

NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY



VOLUME 10.1 | APRIL 2021

IN THIS ISSUE

Campaign for the Future Nears Completion and Provides for Much-Needed Restoration Projects	1
NEH-Funded Digital Projects Are Introduced	2
The Robert and Ardis James Foundation Donates \$250,000 for Endowment	3
National Willa Cather Center Selected for the 2021 Nebraska Passport Program	3
Centenary Edition of <i>Youth and the Bright Medusa</i> Published	4
Couple Donates Beloved Allan Tubach Painting, <i>Willa's Windows</i>	5
This Autumn, Spend an Immersive Weekend in Taos, New Mexico	5
Photo Collections Continue to Grow	6
Leroy Maruhn is Miriam Mountford Volunteer of the Year	6
New Virtual Author Series—Save the Dates!	7
Plan a Spring Visit to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie	7
Introducing Alise Perault as Program Associate	7
Coming Up!	8

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

Campaign for the Future Nears Completion and Provides for Much-Needed Restoration Projects

Thanks to overwhelming support of our *Campaign for the Future*, restoration and preservation efforts at three important historic sites is nearing completion. We are grateful to over 570 donors who have supported the campaign. Today we stand within just \$500,000 of concluding this effort to make much-needed capital improvements to seven Cather-related properties, to expand programming, and to build endowment.

A myriad of improvements have been made to three properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of their association with Cather's life and writing.

The Pavelka Farmstead has been restored to its period of significance. The home's foundation has been stabilized, lighting and mechanical systems have been added to accommodate future interpretation, and a walking path and access ramp have been established to make the site accessible for all of our guests. The farmstead was home to Anna Sadilek Pavelka, prototype for Cather's *Antonia*. Restoration will make it available for guided tours for the very first time.



The restored facade of the Burlington Depot.

The Burlington Depot has undergone significant improvements. Windows and doors have been restored, and siding that matches the original historic profile has been installed. Relocation of new mechanical equipment will allow for additional exhibit space. Original bricks from the station platform have been reinstalled. The original two-story section of the depot, constructed in 1897, is the building Cather was familiar with during her last years in Red Cloud.

The Farmers and Merchants Bank is also being returned to its early grandeur. A vaulted ceiling in the lobby will be restored, infilled windows have been uncovered, and the lower level is being refinished to make way for future exhibits. Restoration of the beautiful sandstone facade is set to begin this spring. This building was erected in 1889 by Silas Garber, fourth governor of Nebraska and prototype for Captain Forrester in *A Lost Lady*.

We are pleased to be so close to meeting our goal. The remaining \$500,000 needed to complete the campaign will allow us to fully

continued on next page



The Pavelka Farmstead following exterior restoration efforts.

Campaign for the Future Nears Completion and Provides for Much-Needed Restoration Projects

continued from front page

restore four additional historic sites, including the Willa Cather Childhood Home, Grace Episcopal Church, J. L. Miner House, and St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church.

Another unmet need is additional funding for installation of exhibits and interpretive elements that explore why each site is important to the life and work of Willa Cather and to the community of Red Cloud. The new interpretation will be anchored around overarching themes such as homesteading, immigration, entertainment and culture, rural life, religion, and technology.

In addition to making the sites more appealing to modern audiences, we will be able to highlight previously untold stories from a variety of voices.

Please help us bring this effort to a successful completion. Gifts can be made online at www.WillaCather.org or by mail. Pledges to the campaign are payable over a 5-year period. For more information, please contact Ashley Olson, Executive Director, at 402-746-2653 or aolson@willacather.org.

NEH-Funded Digital Projects Are Introduced

The National Willa Cather Center is pleased to announce two new digital educational initiatives, made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant. These new projects—a mobile and web-app and a digital collections search tool—will help to engage with students and readers, both remotely and while onsite in Red Cloud.

