

NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY



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Spotlight on the Farmers and Merchants Bank Rehabilitation

Thanks to your donations to our *Campaign for the Future*, the Farmers and Merchants Bank is being returned to its early grandeur. Under the supervision of Tru-Built Construction of Lincoln as general contractor, the rehabilitation project aims to address deterioration that was present at exterior elevations; eliminate water infiltration at basement level; preserve and restore the original interior features; and retrofit the building with new electrical and mechanical equipment prior to installation of new site interpretation and exhibits.

Construction activities have involved demolition of the early 1960s-era basement rooms to refinish and fully utilize the space

for future museum exhibits. The bank's lobby will once again be illuminated with natural light owing to the restoration of a vaulted ceiling that revealed six upper transom windows. Removal of two infilled windows on the back facade allowed for installation of transoms and windows that align to the original sizes, which was also key to restoring the distinctive attributes of the lobby space.

Restoration of the sandstone facade was the most significant undertaking due to the need to replace several damaged stones. Stone fabrication was completed by Carson Stone & Supply of Omaha using 3D scanning technology to replicate the intricate engraving work of the original stones. The facade restoration also involved the replication of two slender sandstone tourelles that once flanked the tower toward the cornice of the pyramidal roof. The new stones replace the original tourelles that were damaged to the point of instability, which had required their removal nearly two decades ago. Many of the original fishscale slate shingles were damaged or missing and have since been replaced with new slate shingles that match the color and shape of the original product.

Future work involves restoring the tile floor in the lobby; installing new mechanical and updated electrical



The Farmers and Merchants Bank has been receiving a sensitive historic facelift and much attention inside.

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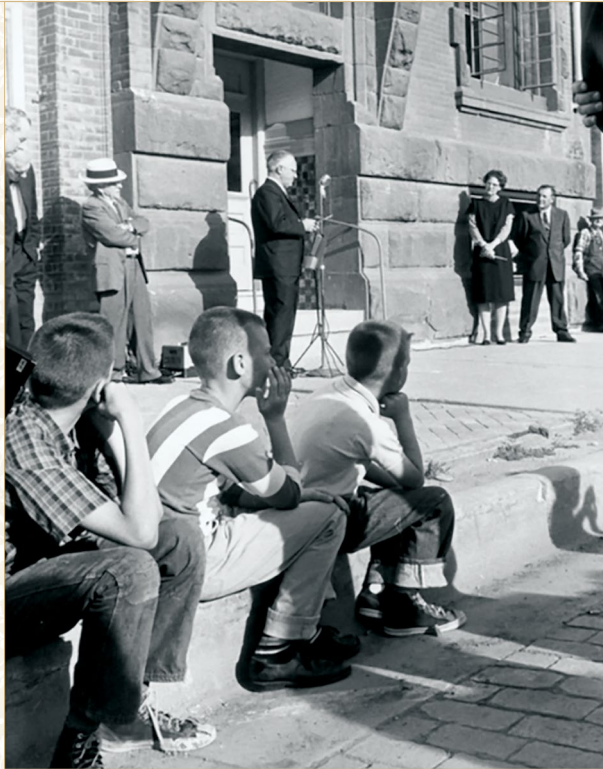
Spotlight on the Farmers and Merchants Bank Rehabilitation

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systems; refinishing wood floors and adding new flooring to the basement exhibit space; applying a fresh coat of paint in the interior; returning the ornamental metal finial to the peak of the building; securing period-appropriate lighting fixtures for the bank lobby; and developing and installing new exhibits for the space.

About the building

Construction of the Farmers and Merchants Bank began in the summer of 1888 and was completed in 1889. The building was built as home to the Farmers' and Merchants' Banking Company, which was incorporated in 1886 by Silas Garber, E. B. Smith, George O. Yesier, George B. Holland, and W. S. Garber. The building, later referred to as "one of the finest and most complete banking buildings in the state," was the tallest structure in Red Cloud at the time of its construction. In fact, the *Webster County Argus* amusingly reported in 1889 that the building would be "a joy forever" and noted "unless the builders stop pretty soon, it will rival the Washington Monument in its towering height."



