

# NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY



VOLUME 11.2 | OCTOBER 2022

## IN THIS ISSUE

Willa Cather Childhood Home Restoration Underway	1
Potter Block Rehabilitation Reaches Fundraising Milestones	2
Cather Enthusiasts Gather For Annual Spring Conference	3
Scholarship Awards Enable Pursuit of Humanities Degrees	4
Inaugural Teacher Institute Held	4
Own a Piece of History: The Willa Cather Statue	5
Save the Dates: Willa Cather Spring Conference and International Cather Seminar	5
Soundstitching: Sites and Sounds of Willa Cather's World	6
Program from the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Emerges	6
Joseph Kyle's Last Visit Leads to Unexpected Bequest	7
One of Ours Centenary: Special Features	7
Coming Up!	8

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## Willa Cather Childhood Home Restoration Underway

The Willa Cather Childhood Home is a national treasure, one of only twenty-two National Historic Landmarks in Nebraska and the site most closely associated with the life and literature of one of America's greatest novelists. The site closed August 15 to facilitate the first comprehensive restoration in over fifty years. Restoration is now underway and will be completed next summer. This project is made possible through a Save America's Treasures grant administered by the National Park Service, which is being matched dollar-for-dollar through a private fundraising effort.

Acquired and restored in our early years, the site opened to visitors in 1967 and was gifted to the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1978. The transformative restoration will ensure the 140+-year-old home is preserved as a cultural attraction for the learning and enjoyment of future generations. The restored home will create a more immersive destination to discover family artifacts and encounter the lived world of the Cather family.

A modest one-and-a-half story frame house, the Willa Cather Childhood Home was Cather's residence between the ages of ten to sixteen. While she moved away from Nebraska in 1896, her parents Charles and Mary Virginia Cather rented the home through 1904. Many of Cather's best known writings depict life in Red Cloud and Webster County during Cather's formative years.

The Cather house is vividly described in *The Song of the Lark*, "Old Mrs. Harris," and "The Best Years."

The National Willa Cather Center took ownership of the Willa Cather Childhood Home from History Nebraska in 2019 and is committed to preserving and interpreting the landmark site, including the delicate original wallpaper Cather purchased and hung in her attic bedroom as an adolescent. Major elements of the restoration will include an accessible entrance; new climate control and electrical systems; restoration of windows and doors, new fire and intrusion alarm systems, roof replacement, foundation repair, recreation of the original fence, and conservation of the original wallpaper in Willa Cather's bedroom.

The restoration is a key component of the National Willa Cather Center's *Campaign for the Future*, which has raised over \$7 million for restoration of numerous Cather-related historic properties, expansion of educational



The Willa Cather Childhood Home is undergoing its first major restoration in over fifty years.

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## Willa Cather Childhood Home Restoration Underway

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programming, development of visitor amenities, and growth of an endowment. During the construction period and leading up to the reopening, visitors are encouraged to explore the exhibits at the National Willa Cather Center and participate in guided town tours of six additional historic properties related to Cather's life and writing. The Center's mobile app also offers a 30-minute narrated tour of the Willa Cather Childhood Home.

*We aspire to raise an additional \$200,000 for the restoration, wallpaper conservation, and future interpretive enhancements to the interior and site exterior. Please consider supporting the project with a charitable gift. Pledges are payable over a five-year period. Contributions may be mailed to the Willa Cather Foundation, 413 N. Webster St., Red Cloud, NE 68970. Donations may also be made online.*



Tour Guide Janet Maruhn and Director of Collections & Curation Tracy Tucker carefully pack items for inventory and storage.

## Potter Block Rehabilitation Reaches Fundraising Milestones

Plans to rehabilitate the historic Potter Block in Red Cloud into a charming boutique hotel and event space have reached significant fundraising milestones in recent months. News of a \$2.3 million Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery & Investment Act grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and an allocation of \$1,000,000 in Nebraska Historic Tax Credits from History Nebraska has made it feasible to move ahead with the next phase of construction. Additionally, an allocation of \$20,000 in Community Development Assistant Act (CDAA) tax credits will enable the Department of Economic Development to distribute a 40% state tax credit to businesses, corporations, insurance firms, financial institutions, and individuals that make eligible cash contributions to the project.