“Creation of digital education tools has been on our list of goals for years,” said Tracy Tucker, the NWCC’s education director and archivist. “Implementing such tools is a resource-intensive process but an important one, and the education team was able to utilize the time during closure last year to make this happen.” Photographs, videos, audio recordings, and descriptions were necessary for creating the mobile tour apps on the Cuseum platform. Designed to enhance guided tours for Red Cloud visitors or to stand alone as an abridged tour for Willa Cather fans around the world, the National Willa Cather Center tour apps offer great flexibility, with a goal toward expanding the platform as a resource for teachers.

The app allows users to explore the Cather Childhood Home, the *American Bittersweet* exhibit, or take the self-guided town tour, as well as listening to audio clips and viewing collection pieces to enrich understanding of the sites. The app also helps to provide



Download our new mobile app for new educational offerings.

alternative tours for those who face mobility or other physical challenges.

A new collections search tool, found on the National Willa Cather Center’s website, allows visitors to browse highlights from the archival, museum, and permanent art collections housed at the NWCC. Because the collections search tool is tied to the museum’s cataloging system, Tucker said, the project will continue to grow.

“We anticipate adding a photograph gallery soon,” she said, “and new pieces will be added continuously as the collection grows.” Work to photograph and research each collection piece takes time, she added, but makes the objects more accessible to guests and researchers and useful to the organization.

The NEH grant of \$134,060 supported staff salaries as well as interpretation and programs in the latter half of 2020. “This award came at a crucial time,” said Executive Director Ashley Olson. “After being closed and with many travel and event restrictions still in place, we wanted to find new and innovative ways to reach students and readers. This grant allowed us to retain staff and stay focused on our mission-driven activities.”

In addition to the digital projects, the NEH CARES Act grant supported the creation of new interpretive signage for the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, collections handling training, and the development of museum-wide emergency protocols.

The Robert and Ardis James Foundation Donates \$250,000 for Endowment

Literature enthusiasts from across the country who visit the National Willa Cather Center can look forward to new experiences—in Cather’s hometown of Red Cloud and virtually—thanks to the ongoing work of our *Campaign for the Future*.

The Robert and Ardis James Foundation has made a \$250,000 gift to the Foundation’s endowment. Annual net income from the endowment will be used to expand educational and arts programming. Speaking for the Robert and Ardis James Foundation, Ralph James referenced a desire to encourage people of any age to use their creative energy.

“Part of what we want to do is inspire people to produce meaningful and beautiful work,” he said. This aligns with the Willa Cather Foundation’s mission to promote Cather’s legacy through arts programming and to encourage new adaptations of Cather’s work.

Ralph James was first introduced to Cather by his mother, Ardis, who gifted him a full set of Cather’s novels for Christmas when he was sixteen. He has read all of the author’s books, but points to *My Antonia* as a favorite.

The National Willa Cather Center’s ability to encourage visitors to engage with history is also appreciated by James. “I am a firm believer that if you don’t understand your history, you will be doomed to repeat your same mistakes.” He continued, “It is really valuable to



Robert and Ardis James, photo courtesy of The International Quilt Museum, Image by Geoff Johnson/Malone & Company.

have the ability to go back over one hundred years and imagine what life was like by seeing and walking among things from the past.”

In addition to their generous gift to grow the Willa Cather Foundation’s endowment, the Robert and Ardis James Foundation also makes annual gifts to support operation of the National Willa Cather Center—a museum and archive that opened in 2017 as a living memorial to Cather.

Campaign Co-Chair Jay Yost called the grant from the James Foundation “an incredibly meaningful gift at an important time.” He continued, “We are immensely

grateful to Ralph James and Cathy James Paglia for their long-time support and for this important investment.”

Ardis (Butler) James grew up in Lincoln and Omaha and married Robert G. James of Ord in 1949. In leading the foundation that bears their parents’ names, the James children seek to support causes that will honor their parents’ passions and their inherent love of Nebraska.

Ashley Olson, executive director of the National Willa Cather Center, noted “I hope the tremendous generosity of the James family will inspire additional gifts to the endowment and enable us to share the value of literature, history, and the arts with an expanded audience.”

