, who reveled in music—in his own performances at our gatherings as well as his understanding appreciations of Cather’s use of performance in such places as *Lucy Gayheart*—a friend and colleague possessed of a wry sense of humor. These items remind us of David’s excellent Cather scholarship across a range of interests, of his indefatigable work on behalf of the Willa Cather Foundation, and, most especially and emphatically, of his humane presence among us for so many years as one of ours.



SAPPHIRA AND THE SLAVE GIRL

by Willa Cather

*Time*

For some ~~years~~ past it has been known that Miss Cather was at work on a new novel, but the setting remained, until very recently, her own well-kept secret. For *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, she has gone to Virginia -- just west of Winchester where she lived as a little girl before the family moved to Nebraska.

The period is the middle of the nineteenth century. Sapphira, a rather willful, haughty, and attractive child of the ~~Eastern~~ *Loudoun County* aristocracy had "broken away from her rightful station" to marry Henry Colbert a sober, hard-working miller. Together they had moved to the uplands, to live among poor people who had no liking for Sapphira's fashionable Anglican creed and even less for her cavalier attitude toward slavery.

On the whole the Colberts, who rank with Miss Cather's finest character creations, lived well together -- until the slave girl, Nancy, came between them.

How the conflict that then arose is resolved and how the resolution influenced

Sapphira and Henry, form the heart of the novel. It is a dramatic and moving theme;

and it is treated with the *dignity*, sensitiveness, and imagination of a master. Here

again is the calm dignity of her beautiful style -- matchless among that of writers

of today -- and a story that is moving and satisfying. It is indeed a proud privilege

*round off my first quarter century work* to be able to add to my *imprint* so memorable a novel.

The Garden of The Heart

A GARLAND OF VERSES

BY  
Ethelewyn Wetherald  
Edith M. Thomas  
Harriet Prescott Spofford  
Hattie Horner Louban  
Clifford Lanier  
Roy Farrell Greene  
Marian Douglas  
Herman Montague Donner  
Virginia Woodward Cloud  
James Courtney Challis  
Willa Sibert Cather  
Mary M. Adams

BOSTON  
RICHARD G. BADGER  
1901

With Mr. Richard G. Badger's Compliments

LITERARY NOTE.

MISS WILLA SIBERT CATHER, whose first book, a delightful volume of poems entitled *April Twilights*, will be published at once, was born near Winchester, Va., in 1876. When she was ten years old, the family moved to a ranch in Southwestern Nebraska, and for two years the child ran wild, living mostly on horseback, scouring the sparsely-settled country, visiting the Danes and Norwegians, tasting the wild-plum wine made by the old women, and playing with the little herd girls, who wore men's hats, and were not in the least afraid of rattlesnakes, which they killed with clods of earth. Even when the family moved later to Red Cloud, she still kept up her friendship for the Norwegian farmer folk, whose business brought them often to her father's office. During the ranch period and for some time after going to Red Cloud, Miss Cather did not go to school at all, and her only reading was an old copy of Ben Jonson's plays, a Shakespeare, a Byron, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which latter she read through eight times in one winter. The first two years of her course at the University of Nebraska, where she graduated in 1895, were spent in the hardest kind of study, but then she discovered herself and began to write a little, mostly for her own pleasure and to satisfy the new craving for expression. She edited a creditable college magazine, and did remarkably discriminating dramatic criticism for the *Nebraska State Journal*. With all this she read voraciously, both in French and in English, and laid the foundation of her wide acquaintance with both literatures. Every vacation she went back to the smokesheds and the Norwegians, where she says she found her real life and her real education. After graduation she wrote for the *Lincoln (Neb.) Courier*, and in 1896 she came to Pittsburg, where she was for several years on the staff of the *Leader*, doing clever dramatic and literary criticism in addition to her regular work.



April  
Twilights  
BY  
Willa Sibert Cather

MR. RICHARD G. BADGER has pleasure in announcing the immediate publication of Miss Cather's first volume of poems. Many of these have already attracted marked attention in the magazines, and others, perhaps even more notable, are here printed for the first time.

The title of the collection is an especially happy one; while others sing of varying themes and moods, but the tone of the whole collection is like that of a beautiful April evening, when the old world is young again, and the quiet charm of the clean, wholesome air and the twilight is at once restful and invigorating. It is a little book worth while.

The book is handsomely printed and bound. Antique boards \$1.00.

(OVER)

Among the new acquisitions from the collection of the late David Porter.



# A Lost Painting: *Nancy's Return*

John Jacobs

A few weeks before the 17th International Willa Cather Seminar in 2019 in Winchester, Virginia, Ann Romines was doing some Cather research in the Stewart Bell Jr. Archives at Handley Regional Library in Winchester. That day, she was lucky to meet Glenne White, an assistant in the Archives and a retired middle-school librarian. As they chatted about their interest in Cather, Glenne shared a cropped photograph of a compelling painting of “Nancy’s Return,” the scene in the epilogue of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* in which the escaped “slave girl” Nancy, who has spent the past twenty-five years as a free woman in Canada, returns to Willow Shade for a reunion visit with her mother, Till. Glenne knew the artist and her local models, but not the whereabouts of the original painting—both a circumstance and an energizing challenge for a relentless scholar. That was when Ann sought my help.

As it turned out, I knew the painting and had an uncropped photocopy of the original given to me by the late artist, Marian O’Rork Miller, who passed away in 2016. But I had little more knowledge of the original painting than Glenne. Her photograph was a picture of the cropped painting that she had noticed on a piano at a friend’s home. My copy of the painting served as a cover to a binder where I kept Cather materials for public programs.

Marian was a longtime art teacher at Winchester’s John Handley High School and one of my daughter’s favorite teachers there. She and I became friends in 1986, when I invited her to join a seminar on American poets sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities at Shenandoah University. (These month-long seminars, held throughout the Commonwealth each summer, were designed to bring high-school teachers of humanities to university campuses for intense study of focused humanities topics.) Since these

seminars were meant to refresh the study of humanities for their own sake, I encouraged participants to design their own final projects to present during the final days of class. Marian chose to interpret three poems by William Carlos Williams with delightful watercolors of “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “Queen-Anne’s Lace,” and “The Yachts.”

As I was planning a subsequent VFH Seminar in 1992, “Cultural Encounters in the Work of Willa Cather,” I knew that Marian’s skills as a visual interpreter of the printed word would be invaluable. Seminarians produced a fascinating variety of final projects. One student created a pastiche of reflections on the seminar and its echoes in the multicultural dynamics of her decades-long marriage. Another traced her genealogy to discover

her relationship to Willa Cather via shared roots in the family of Jeremiah Smith, one of the earliest local European American settlers, in 1730. An amateur chef in the group prepared foods appropriate to the major novels we read and detailed their cultural histories. Marian chose a complex project in oils that was framed in Mesa Verde’s Tower City and contained tokens from Cather’s Southwestern novels and *Shadows on the Rock*. (With great pleasure, I’m glancing across my study at that painting as I write.) This painting later became the genesis of *Nancy’s Return*.

During the first International Seminar held at Shenandoah University (“Willa Cather’s Southern Connections”) in 1997, Marian participated in a panel discussion on teaching Cather. Her painting caught the attention of another seminarian, who commissioned her to interpret from *Sapphira* “Nancy’s Return” to Back Creek from Canada. Thanks to the generosity of Susan Parry and her late husband David, then owners of Willow Shade, Cather seminarians visited Willa Cather’s childhood



*Nancy's Return* by Marian O'Rork Miller, 1997.





home, where Marian sketched the room she would depict in her painting.

For her models, Marian sought the help of her friend and teaching colleague Cecily Haston. Till's model was Cecily's mother, the late Mrs. Mary Louise Byrd, and Nancy was modeled by Cecily's daughter Renee. The depiction of Cather appears to be from a photograph taken in Winchester at Wortham and Bowley, about 1878 (see page 17). The painting was completed in 1997, but its commissioner chose not to buy it.

The last known appearance of *Nancy's Return* was on March 28, 2000, at the John Handley Library Auditorium. The occasion was a presentation by Merrill Skaggs on the literary "conversations" between Cather and Ellen Glasgow. Merrill's presentation was one of four by outstanding Cather scholars including Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Ann Romines, and Susan Rosowski. They were part of a public program sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities celebrating the reopening of the restored and renovated 1913 John Handley Library. The program, "Willa Cather: From Winchester to the World," was recognized for excellence by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association. The auditorium is next to the Library's archives, which brings us forward and back to the ghost of *Nancy's Return* captured on Glenne's phone and shared with Ann in 2019.