In early 2020, basement excavation and underpinning prepared the Potter Block building to support the return of a third floor that was lost to fire in 1961. Planning and fundraising efforts have continued since that time, and over \$3 million in donations and investments has been secured, bringing total funds raised from all sources to over \$6 million.

When rehabilitation is complete, the Potter Block will grow from a 16,500 square foot facility to a 22,500 square foot facility. The building will house event and meeting space, catering facilities, a small library of Great Plains literature, art and historic images on exhibit, and guest rooms for overnight stays.



The Hotel Garber will provide 26 rooms, and its design will echo the historic Potter Block.

When developed and conjoined to our Farmers and Merchants Bank next door, the buildings will become a mixed-use facility, including gallery and exhibit areas and space for historic site tours that will highlight connections to Red Cloud's history and Willa Cather's life and writing.

The facility's name, Hotel Garber, is a nod to Silas Garber, a founder of Red Cloud, the third Governor of Nebraska, and prototype for Captain Forrester in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*. When fully restored, the building will provide much-needed lodging for tourists and expanded meeting facilities for events and retreats. It will allow visitors to the National Willa Cather Center to stay longer to enjoy the museum, the historic sites, the town, the Cather Prairie, and other scenic places Cather loved.

The project is a key priority for the National Willa Cather Center's *Campaign for the Future* and Red Cloud's Heritage Tourism Development Office, which launched in 2015 through a collaboration between the National Willa Cather Center, City of Red Cloud, Chamber of Commerce, and Red Cloud Community Fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation.

*Please consider supporting the project with a charitable gift. Naming and recognition opportunities are available, and pledges are payable over a 5-year period. Contributions may be mailed to the Willa Cather Foundation, 413 N. Webster St., Red Cloud, NE, 68970 or made online at [www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org)*

# Cather Enthusiasts Gather For Annual Spring Conference

The 67th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference welcomed 237 attendees in a combination of online and onsite events, but this year the National Willa Cather Center was also delighted to welcome a majority of attendees back to Red Cloud. With the topic of “Literary Prizes: Acclaim and Controversy,” we explored the culture of literary prizes as we marked the publication centenary of Willa Cather’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *One of Ours*. Dr. James English, author of *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, and Maureen Corrigan, author and NPR’s book critic, were featured speakers.

Guests from around the country enjoyed paper presentations, live Q&A sessions, invited speakers, and a *Soundstitching* gallery talk and related multi-media performances, as well as other activities. Cather scholars, educators, and students also presented, complete with live Q&A sessions and engaging panels. Other highlights included an invited lecture by Dr. James English and Maureen Corrigan’s presentation, “All the Glittering Prizes,” followed by a book signing.

The last day of Spring Conference now pleasantly coincides with National Prairie Day, which we again celebrated with a

guided morning walk and select readings at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Many from the region also attended our events and performances, including Cassia Kite and Stacey Barelos’s collaborative “Burlington Depot” composition, part of their *Soundstitching* exhibit. Related videos were created for our virtual attendees, and the annual service at Grace Episcopal Church was held both in person, and virtually, with the Reverend Charles Peek returning to officiate.

The conference began with a special live taping of Nebraska Public Media’s *Friday LIVE* program, with host Genevieve Randall, which included several interviews and performances related to Spring Conference. The event ended with our annual banquet and a performance of composer Chris Ellenwood’s *Children of the Moon*, a composition based on *One of Ours* performed by the Nebraska Chamber Players.

The National Willa Cather Center would like to thank Dr. Melissa Homestead for serving as the conference’s academic director. We are also grateful for support from the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Humanities Nebraska, the Philip L. and Helen Cather Southwick Fund, and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Cather Project.



Invited speaker Maureen Corrigan (right) and Executive Director Ashley Olson following a lecture and moderated Q&A.



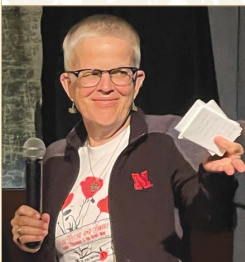
Sculptor Littleton Alston speaks to conference-goers.