National Willa Cather Center Selected for the 2021 Nebraska Passport Program

The National Willa Cather Center will be one of seventy stops included in the 2021 Nebraska Passport program. Nebraskans and tourists travel throughout the state collecting stamps to earn prizes, while also supporting Nebraska’s tourism destinations and local businesses. Travelers will have from May 1 through September 30 to visit the attractions and get their stamps.

Now in its twelfth year, the Nebraska Passport provides significant economic impact for the state and for the communities included in the program. The NWCC has been selected in several past

years and is the only Passport stop in the immediate region in 2021.

“We are honored to have been selected this year, especially as people are eager to travel again, and perhaps a bit closer to home,” commented Catherine Pond, marketing coordinator.



continued on next page

National Willa Cather Center Selected for the 2021 Nebraska Passport Program

continued from previous page

“The Passport program allows us greater exposure within Nebraska’s unique tourism offerings and a special opportunity for our tour guides and front line staff to interact with Passport travelers.” The NWCC will offer discounts and incentives throughout the program.

Passports will be available at participating stops starting May 1 or can be pre-ordered at www.NebraskaPassport.com. Participants

are also encouraged to download the Nebraska Passport app on their smartphone to collect digital stamps, supplementing the passport booklet for convenience. The app will be updated with the 2021 information on May 1. To download, search “NE Passport 2021” in the Apple Store or Google Play Store.

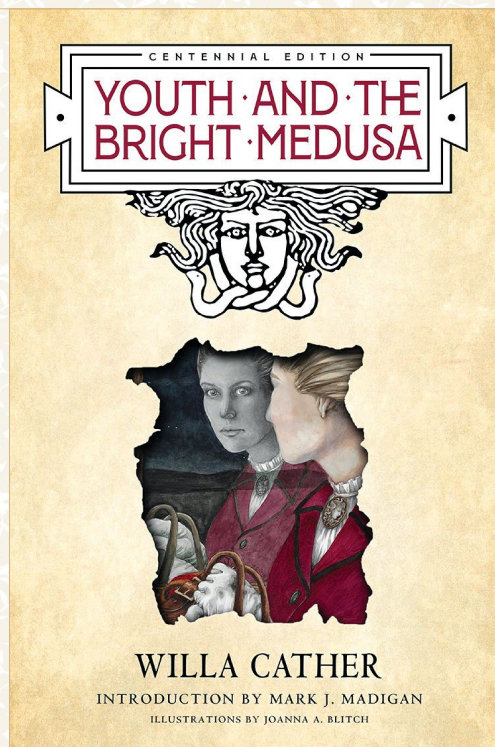
Centenary Edition of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* Published

As a capstone to the 65th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference in 2020 and the centenary of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, a limited-edition of this 1920 collection of eight short stories was recently published.

An illuminating forward by Cather scholar Mark Madigan provides new insight and reflections on the book’s ongoing relevance. He writes: “The perilous adventures begin with a love story and end with a deathwatch. In between are tales that bring to life a wide spectrum of human dramas, dreams, emotions, vices, and virtues. Equally unforgettable are its characters, and the settings this cast inhabits are as keenly rendered as any Cather ever wrote. Kansas, Nebraska, and Wyoming are represented, but most are urban and Eastern, marking a shift away

from the Great Plains landscapes for which she had won critical and popular acclaim during the 1910s.”

Joanna A. Blich of Greensboro, North Carolina, was selected to illustrate this reissue. For her illustrations, Blich consulted books on historical fashion, and looked at pieces from auction houses and museums. “My goal was to



create richly detailed images that wouldn’t date too quickly. I worked in ink on paper, because it reproduces well,” Blich said. “I love the immediacy and the element of chance involved in working with traditional, as opposed to digital, media.”

She was especially struck by Cather’s love for music and singers: “Her knowledge and appreciation of music runs all through those stories. Devotion to music is the animating force that drives so many of her characters.

A place in the world of art, especially music, is the dangerous, irresistible ‘Bright Medusa’ that lures and haunts them.”

These career-defining short stories are a special reminder of how important the arts are to our society and culture, the cohesiveness of our communities, and to the mission of the Willa Cather Foundation.