After Ann told me about her meeting with Glenne, I called Glenne. As it happens, the original photograph was on Cecily Haston's piano. Glenne said that she thought Cecily said the original had been used for a book cover, which I could not verify. Mrs. Haston thought the original might be with Marian's daughter Heather. Neither Glenne nor Mrs. Haston knew Heather's address or phone number. Heather's married name is Cammer, so I began to search for her under that name, but with little success. In searching the internet for any trace of Heather, I learned she was a teacher. So I focused my search on local school districts and discovered her at Indian Hollow Elementary School. The school, a few miles east of Willa Cather's Back Creek birthplace, had created a controversy in Frederick County in 1988, when nominations for a name included "Willa Cather." At a second reading of the proposal, a member of the school board mentioned that Cather might have been a lesbian. At the third and final reading, the school was named Indian Hollow.

My email to Heather was answered swiftly. She had just moved to a new house, but she felt confident she knew where a print of the painting was. Heather does not know the

whereabouts of the original painting. The image on page 30 was photographed from her print, the only uncropped and undamaged one known to exist.

At the least, we now have a nearly complete history of the genesis of *Nancy's Return*, its models, the authenticity of its setting, its exposition at the Handley Library, and its diminished life in the one perfect print and various flawed copies discovered in this hunt for the original artifact that so well complements one of Cather's most memorable scenes: the silent embrace of a Black mother and daughter who had been separated for twenty-five years by slavery. "Neither spoke a word," Cather wrote. "There was something Scriptural in that meeting, like the pictures in our old Bible" (*Sapphira* 276). We see the privileged white child, young Willa, watching intently from the quilt-covered bed; the reunion took place in the bedroom so that she, confined to bed with a cold, could see this intimate scene, as she desired.

It was a bright, windy March day, Cather wrote, and on a table in the bedroom Marian Miller has painted a bunch of just-picked jonquils, fragrant yellow flowers that bloom in Virginia yards in March and are mentioned several times in *Sapphira*. Cather's authorial voice calls them "jonquils," but Rachel and Nancy refer to them as "Easter flowers" and Henry and local enslaved persons call them "smoke pipes," after the clay pipes smoked by both white and Black Virginians (22, 66). In a letter Cather wrote to her mother in 1928, forty-five years after they left Virginia, she refers to these same flowers as "daffodils" or "'Easter flowers' as we used to call them . . . they are the very first flowers I can remember in Virginia" (*Selected Letters* 406). The multiple names and mentions of these flowers suggest how vividly early Virginia memories remained with the author as she wrote *Sapphira*. With her bunch of jonquils and in many other ways, Miller evokes a scene from 1879 that Willa Cather remembered and thought about all her life, until it became the lodestone of her last novel, published in 1940.

Somewhere out there, Marian Miller's painting of that memorable moment in "Nancy's Return" probably still exists. If you should find it, please let us know!

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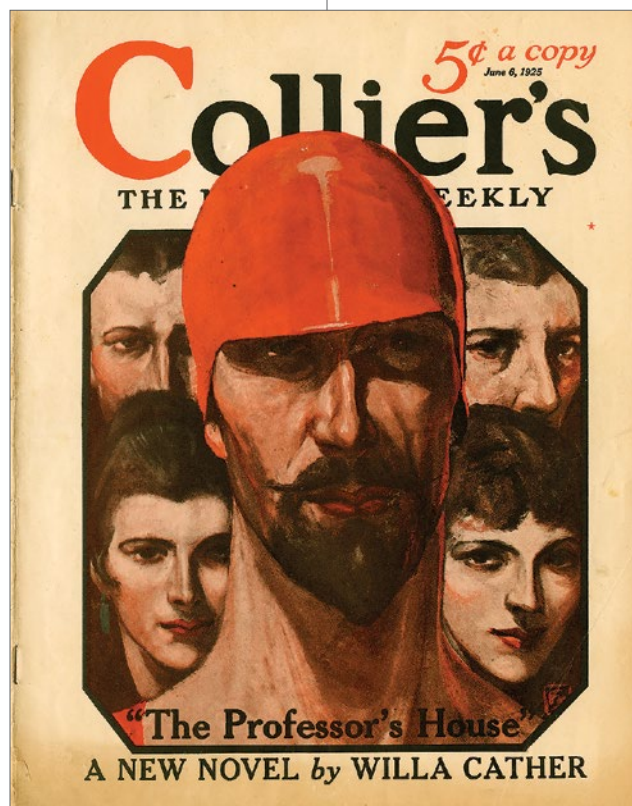
# Writing, Revising, and Promoting *The Professor's House*: New Evidence of Willa Cather at Work

Melissa J. Homestead

When did Willa Cather finish composing a complete version of *The Professor's House*? When did she edit that text, and when was it first set in type? These are precisely the sorts of questions that the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition has sought to answer for each of Cather's novels. *The Professor's House* appeared serially in *Collier's Weekly* in June, July, and August 1925, shortly before Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., published it as a book in September. The Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *The Professor's House*, with a "Historical Essay" by James Woodress and "Textual Essay" by Frederick Link, was published in 2002. In the eighteen years since, much has changed in Cather scholarship. Cather's correspondence with Alfred Knopf has become available (Thacker, "Finding"), as has additional correspondence between Cather and Blanche Knopf (Homestead, "Yet More"). A portion of Cather's letters were published as *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* in 2013, and *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather* will eventually publish all of the known letters. Moreover and crucially, scholars can now quote from Cather's side of this correspondence rather than paraphrasing it. Many more working typescripts of Cather's fiction have also found their way into library collections. The Willa Cather Scholarly Edition analyzed an edited typescript of *The Professor's House*, all elements of which Cather herself typed, including fragments of an earlier typescript pasted into the later typing. However, a number of pages were missing, including many pages at the beginning of the novel (Link 398). These pages have since been found, and the complete document is part of the Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Collection in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Archives and Special Collections.

Ann Safford Mandel's 2019 donation to Special Collections at Smith College of an undated letter

from Cather to Grant Overton (literary editor of *Collier's Weekly* in 1925) and dated, uncorrected galley proofs of *The Professor's House*, which were brought to my attention by curator Karen Kukil, provide new evidence of Cather's composing process and the production history of her novel. In this essay, I look across these different versions of Cather's novel—typescript, galley proofs, magazine appearance, book—and establish when each document was produced. By doing so I present a fuller account of Cather at work on her novel and significantly revise the chronology established by the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition. As scholars have also increasingly recognized, Cather was actively involved behind the scenes in promoting her work, including through what Robert Thacker calls "playing the game of literary reputation" by cultivating relationships with critics ("She's Not a Puzzle" 131). Cather's letter to Overton helps to establish the production chronology of *The Professor's House*, and it also establishes that Overton was the author of a key positive review of *My Antonia*. Using Cather's letter to Overton as a jumping-off point, I recover her relationship with him as yet another instance of her cultivating a relationship with a critic in order to shape the reception of her work.



The June 6, 1925 *Collier's*, with cover illustration by Frank Street.

To begin, dating Cather's letter to Overton and puzzling out who received and preserved the galleys, and when, requires a reconstruction of the earlier chronology of the prepublication circulation of the novel. In the Textual Essay for the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *The Professor's House*, Frederick Link maintains that *Collier's* produced its printed text from a typescript Cather provided to the magazine, and thus "the printing history of *The Professor's House* begins with *Collier's*" (392). Link and James Woodress reach strikingly different

conclusions about when Cather finished composing the novel in its entirety. In the Historical Essay, Woodress concludes that Cather had composed all three sections of the novel by January 1925 (296), while in his Textual Essay, Link concludes that Cather did not finish composing the final section of the novel (“The Professor”) until after mid-March in 1925 (390–391).

Woodress and Link derive their conclusions from different sets of documents. Woodress draws primarily on letters to establish chronology, but one Cather letter he does not cite suggests that Cather was circulating a complete version of the novel in late 1924. In early December 1924, Cather wrote Blanche Knopf asking her to relay a message to Alfred Knopf, that he should “send me down the last part of the novel, the part still in manuscript, as soon as he can, and I’ll get it ready for the printers.”<sup>21</sup> It is doubtful that by “manuscript” Cather meant a handwritten document. Rather, she was likely asking for the return of part of a marked-up early typescript, perhaps the Southwick typescript, so that her secretary, Sarah Bloom, could retype it and so that she and Edith Lewis could polish the retyped document before it was sent to the printers to be typeset. This letter contradicts Link’s assertion that Cather had not yet written Book III (“The Professor”) by March 1925. In an interview with Rose C. Feld published December 21, 1924, in the *New York Times Book Review*, Cather is said to be “now writing a new novel which will come out next Autumn” (Feld 72). This interview is part of Woodress’s case for an advanced state of composition in late 1924. Of course, Cather’s interviews as evidence must always be treated with

caution. Feld quotes Cather as saying of her unnamed novel, “There will be no theories, no panaceas, no generalizations. It will be a story about people in a prosperous provincial city in the Middle West. Nothing new or strange, you see” (Feld 72). This description hardly matches *The Professor’s House*.