Guests visit the George Cather Farmstead, thanks to the hospitality of Lynette Krieger.



Campaign Co-Chairs Ruth Keene and Jay Yost toast to the future while thanking our generous supporters.



Conference Academic Director Melissa Homestead.



Board President Bob Thacker seated with Dave Bieh’s bronze sculpture of Cather.



The Nebraska Chamber Players perform Chris Ellenwood’s new composition, *Children of the Moon*.



Visitors participate in a guided hike at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie on National Prairie Day.

# Scholarship Awards Enable Pursuit of Humanities Degrees

On Friday, June 3, we awarded and celebrated our 2022 recipients of the Norma Ross Walter, Antonia, and the Antonette Willa Skupa Turner scholarships. Students presented their winning essays, which were followed by a Q&A session with conference participants.

The Norma Ross Walter Scholarship Winners are: Emelia Richling (Grand Island Northwest High School); Allison Meerian (Gretna High School); and Megan Ruwe (Millard North High School). This year's Antonia Scholarship Winner is Chloe Berger (Berger Homeschool) and the Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship Winner is Shelby March (Wymore Southern High School). The Leslie A. and Helen R. Wilson Scholarship Winner is Kayce Clark (Red Cloud 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



Many of our scholarship winners and their families attended in person this year. From left to right: Virgil Albertini, Board of Governors; Jocelyn Richling & Pam Richling, sister and mother of Emelia Richling; Ronald March, Austin March, Shelby March, Angela March, Megan Ruwe, Charla Ruwe, Alana Hoyt & Anna Taylor, daughter and granddaughter of Antonette Turner; and Rachel Olsen, Director of Education & Engagement.

\$200,000 and have assisted more than eighty students pursuing higher education degrees, primarily in English or history.

*For more information about our scholarship funds, please contact Rachel Olsen at [rolsen@willacather.org](mailto:rolsen@willacather.org). Application information for 2023 is available at [www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org) and annual deadlines are January 31, February 28, and April 20.*

## Inaugural Teacher Institute Held

Teachers from Nebraska, Utah, and New York immersed themselves in Willa Cather's Red Cloud as part of our inaugural Teacher Institute. They enjoyed extended tours, research in the archives, and expert-led lectures connecting Cather's literary works to Great Plains history and culture. The cohort drew on these experiences to create a new teaching unit for Cather's short story "A Wagner Matinée," which is now available to all educators on our website.

We are currently taking applications for participation in our Summer 2023 Teacher Institute. Successful applicants are employed full-time as a K-12 teacher or librarian and demonstrate a clear interest in further developing Willa Cather and/or Nebraska history or literature curriculum for their students. This unique program offers five days of immersive literature and history study in a community that boasts the largest collection of nationally designated historic sites dedicated to an America author. Special lectures will augment historic site tours, visits to the archive, and one-on-one conversation with Cather scholars, but participants can also expect comfortable B&B lodging and generous time to relax and plan for the coming year. Those who complete this retreat-style professional development workshop receive a certificate of completion and support packet which details contact hours and curriculum.

*The National Willa Cather Center 2023 Teacher Institute will take place July 6-10 in Red Cloud and Lincoln, Nebraska. Applications are available online, and the last day to apply is April 30. Please contact Rachel Olsen, at [rolsen@willacather.org](mailto:rolsen@willacather.org) if you have any questions.*



Our inaugural group of Teacher Institute attendees at the Pavelka Farmstead. From left to right: John Elster, Mount Michael Benedictine High School in Elkhorn, NE; Stan Szczeny, Williamsburg Academy in St. George, UT; Cynthia Adams, Clarence High School in Clarence, NY; Marcy Mahoney, Omaha Central High School in Omaha, NE; and Elizabeth Lafleur, Oakland-Craig Junior-Senior High School in Oakland, NE.

## Own a Piece of History: The Willa Cather Sculpture

The Willa Cather Foundation is pleased to announce an opportunity to own a copy of the statue of Willa Cather, created by artist Littleton Alston, that is destined for the National Statuary Hall Collection of the U.S. Capitol. The bronze sculptures are twelve inches tall, mounted on a polished walnut base, and each individually signed by the artist.