You can order *Youth and the Bright Medusa* from our website, and a complete set of eight limited edition 8x10 giclee prints from Blich’s illustrations are also available.



A new illustration for the short story “The Sculptor’s Funeral.”

Couple Donates Beloved Allan Tubach Painting, *Willa's Windows*

A recent gift of the painting *Willa's Windows*, by noted Nebraska artist Allan Tubach, joins our permanent art collection, thanks to Tubach's longtime friends, Larry and Sandee Collier, of Anaheim Hills, California. Collier met Tubach more than sixty years ago at Midland College (now Midland University) in Fremont, Nebraska, and purchased *Willa's Windows* in 2005 to add to his extensive collection of the artist's paintings.

Originally from Falls City, Nebraska, Tubach studied commercial art at the Omaha Art School before continuing his art training at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Tubach has been described as a Midwest painter "who explores the essence of life on the great American prairie" in a profile in *National Geographic*. His paintings are represented in over five hundred private, corporate, and public collections.

Ruth Keene, a member of our Board of Governors, and Tubach



Larry and Sandee Collier with their gifted painting *Willa's Windows*.

himself, helped to facilitate the eventual Collier donation, and we are grateful for their generosity.

If you have an item of interest that relates to Willa Cather or her life and work, please contact Executive Director, Ashley Olson at (402) 746-2653 or by email at aolson@willacather.org

This Autumn, Spend an Immersive Weekend in Taos, New Mexico

Join us in Taos, New Mexico, for a 3-day, 3-night excursion, November 11–14, based at the historic Mabel Dodge Luhan House, where Willa Cather was once a guest. We will explore "Willa Cather and the Counterculture" and the best of this beautiful mountain town's historic and arts offerings, while learning about Cather's time in New Mexico.

When Mabel Dodge settled in Taos and began to invite her friends and artists from the East in 1918, she did so with the idea of establishing not just an artists' colony but a completely different "counterculture" lifestyle long before it was trendy. We'll discuss and share from Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *The Professor's House*, and other readings, in addition to touring the Father Martinez Hacienda and Taos Pueblo, the Fechin House and the Millicent Rogers Museum, and more.

Registration for \$995 includes three nights lodging, breakfast and lunch on Friday and Saturday, and breakfast on Sunday. Admission and fees to museums and sites are also included. Dinners will be hosted around the region but are not included in the registration cost.

This event has a limited capacity, so plan to register early! For questions about the program, please visit our website for more information or contact our Education Director Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org.



The Mabel Dodge Luhan House.

Photo Collections Continue to Grow



Willa Cather's youngest sibling, John (Jack) Cather.

in the Moon Block. The cabinet card, circa 1896, features a doe-eyed Jack in a “Little Lord Fauntleroy”-inspired dark suit with large ruffled collar and bow. The photograph remained with the Cather family until its donation.

The other portrait, a beautiful and well-loved portrait of Irene Miner, found its way to Red Cloud in a more surprising way—through a donation to a charity thrift shop in California! A handwritten label attached to the back of the photo identified the subject of the photo, her hometown, and noted her friendship with Willa Cather. Because the photo is trimmed and has been

Two charming portraits received this month by archivist Tracy Tucker aptly illustrate the range of donors to our Willa Cather Foundation Collections and Archives. Since our organization's earliest days, the strength of our collections has drawn from Cather family materials. The first portrait we received, an early image of John Esten (Jack) Cather, Willa Cather's much-loved youngest brother, was taken at the J.H. Wegmann gallery,

mounted to a cardboard backer, no other clues exist about the photographer, the studio, or the occasion. The fragile photo is notable for Irene's elaborate outfit: a soaring ostrich-trimmed hat and a boldly patterned dress with shirred skirt, sleeves, and neckline, embellished with a high lace collar and ruffles and an oversized lace bow.