As Woodress further observes, Cather’s letters to Irene Miner Weisz suggest that Cather had shared at least a portion of the novel with Weisz over the Christmas holiday, when Cather stopped over in Chicago on her way back and forth to Nebraska. As Cather wrote Weisz on February 17, 1925, “It was such a satisfaction to me to have you read the story, dear Irene, and to see that you got at once the really fierce feeling that lies behind the rather dry and impersonal manner of the telling” (*Selected*

last hard bed? He disliked the 'modern' attitude about death. It wasn't optimism, it was mere vulgarity, and he detested the fashion of ignoring death and pretending it did not occur.. One of his colleagues <sup>had</sup> died <sup>the</sup> winter <sup>before</sup>. His wife belonged to a school of 'Thought' <sup>which</sup> did not admit such an <sup>event</sup>. The poor man had been removed as discreetly as a dead mouse from her house full of sun parlors and flowers.

Himself, he regarded death with awe and sadness, and without expectation of another life. <sup>There had been a time when he believed in the survival of personality, but now he understood that illusion. While a young man is full of the life-stuff of the race, it cries out in him, "I shall go on forever!" And it is right. But when that tide has gone down in him, he knows himself to be merely a vessel which for a time contained an immortal essence. He could remember ~~xxxix~~ how the loneliness of ~~xxx~~ death used to seem unbearable to him; how he used to feel that if his wife could but lie in the same coffin with him, he would not be so insensible that the nearness of her ~~his~~ body would not give comfort to him. But now he thought of that eternal ~~sol~~ solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth.</sup>

One morning <sup>came</sup> on the table there lay two letters; one from Lillian, one from Louie. <sup>They came early.</sup> ~~They had come in the morning, before he started for the University, and he did not open them until noon he returned at work.~~ <sup>Back letter</sup> ~~when he had not had time to open them. They were still unopened, and he put off the moment because they were of a suspicious thinness, they didn't feel as if they contained sudden decisions. Perhaps it was the dread of these decisions that made the idea of the mournful Norseman's house so sweet.~~ Eventually he took them up, ripped them open with his forefinger, and had it over. Yes; all plans were changed, <sup>by the happiest of expectations.</sup> ~~all dates cancelled.~~ The family were hurrying home to prepare for the advent ~~of~~ of a young Marsellus. They would sail on the sixteenth, ~~of~~ on the Berengaria.

A page of original typescript showing a pasted-in fragment. Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

*Letters* 366). More apposite in pinpointing the beginning of the production of the novel, on February 10, 1925, Blanche Knopf wrote that she thought Alfred Knopf had already written Cather “that we would like to have the first twenty pages of *The Professor’s House*, if possible, fairly early since we are getting the fall list in order rather early this year; also, you won’t forget that I’d like the first five or six chapters as soon as possible for our magazine friend.”<sup>22</sup>

Based on this reference to “our magazine friend,” Woodress surmises that Blanche Knopf and Paul Reynolds, who was then acting as Cather’s literary agent, were simultaneously circulating the novel to magazines (296). If this had been the case, however, it could have caused serious confusion and misunderstanding if



each unknowingly offered the novel to the same magazine. It seems more plausible that Reynolds was “our magazine friend,” i.e., the person responsible for placing it with a magazine, and Link bases his chronology on documents in the Reynolds agency archive. In any event, Reynolds acted very quickly. On March 6, 1925, he produced a two-page summary of “the 183 pages that I have” of *The Professor's House*, and his plot summary makes clear that he had in hand a version encompassing Book I (“The Family”) and Book II (“Tom Outland's Story”). On March 11, 1925, Harold Ober of the Reynolds agency wrote a memorandum to “Miss Magee,” another Reynolds employee, saying that “Collier's will pay \$10,000 for this in weekly installments of \$1,000, beginning with the week of May 18th.” Link uses these internal Reynolds agency documents to argue that Cather substantially revised and expanded Books I and II after March 11 and composed Book III only after that date (Link 390–391). However, as we shall see, other documents, including the galley proofs, make clear that this was not the case. Cather's undated letter to Grant Overton is likely an artifact of this series of events occurring over a matter of days in mid-March, when Reynolds offered the serial rights to *The Professor's House* to *Collier's*, the magazine made an offer to Cather, and Cather and the magazine entered into a contract and agreed to a publication schedule for the serialization.

In 1925 Cather was already acquainted with Overton as a critic. He was the author of the much-cited *The Women Who Make Our Novels* (1918), in which Cather was one of the thirty-two novelists considered. In a May 30, 1919, letter to Ferris Greenslet she called the book “amusing” because Overton “wriggles and lies like a gentleman” and let the women authors “speak for themselves----don't they do it though!” (*Complete Letters* no. 0464). Overton did not address *My Antonia* in *The Women Who Make Our Novels* because Cather's novel appeared too late in the year for him to consider it. He was, however, then literary editor of the *New York Sun* (“Grant Overton”), where his laudatory review of *My Antonia* appeared anonymously. Margaret O'Connor does not identify him as the author of this review in *Willa Cather: The Contemporary Reviews* (79–81), but Cather clearly knew that he wrote it and implicitly identified him as its author several times in letters.<sup>3</sup> To Fanny Butcher in early September 1927 she wrote, “You and Grant Overton were the only two reviewers in America who liked ‘Antonia’” (*Selected Letters* 396). To Alfred Knopf on September 3, 1931, she identified “Grant Overton in the Sun” as one of three positive reviews of the novel (the others being Fanny Butcher and “some Philadelphia paper”) (*Complete Letters* no. 2636). Again on February 20, 1941, writing to Viola Roseboro', she identified Fanny Butcher and Grant Overton

900-

M.S.C.

Thank you

Dear Mr. Overton:

You are too clever by half! The theme is very like that of "Many Marriages" - so much so that in joking to myself about it I threatened to call the story "Many Mansions". But please keep your sharp eye to yourself, or you'll have the Freudians upon me with their odious comparisons and analysis, and our poor Professor will be put on the dissecting table. When you put them wise, which I trust you will, I will take them about your ears to show even this, with some of the physiologic words they love to quote. Your letter gives me a jumpy morning - I do like to write for you! It's nice to be sending in copy to the man who <sup>saw</sup> <sup>beauty</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>new</sup> <sup>born</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>expansive</sup> <sup>here</sup> <sup>thought</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>ugly</sup>. That in the pleasantest thing about this transaction, it's mine in my opinion.

Faithfully yours Willa Cather

Cather's letter to Grant Overton. *Complete Letters* no. 3136, the Willa Cather Archive.

as the only two reviewers who favorably reviewed *My Antonia* (no. 1529). As Janis Stout has recently demonstrated, Cather's repeated claims in letters that reviews for *My Antonia* were mostly negative are manifestly untrue (34–37). Nevertheless, when Cather wrote to Overton about *The Professor's House* in 1925, she addressed him as a sympathetic ally who understood her ostensibly misunderstood novel.

Cather was responding to a letter from Overton, and her response makes clear that Overton had read some or all of Book I of *The Professor's House*, “The Family,” before writing her. There is also reason to believe, however, that he had read no further before he decided to acquire the novel for *Collier's*. “You are too clever by half,” she began *in medias res*. “The theme is very like that of ‘Many Marriages,’” a 1923 novel by Sherwood Anderson. Indeed, she confided, the theme was so similar “that in joking to myself about it I threatened to call the story ‘Many Mansions.’ But please keep your sharp eye to yourself, or you’ll have the Freudians upon me with their odious comparisons and analysis” (*Complete Letters* no. 3136).

Anderson's novel was first serialized in *The Dial* from October 1922 to March 1923 and then was published in a longer



version by Benjamin Huebsch in February 1923 (Rogers xi). In it, protagonist John Webster suddenly begins to feel that his life is inauthentic, and at the base of this dissatisfaction is his relationship with his wife, Mary. The family house he occupies with his wife and his daughter, Jane, plays a key role, and he begins to think of his body as a kind of house that needs a thorough cleaning and airing. Thus far, the resemblance to “The Family” in Cather’s novel is suggestive. However, Anderson’s plot and focus is quite different. John Webster, the owner of a washing-machine factory in Wisconsin, responds to this crisis by commencing an affair with his stenographer, and the long middle section of the book consists largely of his recollection, shared in part with his daughter, about the beginning of his relationship with his wife and the false attitudes toward the body and sexuality that she brought to their marriage. Oh, and he tells this story to his daughter while he’s nude. The serial version ended with John Webster walking out the door to meet Natalie, the stenographer, to take a train out of town. The final section added for book publication, however, moves back and forth between the Webster house, where Mary commits suicide by drinking poison, and John and Natalie’s walk to the train station. Anderson’s novel is not sexually explicit, but many critics nevertheless attacked it as immoral and obscene (Rogers xii–xiv).

Certainly, both *The Professor’s House* and *Many Marriages* share a central focus on an unhappily married man and a house, but the analogy loses force when Cather’s novel shifts gears into Book II, “Tom Outland’s Story.” Perhaps Cather was playing along with Overton because she was happy with *Collier’s* \$10,000 offer for the serial rights and because she liked him. She concluded her letter to Overton, “Your letter gives me a joyful morning. I do like to write for you! It’s nice to be sending in copy to the man who saw beauty in ‘Antonia’ when she was new-born and everyone else thought her ugly. That is the pleasantest thing about this transaction. It’s unique in my experience.”