Dedication of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial in the Farmers and Merchants Bank building, May, 1962. Author John Neihardt is leaning against the wall and Mildred Bennett is standing at right of the entrance. The building will celebrate the 60th anniversary of its dedication in May 2022.

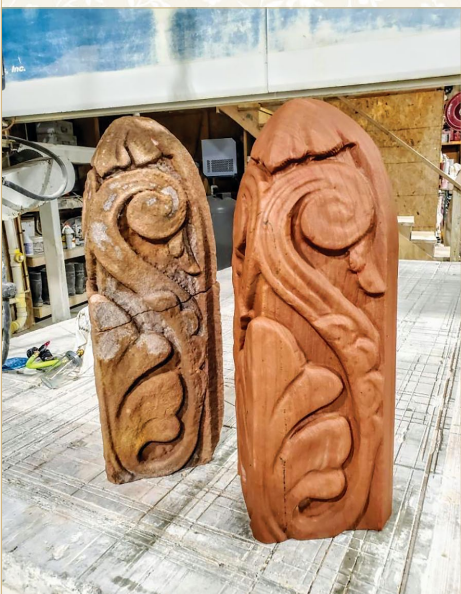
and Queen Anne inspirations, presents its strongest design impulse from the Romanesque Revival style, a prevalent choice for many public buildings and churches of the era throughout the United States. It includes a Colorado sandstone facade; intricately carved wooden and brass teller cages ordered from the Union Furniture Company of Chicago, Illinois; white marble entry steps; and two elegant vaults that were manufactured by Hall's Safe & Lock Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Although the Farmers' and Merchants' Banking Company failed in connection with the Panic of 1893, the building remained a center of community activity. It housed J. L. Miller's harness shop in the garden level, became home

to other community banks, and later housed the City of Red Cloud's offices before being purchased in 1959 by the Willa Cather Foundation. Following efforts to convert the building for use as office, museum, and research space, it was dedicated as the Willa Cather Museum on May 26, 1962, with John G. Neihardt as guest speaker. After the Foundation relocated its office space, the building has been consistently utilized as one of many attractions on the guided town tour of Red Cloud, owing to its connection to Silas and Lyra Garber, Willa Cather's prototypes for Captain and Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady*.

How You Can Help

If you, too, would like to support the rehabilitation of the bank, please donate online or mail your gift to the Willa Cather Foundation, 413 N. Webster Street, Red Cloud, NE 68970. To learn about naming and recognition opportunities available in connection with charitable donations, please contact executive director, Ashley Olson, at aolson@willacather.org or (402) 746-2653.



The sandstone tourelle on the right was fabricated as an exact replica of the original shown on the left.

The ornate building, with its eclectic style

2021 Spring Conference Explores Cather and Popular Print Culture

The 67th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference welcomed 208 attendees in a combination of online and onsite events. The conference was our second that utilized a digital event platform and the first to feature a hybrid setup that enabled guests to either participate from Red Cloud or remotely. *Willa Cather and Popular Print Culture* explored themes around the author's early years as a journalist and contributor to periodicals, as well as her tenure as managing editor of the popular monthly, *McClure's Magazine*.

Guests from around the country enjoyed paper presentations, live Q&A sessions, invited speakers, a gallery talk with Karen Vierneisel—whose exhibit featured paintings inspired by Willa Cather—and other activities. Cather scholars, educators, and students presented virtually, complete with live Q&A sessions and an engaging panel on teaching Willa Cather. Other highlights included a keynote address, *Willa Cather and Magazine-Land*, by Radhika Jones, editor-in-chief of *Vanity Fair*. Dr. Jean Lee Cole, from Loyola University of Maryland, gave a plenary talk focused in particular on Cather's relationship with illustrators while working at *McClure's*.



This year, many attended our full day in Red Cloud of site open houses and a prairie tour on the last day of our second hybrid conference.

walk and select readings at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Many from the region attended open houses at the Pavelka Farmstead and Burlington Depot to showcase recent site work by Tru-Built Construction, which was funded through our *Campaign for the Future*. Related tour videos were created for our virtual attendees, and the annual service at Grace Episcopal Church was also shared online this year.