Cather is portrayed hiking through the open prairie with a walking stick, wearing a brimmed hat and clothed 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 the National Willa Cather Center's 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 in bronze and is now in storage awaiting 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." Willa Cather will become one of only nine other women represented in the collection, while sculptor Littleton Alston will be the first African American artist to have a piece in the National Statuary Hall Collection.

The Willa Cather Foundation has been named the exclusive retailer for the small-scale sculptures by the Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Committee. Proceeds of all sales will



A bronze Willa Cather sculpture is a perfect gift for any Cather enthusiast or a fine addition to your own home library.

support the purchase of a full-scale edition of the original bronze to be placed in the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska. A twelve-inch bronze sculpture retails for \$3,000, and \$1,200 of that amount is tax-deductible as a charitable gift. Orders placed after October 1, 2022 will be delivered in early 2023. To place an order, please visit our website or call (402) 746-2653.

### About the Artist

Littleton Alston maintains a sculpture studio in Omaha, where he is also Professor of Sculpture at Creighton University. His sculptures are included in public and private collections throughout the country, and his work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. His artwork ranges from figurative bronze sculptures to stainless steel abstract works and most recently to large metal and assembled helmet sculptures. Alston has been an artist in residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, the Martine Vaugel Studio in France, and most recently, at the International School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture in Montecastello di Vibio, Italy. He holds a B.F.A. from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and an M.F.A. from the Maryland Institute College of Arts Rinehart Graduate School of Sculpture in Baltimore. In 2019, he won the Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Competition over more than seventy applicants to create a portrait statue of Cather to be placed in the National Statuary Hall Collection at the U.S. Capitol.

## Save the Dates: Willa Cather Spring Conference and International Cather Seminar

Join us in Red Cloud June 1-3, 2023 for the 68th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, a cause for much celebration! Just as Cather wrote about the "certain qualities of feeling and imagination" possessed by Nebraska's early immigrant homesteaders in "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," we will commemorate Cather's 150th birthday by examining the evolution of her own writerly imagination along with the centenary publication of Cather's highly influential 1923 novel *A Lost Lady*. A Call for Proposals and registration details on our website are forthcoming.

Meanwhile, the long-awaited New York City Willa Cather International Seminar, our eighteenth, is set to be held June 21-23, 2023, in conjunction with The New School. We envision a conference that intellectually locates Willa Cather in the context of Greenwich Village and New York more broadly, and to imagine her work as a product of her nearly forty years of urban experience. Though Cather seldom wrote about the city, we believe it is a key element of her personal and professional life. Look for a Call for Proposals and details about registration soon on our website.

# Soundstitching: Sites and Sounds of Willa Cather's World

Exhibited at Spring Conference, *Soundstitching: Sites and Sounds of Willa Cather's World*, is a unique exhibit providing multidisciplinary and multisensory experiences. Fiber artist Cassia Kite used her original and distinctive "Soundstitching" process to transform the colors from hand-stitched images of Cather, and many of her related sites, into playable musical compositions.

In collaboration with Omaha performer and composer Stacey Barelos, two of Kite's works premiered as musical pieces. Barelos translated Kite's embroidered visions into lively and sonorous musical expressions of place and feeling. She gave a live piano performance at the Red Cloud Opera House and a powerful train-inspired recording of different instruments and synthesized sound at the Burlington Depot.

The actual "Soundstitching" process is an experimental, interdisciplinary, and integrative project developed by Kite to create a dialogue between visual art and music through the translation of color into sounds. It is



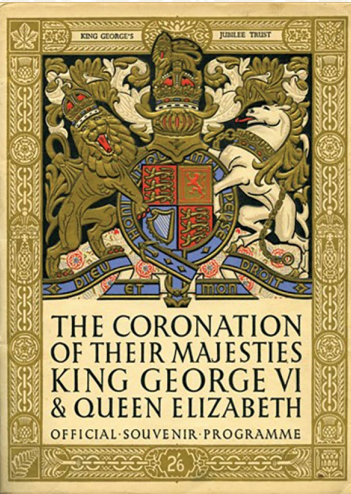
a way for a representational image to have its own unique song associated with it, while also giving a traditional form of art, such as hand stitching, a new way to be interpreted. This process results in an art piece that documents the steps in the process of composing music through a hand-stitched image.