The uncorrected galley proofs definitively contradict Link’s hypothesis about the compositional chronology of the novel and when it was first set in type. The galleys were produced over time rather than all at once, as indicated by the dates printed at the top of pages. Some pages are not dated, some chapters span dates, and in the middle of Chapter V of “Tom Outland’s Story,” the printers stopped printing dates at the top of the pages. The following list roughly summarizes the available date information on the galleys:

February 27: Book I, chapters 1–2

April 21: Book I, chapter 3

April 22: Book I, chapters 4–6

April 23: Book I, chapters 7–8

April 24: Book I, chapter 9

April 27: Book I, chapters 10–12

April 28: Book I, chapters 12–17, and Book II, chapters 1–2

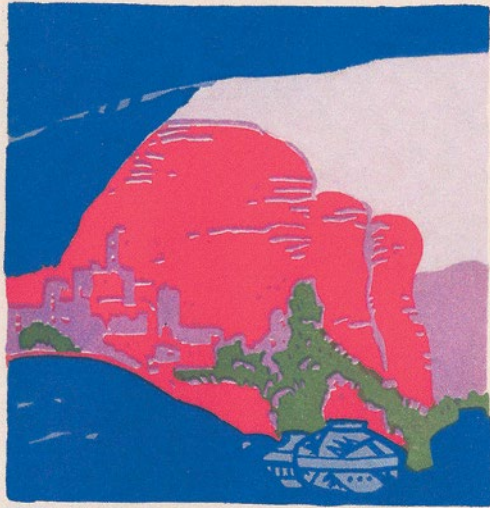
April 29: Book II, chapters 2–5

At the beginning of Book I and at the middle of the April 24 installment (Book I, Chapter 9), yellow printed labels saying “DUPLICATE SET DO NOT RETURN THIS LOT” were affixed to the galley pages. Recall that in early March Reynolds was sent a typescript encompassing Books I and II of the novel. As my list makes clear, the first two chapters of the novel had already been set and printed as galleys several weeks *before* the incomplete typescript was sent to Reynolds. Although Cather continued to refine and polish as late in the process as she could, the dated Knopf galleys make it clear that she did not, as Link further argues, “expand” Books I and II in March and April.

Furthermore, on March 12, just after Reynolds secured the agreement with *Collier’s*, Cather sent the schedule for serial publication in the magazine (apparently included in the offer letter from the magazine) to Blanche Knopf, asking her to take note of the details and return the document. Cather’s letter is undated, but Blanche Knopf responded on March 14, observing, “*Collier’s* certainly do feel keen, as, of course they should. But I agree that it is nice to have them feel that way.” On March 16, with the *Collier’s* offer letter having been returned to her, Cather forwarded it to Irene Miner Weisz. Cather’s letter to Weisz provides further detail about the speed with which *Collier’s* acquired the serial. She was sending the *Collier’s* letter to Weisz because, as she wrote, “you saw my Professor in his early stages and took such a tender interest in him.” As she further explained, the novel needed to be placed with a weekly rather than a monthly because a monthly “could not use it fast enough to eat it all up before the book date, Sept. 1st.” She also reported that the “first editor my agent sent it to bought it within a few hours after it was sent to him, as you see” (*Selected Letters* 368). Thus it is possible, even likely, that Grant Overton spent a few hours reading Book I, “The Family,” and both made an offer for serial rights and wrote Cather about the novel’s marriage theme before he had even gotten to “Tom Outland’s Story.” Cather did not mention the financial offer in her letter to Overton—her acceptance was likely routed through Reynolds. In any event, she likely wrote Overton around the same time as the business side was quickly transacted. Although Cather did not write the month, day, and year at the top of the letter, she did write “Thursday,” and March 12, 1925, the day she forwarded the serialization schedule to Blanche Knopf, was a Thursday. It is thus probable that the newly discovered letter to Overton was also written on March 12, 1925, or, possibly, the next Thursday, March 19.



# The Professor's House



Willa Cather

The first edition dust jacket (reproduction), with cover illustration by C. B. Falls.

Another piece of evidence linked to Overton reveals that he was provided with a complete text of the novel not long after Cather contracted with *Collier's* and the schedule of the serialization was in place. On April 15, Cather sent Blanche Knopf “Overton’s note for the back of the jacket” of the novel. Cather’s enclosure does not survive, but a laudatory critical notice of *The Professor's House* by Overton did indeed appear on the novel’s dust jacket. I was alerted to the existence of this version of the dust jacket by a footnote in David Porter’s *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* (318 note 23). The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Archives and Special Collections has recently acquired many volumes from Porter’s collection, including a copy of *The Professor's House* with Overton’s blurb on the jacket. The text is as follows:

“Of all Miss Cather’s books, *The Professor's House* is the one I should like to see command the largest public, both for its own distinguished quality and its direct interest to American readers everywhere.

“The half-dozen members of Professor St. Peter’s family are presented with an intensity which makes recognition fairly leap

forth. Tom Outland, who so profoundly influenced these lives, spiritually and materially, is all the youth of the world, wistful and proud, with something sturdy and something undefeatable.

“His own narrative finds its place in the novel like the ‘turquoise set in dull silver’ or like the andante in a symphony.

“The arrowy perfection of the book is not perceived until the very end, where from a wide flight and from scenes of amazing pictorial beauty the focus draws down to the single figure of a middle-aged man taking his last farewell of boyhood. I do not know when I have been so much moved by a few pages of simple writing. At the end I caught my breath and said with Conrad: ‘Behold!—all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest.’”<sup>4</sup>

As Cather’s letter to Blanche Knopf suggests, she herself solicited the blurb from Overton. She had flattered Overton’s critical judgment, positioning him as her ideal sympathetic and discerning reader, and as his blurb suggests, she had cannily steered him toward extravagant praise and an explication of the novel’s structure in line with her own understanding of it. To top it all off, his blurb closes with a quotation from Joseph Conrad’s preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* in which Conrad briefly and poetically defines the nature of art and the artist—high praise, indeed.

Overton’s blurb also establishes that he had read the entire novel by mid April. Only the first two chapters were in galley by April 16, so Overton necessarily read the complete text in typescript. Similarly, Frank Street, the illustrator for the *Collier's* serial, probably began work for the early installments based on the same typescript. Nevertheless, as discussed further below, the galley’s closely match the *Collier's* serial text, and although the donor to Smith College Special Collections had no documentation of her acquisition, it seems plausible, even likely, that the donated galley’s were sent by Cather (or the Knopf offices) to Overton for *Collier's* to use in producing the serial text. The galley’s show no sign of having been used as setting copy for the magazine. However, galley’s would have been printed in multiple copies, and Overton easily could have received two sets, retaining one set as a memento.

The serial publication schedule in *Collier's* was as follows (the magazine numbered the books but did not include the chapter numbers present on the galley’s, likely to save space):

June 6: Book I, chapters 1–2

June 13: Book I, chapters 3–6

June 20: Book I, chapters 7–9

June 27: Book I, chapters 10–12

July 4: Book I, chapters 13–16

July 11: Book I, chapter 17 and Book II, chapters 1–3



July 18: Book II, chapters 3–6

July 25: Book II, chapter 6–7 and Book III, chapters 1–2

August 1: Book III, chapters 3–5

Although the latter portion of the galley proofs is undated, Cather had informed Blanche Knopf of *Collier's* schedule, and Knopf clearly ensured that galley proofs were available early enough for the magazine to use them as setting copy.

Only the one Cather letter to Overton has surfaced thus far, but she clearly stayed in contact with him thereafter, both in person and by letter. As serialization of *The Professor's House* was nearing its end in July, Overton included in his *Collier's* column "Have You Read?" what seems to be a snippet of conversation with Cather, perhaps over tea at 5 Bank Street:

In nearly every one of [Willa Cather's books] there is a boy or very young man who tells the story, or who is of first importance in it. A typical instance is Tom Outland in her new novel now running serially in these pages. "Why the boy or young man?" you ask Miss Cather, who laughs and replies that she grew up with three brothers, "all nearly of an age" and the point of view comes natural to her.<sup>5</sup>

This insight appears in a slightly different form in Overton's chapter on Cather in his revised and thoroughly reconceived 1928 version of *The Women Who Make Our Novels*. In the 1928 revision he also recounts a version of Cather's creative process in writing *The Professor's House* not otherwise made public during Cather's lifetime. At the end of his discussion of *My Antonia*, he explains that the "lapse of four years" between the publication of that novel and *One of Ours* "is largely accounted for by the fact that Miss Cather did some work on the novel which was ultimately to become "The Professor's House" (84). He returns to the question of compositional chronology in his discussion of the form of *The Professor's House* and the split between Godfrey St. Peter's and Tom Outland's stories:

When she began to write this book—before writing "One of Ours" and "A Lost Lady"—she started with young Tom in New Mexico. She has always liked to write narrative and Tom's story seemed the natural beginning of what she had to tell. But after some progress she found out her mistake, for Tom's story was monotonous, and except as a piece of high adventure, meaningless. She found out her mistake without immediately finding out how to mend it. The novel was laid aside while she went ahead with other work.