Other photos, including additional photos of the Cather family and the early days of Webster County settlement, were also received with these donations. As ever, we remain grateful to our donors who have cared for Cather materials over the decades before entrusting them to our care, but we are also thankful for new friends, far and wide, who recognize Red Cloud and Cather connections in unexpected places and seek us out. If you have—or discover!—a treasure that may relate to our collections, we'd love to hear from you! Contact our archivist, Tracy Tucker, at ttucker@willacather.org to inquire.



Willa Cather's friend, Irene Miner Weisz.

Leroy Maruhn is Miriam Mountford Volunteer of the Year



One silver lining of 2020 was that we were able to get significant work accomplished at many of our historic sites. Quietly helping us along the way was Leroy Maruhn, our 2020 Miriam Mountford Volunteer of the Year.

Leroy has graciously helped with all kinds of tasks: running errands, assisting with grading work at the J. L. Miner House, and loaning his equipment. The use of a borrowed cement mixer enabled the addition of a new step for the north entrance of the J. L. Miner House, as well as repairs to the driveway and new footings for the porch restoration project at the Cather Second

Home. Leroy and wife Janet also dug up and saved the peonies at the Pavelka Farmstead ahead of the restoration project and transported them elsewhere while they await a spring replanting.

Recognizing the importance of a strong volunteer corps, the family of Miriam Mountford established the Miriam Mountford Volunteer Award as a perpetual tribute to those whose selfless service is at the heart of the Willa Cather Foundation's work. Each year we recognize an individual whose service is deemed outstanding. Mrs. Mountford's son Fritz has followed in his mother's footsteps, actively serving our organization as a member of the Board of Governors for a number of years.

New Virtual Author Series—Save the Dates!

Launched last fall, our popular virtual Author Series hosts great literature and conversation among authors and their readers. The new series is part of our commitment to expanding our programming and making additional offerings available to our members across the country. Donor underwriting and support from the Nebraska Arts Council and Nebraska Cultural Endowment have helped to make the author series possible. You're invited to join us virtually each month for these engaging book talks. Visit www.WillaCather.org and click on "Events" for more details.

Dr. Charles Johanningsmeier
in Conversation with *Animal Engine Theater* (selected Spring Conference readings)
April 29, at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. James Kimball, author of *Prairie Forge: The Extraordinary Story of the Nebraska Scrap Metal Drive of World War II* (2021 One Book One Nebraska winner)
May 20, at 7:00 p.m.

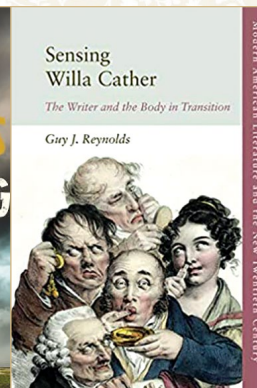
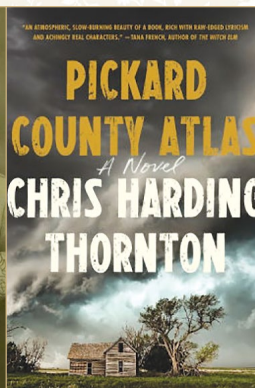
Chris Harding Thornton, author of *Pickard County Atlas*
June 24, at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Guy Reynolds, author of *Sensing Willa Cather: The Writer and the Body in Transition*
August 19, at 7:00 p.m.



Kelsey Squire, author of *Willa Cather: The Critical Conversation*
September 23, at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. William G. Thomas, author of *A Question of Freedom*, in discussion with film collaborators Dr. Kwakiutl L. Dreher and Michael Burton
October 21, at 7:00 p.m.



Becky Faber, author of *One Small Photo*
November 4, at 7:00 p.m.

Leonard Marcus, author of *Randolph Caldecott: The Man Who Could Not Stop Drawing*
December 16, at 7:00 p.m.

Plan a Spring Visit to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie



The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, a 612-acre undisturbed grassland just south of Red Cloud, offers Cather enthusiasts a chance to learn about and explore the Great Plains as Cather encountered them in 1883.