The conference ended with the National Willa Cather Center's commissioned play, *Henrietta Solway*, performed by Animal Engine Theater Company of New York. The original play combined the short fiction and serialized novels of Willa Cather into a single epic story that was shared virtually and broadcast to an audience at the Red Cloud Opera House.

The National Willa Cather Center would like to thank Dr. Charles Johanningsmeier for serving as the conference's academic director. We are also grateful for support from the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Humanities Nebraska, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Cather Project.

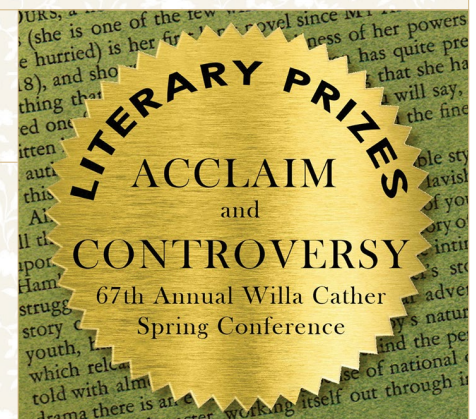


Children explore the refurbished cellar at the Pavelka Farmstead.

The last day of the conference coincided with National Prairie Day. The occasion was celebrated with a guided morning

Save the Date! 67th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference: June 2–June 4, 2022

Our 2022 Spring Conference explores the landscape of literary prizes as we mark the publication centenary of Willa Cather's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *One of Ours*. "Literary Prizes: Acclaim and Controversy" will examine the phenomenon of cultural prizes and will feature Dr. James English, author of *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, as an invited speaker. A call for papers is forthcoming. See our website for details.



Student Scholarships Awarded

The National Willa Cather Center is delighted to announce our 2021 recipients of the Norma Ross Walter, Antonia, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, and the Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson scholarships. Each student recorded a video reading of their winning essays to be shared virtually at our 66th annual Spring Conference, and they attended a live Q&A session with conference participants.

The Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Winners are: in first place, Anna Schmidt (Tri County High School); in second place, Ashleigh Jay (Paxton Consolidated School); and in third place, Emma Miller (Central High School). This year's Antonia Scholarship Winner is Fiona Wiberg (Papillion La Vista South High School) and the Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship Winner is Reyana Tegmeier (Pawnee City High School). Meanwhile, the Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson Scholarship Winner is Cody Hubl (Blue Hill High School).

Norma Ross Walter was a frequent visitor to Red Cloud and lifelong Cather fan. The scholarship established by her ample bequest supports young women seeking higher education. Antonette Turner generously established both the eponymous Antonette Willa Skupa Turner scholarship and the Antonia scholarship, named after the celebrated Willa Cather character inspired by Turner's grandmother, Anna Pavelka. Created by Jack Wilson in memory of his parents, the Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson scholarship assists Webster County students pursuing secondary education or agricultural degrees.

Scholarships awarded through the Willa Cather Foundation since 1987 total more than \$190,000 and have assisted more than 75 students pursuing a higher education degree. For more information about our scholarship funds, please contact education coordinator Rachel Olsen at rolsen@willacather.org. Application information for 2022 is available at www.willacather.org and annual deadlines are January 31, February 28, and April 20.

Congratulations to the Ana McCracken Educator Scholarship Recipients

The National Willa Cather Center was pleased to award three Ana McCracken Educator scholarships this year. Melissa Barry of Superior, Nebraska; Timothy Kaldahl of Omaha, Nebraska; and Paul Timm of Lyons, Nebraska, all possess special talents as educators bringing Willa Cather to their students.

Created to help cover the cost of attending Spring Conference, this year's recipients enjoyed complimentary access to all virtual content and will be able to use the scholarship to offset the cost of a future visit to Red Cloud. Although the conference was partially virtual with select in-person events, educators still left the event energized. Red Cloud English teacher Melissa Barry reports, "I am excited to bring my sophomores [to the NWCC] . . . I am really excited to get them involved!"