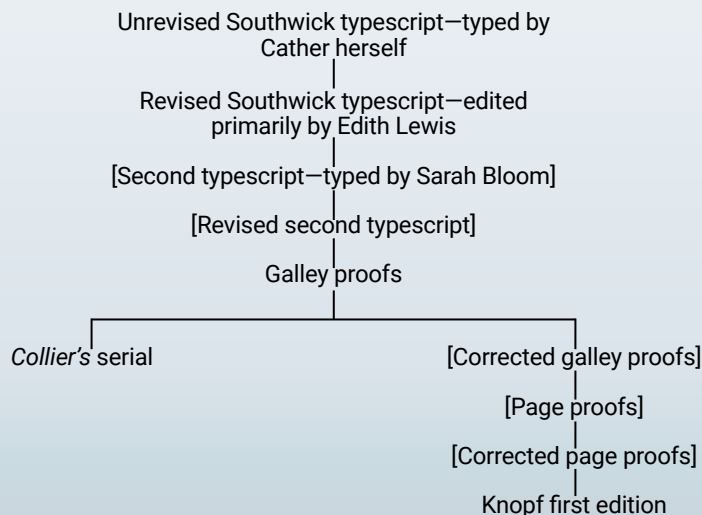
Eventually it came to her that Tom was significant only as he affected other lives; that it was this effect which she had to show; and that she must begin with those lives, showing them as Tom had affected them. . . .

So she set out to write the novel as it stands. (92)

Cather maintained contact with Overton at least through 1926. In April of that year, as she was working on *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she had Overton, a recent convert to Catholicism, read over the early part of the manuscript for her.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Cather might have maintained the connection even longer, perhaps asking him to read *Shadows on the Rock* before publication, but he died in 1930 at the age of forty-two.



I conclude by turning to the galley proofs as evidence of the evolution of the text of *The Professor's House* over time. Link finds "more than thirteen hundred variants in accidentals and some five hundred in substantives between the magazine text and that of the first printing of the Knopf first edition" (403). Although Link's analysis of the variants between the *Collier's* and Knopf texts still stands, the route through which these variants were produced must be revised. Clearly, there *was* a retyping of the Southwick typescript that Cather (and likely Lewis)<sup>7</sup> further revised—indeed, there may have been two retypings. However, this missing typescript (or two) came earlier in the process and was the basis for *both* the *Collier's* and Knopf texts because the *Collier's* text descends from the same galley proofs as the Knopf first edition (see illustration below for a diagram of this textual transmission).



This diagram (called a stemma) represents the versions of Cather's text and their relationship to one another as lines of descent. The stemma includes the newly discovered galley proofs. Documents not currently known to exist, but which logically account for differences between known versions, are represented in brackets.

I do not attempt to provide a full account of divergences and continuities between the revised Southwick typescript, the galley proofs, the *Collier's* text, and the first edition. Rather, I provide a few telling examples, dividing them into three categories. First, I provide examples in which the revised typescript and *Collier's* text cluster

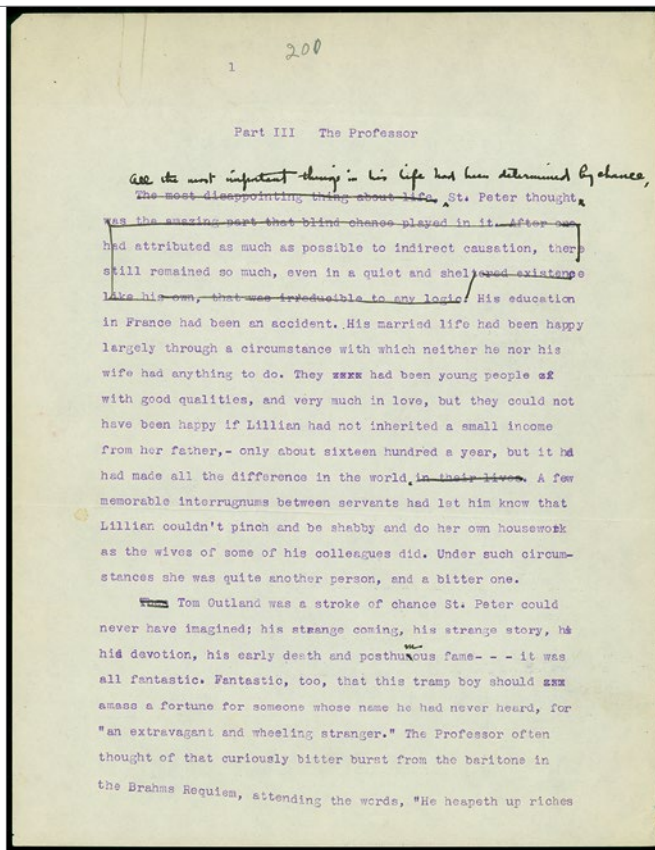


together and the galleys and first edition cluster together. Second, I consider instances in which the *Collier's* text differs from the three other texts. And third, I note examples in which the first edition departs from the three earlier texts. Examples from all three categories support the line of textual transmission I propose above.

In Book I, Chapter I, even though Edith Lewis marked many substantial revisions on the Southwick typescript, many elements of all four versions of texts are identical, save for small variations in punctuation and spelling. In typing the text, Cather generally tried to hew to the Knopf house style of using British spellings (this allowed Knopf to send printed sheets to England to be used for British editions).<sup>8</sup>

Cather was not entirely consistent in this, however, and as the galleys demonstrate, a Knopf copy editor made sure to impose British spellings uniformly across the text. On the other hand, a copy editor for *Collier's* evidently imposed the magazine's house style on the Knopf galleys used as the magazine's setting copy.<sup>9</sup> Thus the Professor wears "pyjamas" in the typescript (2) and in the galleys and first edition (12), while in the *Collier's* text he wears "pajamas" (June 6, 5). In contrast, the Professor's "neighbors" hold his walled garden against him in the typescript (4) and in *Collier's* (June 6, 5), but in the galleys and the first edition his "neighbours" are resentful (14).

Beyond spelling and punctuation differences, some elements of the *Collier's* text are unique. Significant passages that appear in the Southwick typescript, the galleys, and the Knopf first edition are omitted from the *Collier's* text. These omissions are of the kind that Link attributes to the magazine shortening the text because of space constraints (406–7). Take, for example, the famous passage at the end of Chapter XIV of Book I. In a conversation with his wife, Godfrey St. Peter suggests that perhaps an aged Euripides withdrew from society to live in a cave "because he had observed women so closely all his life." This passage is in the Southwick typescript (121), the uncorrected galleys, and the Knopf first edition (154); however, it is *not* in *Collier's*. Facing space constraints, the *Collier's* copy editor deleted the passage, privileging forward movement of the plot



The typescript page showing an example of Edith Lewis's role in the editing process. Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

over character development. Link notes another category of changes made by *Collier's*—the magazine eliminated trademarks to ensure that the novel did not appear to privilege one brand over another (407). Thus in the Southwick typescript (29, 59), the galleys, and the Knopf first edition (46, 81), Scott McGregor drives a Ford and Louie Marsellus drives a Pierce-Arrow, but in *Collier's* McGregor drives a "little car" (June 6, 38) and Marsellus drives a "luxurious car" (June 20, 22). In these instances, the through line is clear. Cather had crafted the passage about Euripides and assigned brand names to the sons-in-law's cars in 1924, and she did not depart from those choices later. *Collier's* was solely responsible for these omissions and changes.

In other instances, however, in which the Southwick typescript, galleys, and *Collier's* text agree but differ from the first edition, we can infer two potential lines of transmission. Cather may have marked changes on the galleys in late spring of 1925, which were incorporated before the page proofs were printed. In the alternative, she may have marked these changes on the page proofs in the summer of 1925, and these changes were incorporated before the first edition was printed. Sometimes changes in this category are quite subtle. For example, in Book I, Chapter II, Kathleen's hair had "distinctly green lights in it" in the typescript (23), in the galleys, and in *Collier's* (June 6, 37); and the professor's eyebrows were "grizzled" in the typescript (25), in the galleys, and in *Collier's* (June 6, 38). But in the first edition Kathleen's "lights" became "glints" (38) and Godfrey's eyebrows "heavy" (41). Similarly Louie offers to drive dinner guest Sir Edgar out to Outland, his country house, a drive of "less than half an hour" in the typescript (24), in the galleys, and in *Collier's* (June 6, 37), but in the first edition the timespan became simply "half an hour" (40).