We invite you to venture to Red Cloud this spring and experience the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie with our free "Prairie Exploration Backpack" program! Perfect for students and their families, each fully outfitted backpack includes nature guide books, sketch books, pastels, binoculars, and more. On your next visit, be sure to check out a backpack from the National Willa Cather Center for your immersive prairie exploration.

The backpack program, launched in 2019, was made possible through grants from the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund and the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation.

Introducing Alise Perault as Program Associate

Alise Perault joined our team in January as our program associate. She has her M.A. in historic preservation studies from Boston University and received her B.A. in art history from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Alise worked as a visitor services associate at the Molly Brown House Museum in Denver, Colorado, and now assists us with the planning, coordination, and execution of performances, exhibits, guided tours, and virtual and in-person programs.



Board Officers

President: Glenda J. Pierce, Lincoln, NE
Vice President: Robert Thacker, Fort Collins, CO
Secretary: Amy Springer, New Orleans, LA
Treasurer: C. Kay Stahly, Kearney, NE
Past President: Marion Arneson, Wayne, NE

Board of Governors

Virgil Albertini, Fairway, KS
Mark W. Bostock, Malcolm, NE
Marian Fey, Omaha, NE
Max Frazier, Riverside, WA
Thomas Reese Gallagher, New York, NY
Sarah Baker Hansen, Omaha, NE
Melissa J. Homestead, Lincoln, NE
James Jaap, Pittsburgh, PA
Ruth H. Keene, Omaha, NE
Fritz Mountford, Hastings, NE
Julie Olin-Ammentorp, Manlius, NY
Diane Prenatt, Indianapolis, IN
Ann Romines, Alexandria, VA
Steve Shively, Lincoln, NE
Sally Stich, Denver, CO
Lu Williams, Red Cloud, NE
John A. (Jay) Yost, New York, NY

Advisory Council

Bruce P. Baker II, Omaha, NE
Laurie Smith Camp, Omaha, NE†
James L. Fitzgibbon, Red Cloud, NE
David B. Garwood, Red Cloud, NE
Joel Geyer, Lincoln, NE
Jane Renner Hood, Lincoln, NE
Ron Hull, Lincoln, NE
Betty Kort, Hastings, NE
Mellance Kvasnicka, La Vista, NE
Lucia Woods Lindley, New York, NY†
Susan Maher, Duluth, MN
Gary L. Meyer, Red Cloud, NE
John J. Murphy, Newton, MA
Charles A. Peck, Kearney, NE
Nancy S. Picchi, New York, NY
Rhonda Seacrest, Lincoln, NE
James P. Southwick, Heber City, UT
John N. Swift, Whittier, CA
Gary W. Thompson, Lincoln, NE
Joseph R. Urgo, Asheville, NC

Staff

Ashley Olson, *Executive Director*
Tracy Tucker, *Education Director & Archivist*
Rachel Olsen, *Education Coordinator*
Alise Perault, *Program Associate*
Jarrod McCartney, *Tourism & Commerce Director*
Catherine Pond, *Marketing Coordinator*
Jim Owens, *Sites Manager*
Laura Lea Johnson, *Administrative Assistant*
Linda Hitchler, *Tour Guide*
Cheyenne Knechans, *Tour Guide*
Janet Maruhn, *Tour Guide*
Karin Prellwitz, *Facilities Assistant*
Jennifer Schriener de Jager, *Facilities Assistant*
Cheryl Wilson, *Tour Guide*

†Deceased



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

COMING UP!



Animal Engine Theatre presents *Henrietta Solway*

A world premiere performance adapted from Cather texts.
Saturday, June 5, at 7:00 p.m.

Blixt Locally Grown – Homegrown Theatre Camp

A week-long theater workshop for local students.
July 12 to July 16 • Performance on July 16, at 6:00 p.m.

Missoula Children's Theater presents *Sleeping Beauty*

A musical adaptation of the classic fairy tale performed by students
August 2 to August 7 • Performances on August 6 & 7

Blue Plate Special – Songs from the 1940s to the present

A variety of musical genres including pop, classic rock, country, blues and jazz.
Friday, October 15, at 7:00 p.m.

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



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