Our educator scholarships are made possible by the generosity of Ana McCracken. She recently shared what inspired her to endow the scholarship to ensure annual awards in perpetuity, "The first time I made a pilgrimage to Red Cloud, I left jazzed about all things Cather. Endowing this scholarship was a way to spread my Cather enthusiasm to students via teachers." She continued, "While to me Cather's stories are always relevant, it's teachers who connect the dots for students between Cather's era and the issues she wrote about that are still at play in today's world."

If you are—or someone you know is—an educator who would like to teach Willa Cather in your classroom, we encourage you to apply! For more information, contact education coordinator Rachel Olsen at rolsen@willacather.org.

American Bittersweet Podcast

In addition to her work this summer, Humanities Intern Margaret Rieckman created an engaging podcast, *American Bittersweet*, for extra credit. Episodes provide a peek behind the scenes with staff members at the National Willa Cather Center. Listeners will learn more about our team and their mission-driven work to preserve Willa Cather's legacy through education, preservation, and the arts. You can find *American Bittersweet* on Spotify and tune-in for free.

American Bittersweet



Lynn R. Wolfe: A Retrospective

Thanks to a generous gift of artwork from Lisa Wolfe and Michael Miller, a retrospective exhibit was on display in the gallery of the Red Cloud Opera House from July 7 to September 1. The donation consisted of fourteen canvases, thirty-nine watercolors, and a single wood and acrylic sculpture, all of which were created by Lynn R. Wolfe.

Born in 1917, Wolfe was raised on his family's Webster County dairy farm near Red Cloud and was greatly influenced by the natural world of his rural childhood. Valedictorian of his Red Cloud class, he went on to study at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In his final year of college, in 1935, he worked to pay the taxes on his family's farm to avoid its foreclosure. At UNL he also worked for the Nebraska State Museum creating sculptures of prehistoric life and preparing fossils.

In 1947 he received his MFA at Colorado University in Boulder, where he remained for thirty-six years as a professor and eventual chair of the art department. Lynn and his wife Arlene were blessed with three daughters, all raised in Boulder. His sculptures and stained glass windows were commissioned throughout Colorado and he worked from his Boulder studio until his death at 102 in 2019.

Lisa Wolfe, Wolfe's only surviving daughter, said that her father would have been "thrilled with the attention to his work" and that his family was able to return some of it to Red Cloud. "He was a big fan of the Willa Cather Foundation," she added, "so I am pleased



Lisa Wolfe and her husband Michael Miller in front of a self-portrait of her father, Lynn Wolfe, at a recent gallery open house for his retrospective exhibit.

that we could find a way to let his art help support that cause."

Regarding her father's work, Lisa continued, "Whenever he introduced himself he was proud to say he came from Red Cloud. So sharing a cross-section of his eight-plus decade portfolio with the community, supporters of the Foundation, and the local art scene seemed like a natural way to bring everything together. A number of these pieces were tucked away and only rediscovered after his

passing. And a few were gems hidden in plain sight."

Fond memories of summer visits to their grandparents farm and to Red Cloud "have always stirred deep, heartfelt emotions and a genuine connection," for Lisa, her siblings and her cousins. *Solstice Solace*, a detailed and intricate, almost photographic image of curtains at an open window, was one of the pieces that inspired Lisa to contact the Foundation about donating many pieces from her father's collection. Lisa said that the curtain series came from her father's childhood memories of growing up on the family farm and looking out the upstairs bedroom window.

The Willa Cather Foundation will benefit for years to come from the generosity of Lisa Wolfe and her family in this very special and heartfelt donation. If you have an interesting collection with connections to Red Cloud or Willa Cather that you would like to share, please contact Ashley Olson, executive director, at aolson@willacather.org or (402) 746-2653.