To my mind, the most interesting set of changes comes at the beginning of Book III, Chapter I and can be tracked across the four different texts, including from the galleys to the first edition. The chronology established above allows us to track these incremental changes over time in 1924 and 1925. When Cather typed the opening of Book III some time in late 1924, she gave the following summary of Godfrey St. Peter's ruminations about his



life: “The most disappointing thing about life, St. Peter thought, was the amazing part that blind chance played in it. After one had attributed as much as possible to indirect causation, there still remained so much, even in a quiet and sheltered existence like his own, that was irreducible to any logic” (224). Revising the Southwick typescript, also in 1924, Lewis substituted one pithy sentence for Cather’s two: “All the most important things in his life had been determined by chance, St. Peter thought” (see illustration on page 38). In the uncorrected galleys and the *Collier’s* text produced from them, the clauses are reordered and the verb changed from “thought” to “knew”: “All the most important things in his life, St. Peter knew, had been determined by chance” (July 27, 28). This version of the sentences testifies to the existence of the hypothetical typescript in the stemma, now lost or not yet located, on which Cather and/or Lewis made these changes—it was this edited typescript that was used as setting copy for the galleys. Finally, in the Knopf first edition, after further revisions marked either on the galleys in late spring 1925 or on the page proofs that summer, the crucial verb had changed yet again: “All the most important things in his life, St. Peter sometimes reflected, had been determined by chance” (257).

When the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition began its work, the conventional wisdom held that “Cather and her editors destroyed manuscripts, typescripts, and proofs” of her works, leaving only texts published in print as evidence of her creative process (Rosowski 35). This conventional wisdom was based, in part, on a January 19, 1936, letter to Pat Knopf, Alfred Knopf’s son, in which Cather claimed as much. “The typescript of *A LOST LADY* was certainly a forgery,” she began—it seems Pat Knopf had been offered a typescript for purchase by a manuscript dealer and had written her about it. “I had but one,” she continued, “and that I burned with a lot of other typescripts before I left Bank Street. Since then I have been offered a good deal of money for certain ones of those manuscripts, but when I was packing to go into storage, those dusty old typescripts did not seem to me worth the room they would take up” (*Complete Letters* no. 1291). As the Scholarly Edition began its work, the emergence of the Southwick typescript demonstrated that typescripts for Cather’s works after *A Lost Lady* had *not* all been destroyed—at least one, and sometimes more than one, edited typescript is now available for every book after *The Professor’s House* except *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (for which there are manuscript fragments). As the case of *The Professor’s House* galley proofs suggests, private collectors may hold yet more prepublication materials, acquired years ago, that may yet become available for study. If and when they do, the analysis of other already-published Willa Cather Scholarly Edition volumes will also need to be revisited.

1. The date for this letter, which Cather dated only “Monday,” is speculative. There are no outgoing carbons from either Blanche or Alfred from November and December 1924. However, Cather declined an invitation by explaining she was not accepting invitations until January first; this suggests that Cather was rejecting a December invitation. Furthermore, Cather did not depart for Red Cloud until the next week of December, seemingly on the spur of the moment, making early December a reasonable supposition. And, finally, Cather referred to a completed novel manuscript and a new work underway, and no other Cather novel published by the Knopf firm fits this end-of-year scenario.

2. On February 27, 1925, Blanche Knopf wrote that she was “expecting to see the manuscript the beginning of next week” and “most certainly eager to read it,” which might conceivably be a reference to *The Professor’s House*, but as the galley proofs were already in production, it seems unlikely, unless it was the “manuscript” of later chapters. It is possible that she was instead referring to an early typescript of *My Mortal Enemy*.

3. Stout also identifies Overton as the likely author of the review based on Cather’s references to him in letters to others (22, 40 note 87), but her letter to Overton makes the identification definitive.

4. Joan Crane identifies the first trade edition jacket as featuring a nineteen-line blurb (113), and Overton’s blurb was formatted into twenty-two lines. Relying on Crane’s bibliography, Porter reproduces the text of a different, unsigned blurb from the back jacket of *The Professor’s House*, identifying it as the earliest (43–44). However, considering how early Cather sent Overton’s text on to the Knopfs, the jacket featuring it may actually be the earlier of the two. Before Porter’s collection was put up for sale, Robert Thacker obtained a photocopy of the blurb for me from Porter’s family.

5. I am indebted to Charles Johanningsmeier’s essay on the serialization of the novel in *Collier’s* and for his help in finding this commentary by Overton in the magazine.

6. Louise Guerber (later Burroughs) reports this in her diary. Cather had met Guerber in 1925 when she went to do early research for *Archbishop* at the Denver Public Library, where Guerber then worked. In 1926 Guerber moved to New York City to work at the library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Guerber recorded that on April 26, 1926, Cather “called me up to know if I’d like the 1st part of the MS of the Bishop. During the morning a boy from *Collier’s* Wkly brought it up. Grant Overton had had it. Miss C. said he had had it. Miss C. said he had recently become a Catholic and she wanted him to read it to see if there was anything go of Jesuits [?] in it.” See also Overton’s obituary, which specifies a Roman Catholic funeral mass and mentions his membership in “the Catholic Club” (“Grant Overton”).

7. On Lewis’s role as Cather’s editorial collaborator rather than her “amanuensis,” as the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition



consistently characterizes her, see my “Willa Cather, Edith Lewis, and Collaboration,” and “The Composing, Editing, and Publication of Willa Cather’s *Obscure Destinies* Stories.”

8. Although the British spellings in Cather’s fiction have sometimes been characterized as Cather’s personal preference, as the more fully documented case of the *Obscure Destinies* stories demonstrates, this was not the case (Homestead, “Composing”).

9. Because the opening pages of the Southwick typescript were missing at the time the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition did its analysis (see above), the Scholarly Edition apparatus does not document some of these variants. In my analysis, my parenthetical citation practice is as follows. I cite page numbers for the Southwick typescript. I cite the *Collier’s* text by issue date and page number. I cite the first edition through the Scholarly Edition volume, for which the first edition served as copy text. And, finally, as the galley proofs are unpaginated, I provide no parenthetical citation information for them.

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# Laurie Smith Camp

Glenda Pierce

On September 23, 2020, the Honorable Laurie Smith Camp, Senior United States District Court Judge for the District of Nebraska, died unexpectedly but peacefully in her sleep at her home in Omaha, Nebraska. Lawyers, judges, and friends from across the state of Nebraska and beyond mourn her passing. The Cather world, too, mourns the loss of a great friend and enthusiastic supporter of Willa Cather's life and legacy.

The day after Judge Smith Camp's death, the Honorable John Gerrard, Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska issued a moving statement on behalf of the Court:

The entire federal court family is devastated by the sudden and unexpected loss of Senior Judge Laurie Smith Camp. Judge Smith Camp was not just an outstanding judge and true leader on our Court, but she was a gracious mentor, friend, and confidante to so many individuals in both the courthouse and the community. She truly was the Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the Nebraska legal community. And I say that with the highest regard to both of these amazing women. Like Justice Ginsburg, Judge Smith Camp was a pioneer and advocate of women's rights, a wonderful mother, and she did it all with a quiet grace, compassion and leading by example. Her legacy is profound and her historical mark on Nebraska's federal court is permanent.

At the time of her death, Judge Smith Camp had just begun her year-long service as President of the Omaha Bar Association. Many tributes to her are collected on the Omaha Bar Association website ([omahabarassociation.com/page/SmithCampTribute](http://omahabarassociation.com/page/SmithCampTribute)).

Judge Laurie Smith Camp was born and raised in Omaha, graduated from Burke High School (1971), received her B.A. degree with distinction from Stanford University (1974), and graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Law (1977), where she was editor-in-chief of the *Nebraska Law Review*.

She achieved many noteworthy "firsts" in her life. She began her legal education at the University of Nebraska College of Law

in 1974, a time when women were just beginning to enter the legal profession in greater numbers. When she joined the Nebraska Attorney General's Office in 1991 as head of the Civil Rights Section, she was the only female section head. When promoted to Deputy Attorney General for criminal matters in 1995, she was the first woman to serve as a deputy attorney general in Nebraska. In 2001, she became the first woman appointed to the United States District Court for the District of Nebraska. She was Chief Judge of the Court from 2011–2018 before taking senior status.<sup>1</sup>

Judge Smith Camp had a remarkable career and a keen

sense of what fairness and equality should mean from an early age. As she shared in a TEDxOmaha talk in 2013, when growing up she took note of the fact that women were treated differently from men and began questioning why that was so. She was ten years old when she started working in her father's law office on Saturday mornings, and asked one of the lawyers why forms for wills were different for men and women. She asked a teacher why all of the books on an assigned reading list were about boys. She questioned her high school principal as to why

the athletic interschool teams were only for boys. After she was admitted to Stanford, where two men were admitted for every woman, she asked the dean of admissions "why the university could not offer equal opportunity for women, especially in light of its commitment to affirmative action for other disadvantaged groups."<sup>2</sup> Laurie would go on to live a life embracing her commitment to fairness, equality, and justice.

I had many interactions with Laurie when I was associate dean at the University of Nebraska College of Law. She was kind, generous, and inspirational, a terrific role model and mentor to law students and lawyers. Not surprisingly, she received many honors and awards in her professional career. I suspect she was especially proud of receiving the "Outstanding Woman in the Law Award" from the Women and the Law Section of the Nebraska State Bar Association in 2005.



During our marathon reading of *My Antonia* in Omaha, Nebraska, on Sept. 22, 2018, Judge Laurie Smith Camp memorably read the final chapter in Book IV of the novel, entitled "The Pioneer Woman's Story": "We reached the edge of the field, where our ways parted. . . ." Photograph: Tracy Tucker.



One of my favorite stories about Laurie, demonstrating her early commitment to women's rights, is from her law school days. Laurie was a first-year law student when the new law building opened in 1975. As the legend goes, Laurie and some of her classmates were very unhappy that in this brand new building, there were two men's restrooms on the first floor—where all classrooms and the entrance to the law library were located—and the only women's restroom was in the basement. After the dean refused to convert one of the first floor men's rooms to a women's restroom, the women engaged in guerilla action and took over one of the first floor men's rooms, changing the sign and putting plants in the urinals. It was officially remodeled the next summer. As former Dean Steven Willborn told me in an email message, Laurie "loved this story. It was a reminder of what the law school once was and what it would and could become. But it was also a metaphor for the entrance of women into our law school and law schools generally—'hey, we're here, pay attention, and if you don't open the doors for us, we'll get them opened anyway.'"

Shining a light on equality was planned for the Eighth Circuit Judicial Conference, scheduled for August 2020 in Omaha. As coordinator of the conference, Judge Smith Camp planned to celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment. Conference speakers were to include the Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Elaine Weiss, author of *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*. Unfortunately, the conference was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the newest president of the Nebraska State Bar, Jill Robb Ackerman, spoke to me of visiting with Judge Smith Camp shortly before her death to inform her of plans to celebrate the 19th Amendment during her year as bar president. Laurie surely must have been pleased by that.

For many people, Judge Smith Camp will be remembered in a special way. She officiated at nineteen marriages during her judicial career, including the ceremonies of both of her children and ceremonies for two Willa Cather Foundation Board members: my Cather Foundation colleague Jay Yost told me that Sarah Baker married Matthew Hansen at the first ceremony at which Judge Smith Camp officiated, and Jay married Wade Leak at her tenth ceremony.

And, of course, Laurie will long be remembered by friends, relatives, and current and former Willa Cather Foundation board members and staff as a Cather fan and generous supporter of the Foundation's work. She served on the Board of Governors of the Foundation from 2001 to 2007, and was a member of the Advisory Council from 2007 until her death. She loved Willa Cather's writing. She read many of Cather's novels in the 1980s and identified with

her strong women characters. In the course of her judicial career, Judge Smith Camp shared Cather's beautiful prose to inspire new American citizens during citizenship ceremonies (see below). Her love of Cather's work was part of her greater passion for the arts and humanities and her broad intellectual curiosity. She really struck me as a Renaissance woman, and one who was down-to-earth and genuinely interested in everyone she encountered.

Laurie has left a lasting legacy for the Cather world. Her generosity is making possible the bronze statue of Willa Cather which is being created by sculptor Littleton Alston. It will be placed in the U.S. Capitol Statuary Hall as one of the two statues representing the State of Nebraska. The Cather Foundation and Cather fans around the world will be forever grateful.

Thank you, Judge Laurie Smith Camp, for your devotion to justice and equality, your generous and kind spirit, and your passion for Willa Cather. May you rest in peace.

## NOTES

1. For an excellent look at Judge Smith Camp's career in context of the changes in the legal status and roles of women in Nebraska, see her lecture "Women's Rights: Fast Forward for 50 Years," the inaugural presentation of the Nebraska State Historical Society's Brown Bag lecture series, October 19, 2010; [youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_VeFnSuaWs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_VeFnSuaWs).

2. "Wolves and Brownies: Laurie Smith Camp at TEDxOmaha"; [youtube.com/watch?v=4-vCQX7SwiU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-vCQX7SwiU).

## Beginning in the Heart

*Judge Laurie Smith Camp, then the United States District Court Judge for the District of Nebraska, made the following remarks to new American citizens at a naturalization ceremony in Omaha on June 14, 2002. We first published this brief speech in our Summer 2003 issue.*

My fellow citizens—

Nebraska's greatest author, Willa Cather, said: "The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman." Today, the history of America begins a new chapter in your hearts. You have chosen the United States of America as your country, and you have chosen to begin your new life as Americans in the heart of America—the state of Nebraska.

Thank you for making these choices. America will be enriched by your citizenship.

*(continued on next page)*



## Beginning in the Heart *(continued)*

Today, you also renounced your former citizenship in other countries. For some of you that was an easy decision. For others, that may have been a painful choice. I remind you that while you have renounced your former citizenship and pledged your loyalty to the United States, you do not give up your own history and culture. Those things you cherish about your past—your memories of family and friends, your music, your literature, your celebrations, your manners, please bring with you. Those of us who have been American citizens for many years can learn much from you.

There may be things in your past that you gladly leave behind you. Just as you chose what items to pack in your suitcase when you came to America, you will choose what customs from your past you will abandon and what you will preserve.

Some of you have lived in America for many years, and some of you are still growing accustomed to the United States. You all know that your new country is not perfect. Everything that is American is not necessarily good. You may be faced with difficult choices as you decide what aspects of the American culture you will adopt and what you will reject. You will make decisions about who you will trust and who cannot be trusted. You will make choices about your work, your friends, your education, and the education of your children. You will decide how your money will be spent, how your leisure time will be used, and how you will vote. As you make these decisions, you will consider what is best for you, what is best for your family—especially your children—and what is best for your fellow citizens.

You may have heard the Latin phrase *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one. We are one nation of people from many backgrounds bound together by certain principles of freedom, equality, and justice. We all share a responsibility to each other and to future Americans to preserve freedom, equality and justice. You have chosen to become Americans at a time when America is in danger, at home and abroad. Your new country will need your help. America's strength does not

lie in its military or its economy as much as in the hearts and minds of its people—good people, of strong character. People like you.

I began my remarks with a quote from the Nebraska author Willa Cather. Cather wrote about immigrants who came to America and settled in Nebraska. She wrote about Bohemians, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Mexicans, Jews, French, and Irish. She observed that within one generation, the immigrants and their children were as successful or more successful than the Americans whose ancestors had lived in this country for generations. Hard work, determination, and a true understanding of the nature of the American dream gave the immigrants an advantage over people who took their blessings for granted.

My own grandfather immigrated to America from Ireland when he was thirteen years old. His family rented farmland in Ireland, and when their crop failed one year, they were evicted. They were in debt and had no home. At that time, the Union Pacific Railroad advertised in Ireland, encouraging people to come to Nebraska. The Union Pacific needed workers. The advertisements said that Nebraska was the most beautiful and prosperous place in America, and had the best weather. For my grandfather and his family, Nebraska was a beautiful new home. I am grateful to the United States for the opportunities it has given me and my family over the years, and I have chosen to stay in Nebraska, although the Union Pacific may not have told the truth about the weather.

I wish you great success as new American citizens. I hope that you will measure your own success not in terms of how much property you own, but according to how you preserve and share the American dream.

Willa Cather said "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

Today, you become a part of something great—America. And today, America becomes greater and more complete because of you. Congratulations.

As we were preparing this issue for publication we received the sad news of the death on December 14, 2020 of Lucia Woods Lindley, a long-time friend and generous benefactor of the Willa Cather Foundation. An accomplished photographer, Lucia was the creative force behind the 1973 *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*, with her beautiful images and text by Bernice Slote. It is an essential volume for Cather readers, and just one part of an important legacy. Lucia was followed in death on December 18 by her husband of nearly 43 years, Daniel Lindley, an English professor and Jungian analyst and respected contributor to Cather studies. We will include an illustrated remembrance of Lucia Woods Lindley and Daniel Lindley in our next issue.



Lucia Woods Lindley helping dedicate the Red Cloud Opera House in 2003.



## Contributors to this Issue

**Adeela Al-Khalili** became interested in Virginia history when she moved to Winchester in the 1980s. There she graduated from Shenandoah University with a degree in education and psychology and then taught fourth grade in Clarke County schools for twenty-five years. Now retired, she is an active volunteer and board member at the Josephine School Museum.

**Timothy W. Bintrim** is a professor of literature and writing at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania. He has published many essays about Cather's Pittsburgh years and dreams of finding her lost Pittsburgh novel in a hatbox someday. He is coeditor, with James Jaap and Kim Vanderlaan, of *Cather Studies 13: Willa Cather's Pittsburgh*, forthcoming in 2021.

**Barbara Davis** was born in Winchester, Virginia. She is a minister at Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Winchester and at several other ministries.