New to the Collection

A recent gift to our collection from the estate of Pittsburgh Cather scholar Jeanne Shaffer contained a charming cardboard filing box, labeled "Business Papers - W.S.C." in Willa Cather's handwriting. Within it were two documents detailing value and actions taken on behalf of Trust #2275, Union Trust Company, addressed to Willa Cather in care of her publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. Cather was unhappy with the performance of this investment and wrote to her brother Roscoe several times about it, finally asking in 1939, "Can you, as a banker, tell me any way to get my money out of this trust?" Like her brothers and father, Cather invested and managed multiple streams of income, designed to both support herself during leaner times and to avoid "the awful income tax." To learn more or conduct research into Cather's business affairs, please contact archivist Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org.



Mary Vaughan on Why She Joined the Cather Legacy Society



Artist Mary Vaughan is our most recent Cather Legacy Society member.

Those who have been immersed in the Cather community for decades may remember the presence of Mary Vaughan and her mother Evadne at Willa Cather Spring Conferences and International Seminars. Evadne began taking Mary to these gatherings in the 1970s. Over many years, they traveled to Red Cloud, Santa Fe, Winchester, Grand Manan, Quebec City, and Middlebury. Mary recalls being a slow reader as a child, so her mother read Cather novels aloud to her. This activity introduced the texts that would be analyzed while people gathered for conferences and seminars, and Evadne intended it to ensure that Mary understood why people came together for the events.

When asked recently to reflect on her long-time support of the Willa Cather Foundation and why she has included the Willa Cather Foundation as a beneficiary in her estate plans, Mary recalled “unforgettable memories through Cather adventures.” Some of these memories will no doubt be familiar to many friends of the Foundation, in particular hearing Cather’s recorded voice for the first time in a barn-style room at Middlebury College. Mary cited hundreds of faces and friendships that taught them so much and became significant in their worlds. She recalled Mildred Bennett’s tall presence, Sue Rosowski’s generous spirit, James Woodress’s kindness, Scott Momaday’s beautiful poems, Marilyn Arnold’s brilliance and warmth, John Murphy’s academic articles, and the “crazy and loveable Canadian scholars.”

Today, Mary is a well-regarded painter. She resides primarily in Santa Rosa, California, and spends extended periods of time in her hometown of Hastings, Nebraska. Looking back, she recalls her relationship with her mother being strengthened through their reading of Cather and their shared experiences at Cather conferences and seminars. Mary credits her mother and Willa

Cather as influential figures who shaped her as an artist, noting reading *Lucy Gayheart* changed her life as a little girl. Characters like Lucy and Thea Kronborg of *The Song of the Lark* shaped Mary’s aspiration to be an artist from a young age.

Regarding her bequest, Mary noted that she supports the Willa Cather Foundation because of what the Cather legacy meant to her and her mother. Mary recently shared, “It is rather hard to put into words what this author’s work and the Foundation offers for the interested and for those who are seeking meaning.” She continued, “On some level Cather helps us all live a better life. It was true for my mother and me. It is still true, for me.”

The Cather Legacy Society recognizes individuals who make charitable gift plans to benefit the Willa Cather Foundation beyond their lifetime. If you, too, have arranged for a planned gift to benefit the Foundation, or if you would like more information about doing so, please contact: Ashley Olson, Executive Director, at (402) 746-2653 or aolson@willacather.org.

Own a Piece of History

The Willa Cather Foundation is pleased to announce an opportunity to own a copy of the sculpture of Willa Cather that is destined for the National Statuary Hall Collection of the U.S. Capitol. Maquettes will be twelve inches tall, with a pedestal base, and each individually signed by artist Littleton Alston.

Cather is portrayed hiking through the open prairie with a walking stick, wearing a brimmed hat and fashioned in the style of women’s sport suits of the day. In addition to taking inspiration from archival photographs of Cather during the height of her career in the 1920s, artifacts from our museum collection were also incorporated into the design. These include Cather’s gold snake ring, and a turquoise jacket that was a gift from her editor, Alfred Knopf, and his wife Blanche.

The full-sized sculpture has been cast and will return to Alston’s Omaha studio to await a future unveiling at the U.S. Capitol. “I’ve portrayed Cather as a mature artist in her prime,” Alston said of his final design. “I sought to capture Willa Cather’s spirit, coupled with her achievements and aspirations in this sculpture.”