**Matthew C. Greer** is a Ph.D. candidate at Syracuse University and a 2020–2022 predoctoral fellow at the University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies. His research uses archaeology to explore enslaved life in the Shenandoah Valley and the contributions enslaved Shenandoahans made to the region's history. He has published in *Southern Studies*, *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology*, and *North American Archaeologist*.

**Yicel Hernandez** is a graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a bachelor's degree in foreign language and literature. She is an instructor at the Latino Center of the Midlands.

**Melissa J. Homestead** is professor of English and program faculty in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where

she also serves as director of the Cather Project and associate editor of *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather: A Digital Edition*. Her book *The Only Wonderful Things: The Creative Partnership of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis* will be published by Oxford University Press on April 1, 2021.

**John Jacobs** is a professor emeritus of English at Shenandoah University and author of several essays on Willa Cather. He has regularly promoted Cather and her writing through public programming and outreach to regional teachers and has served as codirector of two International Willa Cather Seminars in Virginia.

**Jonathan A. Noyalas**, director of Shenandoah University's McCormick Civil War Institute, is author of fourteen books. His latest, *Slavery and Freedom in the Shenandoah Valley During the Civil War Era*, is forthcoming in April from University Press of Florida. It draws on his recent research on post-emancipation Black life in the Valley.

**Glenda Pierce** is president of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation. She served for twenty-three years as associate dean at the University of Nebraska College of Law.

**Ann Romines**, professor emerita of English at The George Washington University, is author or editor of numerous essays and books about Willa Cather, a member of the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation, and editor of this issue of the *Willa Cather Review*.

**Robert Thacker** is Charles A. Dana Professor of Canadian Studies and English emeritus at St. Lawrence University. He is vice president of the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and an issue editor of the *Willa Cather Review*.

## Help Us Reach Our Goal

Our *Campaign for the Future* is an integrated effort to restore seven Cather-related historic properties, expand educational outreach, build endowment, and develop additional visitor amenities in Red Cloud by investing in adaptive reuse of a historic downtown building as a boutique hotel.

Thanks to the generosity of 560+ supporters, we've raised \$6.5 million for these efforts. Please join us as we put the finishing touches on our next chapter. Raising an additional \$500,000 would enable us to:

- Complete much-needed restoration work at all seven Cather historic sites, including additional property improvements to fully realize earlier plans.
- Further enhance program expansion efforts with expanded exhibits signage, and interpretation of the historic properties, both on-site and online.

Your pledge is payable over a five-year period and can be satisfied through payments by cash, check, automated bank withdrawal, or credit card. Gifts of securities, charitable IRA rollovers, or planned gifts by bequest are also graciously accepted.

To find out more about your giving options, or arrange a gift, please contact:

Ashley Olson, Executive Director  
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The Potter Block in its heyday, ca. 1910, alongside a rendering of its adaptive reuse to create the Hotel Garber. The building stands alongside our Farmers and Merchants Bank, described in 1890 as “one of the finest and most complete banking buildings in the State.” The bank is being restored to its early grandeur and will house new exhibits offering a glimpse into Red Cloud's history and Silas and Lyra Garber as prototypes for characters in Cather's *A Lost Lady*.



“Through Willa Cather's writing, we have a better understanding of one of the most remarkable and compelling periods in American history. The sites and collections that make up the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud are cultural treasures. Your generosity ensures that our children and grandchildren will be able to travel back in time to hear the ‘nimble air,’ and learn from Willa Cather's example for many generations to come.”

—Mrs. Laura Bush, Honorary National Chair  
First Lady of the United States (2001–2009)

Ashley Olson, *Executive Director*

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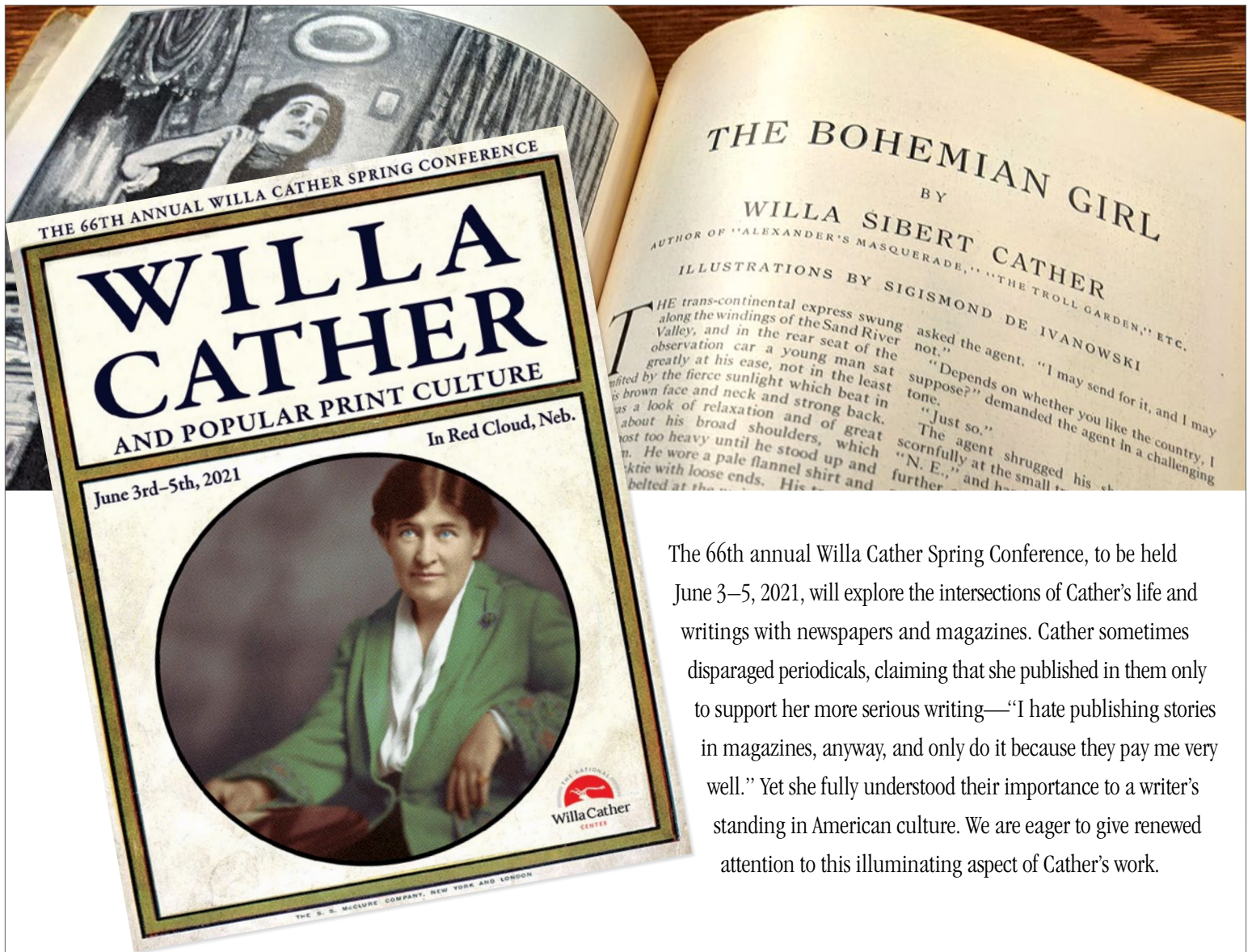
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The 66th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, to be held June 3–5, 2021, will explore the intersections of Cather’s life and writings with newspapers and magazines. Cather sometimes disparaged periodicals, claiming that she published in them only to support her more serious writing—“I hate publishing stories in magazines, anyway, and only do it because they pay me very well.” Yet she fully understood their importance to a writer’s standing in American culture. We are eager to give renewed attention to this illuminating aspect of Cather’s work.



Tina Barney

**Keynote Speaker: Radhika Jones**

Radhika Jones is the editor in chief of *Vanity Fair*. Previously, Jones has served as editorial director of the books department at *The New York Times*, managing editor at *The Paris Review*, editor at *Artforum & Bookforum*, and managing editor at *Grand Street*. Jones graduated summa cum laude with a B.A. degree from Harvard, and holds a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature from Columbia University.

At Columbia, Jones studied the Victorian and 20th century novel, postcolonial theory and criticism, and the history of English as a discipline.

Jones was born in New York City and lives in Brookline with her husband and son.



**Special Guest Speaker: Jean Lee Cole, Loyola University Maryland**

Raised in Nebraska and Iowa, Dr. Cole has taught English literature at Loyola since 2001, focusing on American literature as it pertains to race, gender, landscape, and its place in culture.

She is the editor of the journal *American Periodicals*, and her scholarship on American periodicals and visual culture makes her an ideal speaker for this conference. She will speak on Willa Cather and magazine illustration.



**Animal Engine Theatre Company**

Animal Engine is the collaboration between Karim Muasher and Carrie Brown, movement-based theater artists who create and perform uniquely physical plays that reimagine literature for the stage. Working from a place of serious playfulness, Animal Engine creates by using research, improvisation, movement, and music.