If you are interested in information about ordering your maquette, please contact Alise Perault, at aperault@willacather.org. Purchases will benefit the Willa Cather Foundation.

New Signage and App-Supported Tour Enhance Prairie Visits

Seven new interpretive signs now welcome visitors to the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. The new signage seeks to educate visitors about the history of the parcel of land, its flora and fauna, the use of prescribed fire and grazing for conservation, and the impressive dark sky views.

Also recently introduced on the National Willa Cather Center digital app is a beautifully filmed and narrated tour of the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, complete with highlighted Cather readings. The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, like much of the Great Plains, is part of a larger community of temperate grasslands. Prairies have very few trees because of their limited rainfall and natural disturbances, like fire. Prairies made up about forty percent of the United States at one time, but today less than one percent of the prairies remain, making the 612-acre Cather Prairie a unique and illuminating place to visit.

While recognizing that no digital tool can recreate the sights, sounds, or experience of being at the prairie, virtual tours on the app and website enable us to expand our educational outreach to the world, while also enhancing the in-person visitor experience. Guided tours of the prairie are also available with advance booking. Please contact education coordinator, Rachel Olsen, at rolsen@willacather.org or call (402) 746-2653 to schedule your tour.



Signage was installed this spring in time for our annual conference. A prairie tour was held on National Prairie Day, June 5.

The prairie signage project was made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant. Additional thanks to the Nebraska Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation, and the Gifford Foundation for their support of additional signage and conservation efforts over the years.

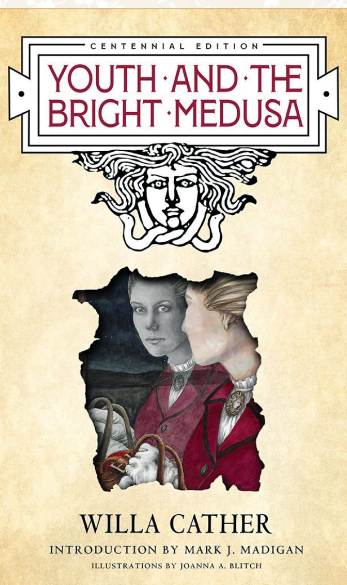
Come Sit a Spell With Willa



Dave Biehl and his bronze of Cather.

Now you can have a chance to sit with our favorite writer when you visit us in Red Cloud! This bronze statue, created by Elkhorn-based artist David Biehl, arrived at the National Willa Cather Center this summer. The addition to our collection was made possible through the generous support of Dave and Cindy Biehl, as well as Dan, Dec, Kyle, and Kipp Yost and families. Our thanks to these gracious supporters!

A Once in a Century Event



Here is a perfect holiday gift from our National Willa Cather Center Bookstore! The centenary edition of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* is \$29.95, softbound, and beautifully illustrated with eight images from Joanna A. Blitch, and an introduction by Mark J. Madigan. Shop online at WillaCather.org/SHOP and watch for our annual holiday sale after Thanksgiving. Your bookstore purchases help support the mission of the Willa Cather Foundation and we thank you!

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†Deceased



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

COMING UP!



Author Series:

Dr. William G. Thomas, Michael Burton and Dr. Kwakiutl L. Dreher
Discussion of *A Question of Freedom* and the documentary film *The Bell Affair*
Thursday, October 28, at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

Author Series: Dr. Rebecca Faber

Author of *One Small Photo*, a poetry collection that explores military service and its after-effects
Thursday, November 4, at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

Go for Baroque: Hear the Rhythm of the Road, Route 66

An evening joyride of treasured songs and whimsical tunes
Friday, November 12, at 7:00 p.m.

Highball! A Tribute to the Music of Jerry Lee Lewis

A 1950s-style tribute to the music of a rock and roll sensation
Saturday, December 4, at 7:00 p.m.

Author Series: Dr. Leonard Marcus

An exploration of the life and work of illustrator Randolph Caldecott
December 16, at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

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



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