*While the show has closed, the online exhibit can be viewed on our website and several works are available for sale, including limited edition prints of select works which can be purchased by contacting Rachel Olsen, at [rolsen@willacather.org](mailto:rolsen@willacather.org)*



Cassia Kite, right, and Stacey Barelos at the Burlington Depot.

# Program from the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Emerges



Not all Nebraska historical collections contain royal memorabilia, but several in south-central Nebraska can claim a personal connection. The death of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on September 8 coincided with a rediscovery of one of our own mementos of the English monarchy. The 1937 coronation of King George VI was attended by Superior, Nebraska, native

Evelene Brodstone, who was a lifelong friend of Carrie Miner Sherwood and Mary Miner Creighton—and Willa Cather!

Brodstone was reportedly the highest salaried woman executive before she married her employer William Vestey, who had just been made a baron. Lord and Lady Vestey attended the coronation, sharing the royal invitation and souvenir programmes with local newspapers and friends. Creighton received one such program, complete with a sample of the ruby

red velvet used to make Lady Vestey's coronation gowns. Within the pages of the programme are official portraits of the new King and his wife Queen Elizabeth and their daughters, the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, and a beautifully engraved map of the coronation procession, with the route and embellishments printed in metallic gold. For the Americans in the crowd, a helpful table tracing the monarchy's genealogy, beginning with William the Conqueror, is at the back of the silk ribbon-bound booklet. The Nuckolls County Museum in Superior received other gifts to their collection, such as the small velvet-covered stool upon which Lady Vestey sat while waiting along the procession route. *To view this or other collection items, contact our archivist, Tracy Sanford Tucker, at [ttucker@willacather.org](mailto:ttucker@willacather.org)*



# Joseph Kyle's Last Visit Leads to Unexpected Bequest

There are few things more touching to leaders of nonprofit organizations than to receive an occasional email, phone call, or letter that reveals a bequest has been left through arrangements in someone's estate plan. This summer, we received notice of an unexpected and generous bequest from Dr. Joseph D. 'Joe' Kyle. The news came from Dr. Kyle's son, Alex Kyle, who shared that he had escorted his father to Nebraska in 2019 for "one last visit to the Plains."

While visiting south-central Nebraska, the Kyles ventured to Red Cloud to see the National Willa Cather Center, participate in a guided tour, and explore the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. Alex shared that his father was impressed by the visit, and recalled, "When he updated his will, he wanted to remember you."

Dr. Kyle was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. After graduating from Dartmouth College, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He attended the Military Intelligence School and the Army Language Schools, where he studied German and Russian. Joe was recalled to duty during the Berlin Wall crisis, served nearly a year at Fort Lewis, and was later offered a Department of Defense civilian appointment to the Army's Military Intelligence Service in Germany. While there, he met his future wife, Charlotte, and enrolled in the University of Erlangen with the intent to become a teacher of European history. Upon return to the United States, he earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Pittsburgh.

A connection to Nebraska came by way of Dr. Kyle's tenure at Hastings College, where he chaired the history department. A long-time resident of Hastings, he also served as President of the Adams County Historical Society and was an active member of St. Mark's Pro Cathedral. After leaving teaching, Dr. Kyle accepted a National Park Service post with the Richmond National Battlefield Park



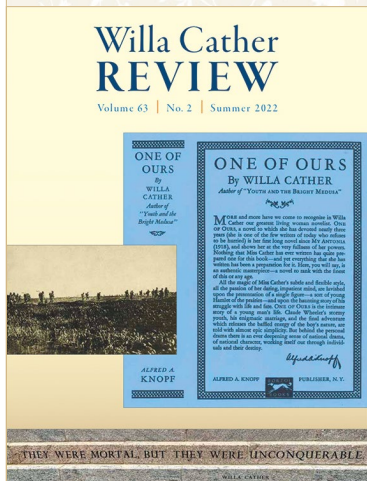
Dr. Joseph Kyle, pictured at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie in 2019.

in Richmond, Virginia, and later joined the staff of Historic Hanover Tavern and taught at Randolph-Macon College.

During the more than twenty years Dr. Kyle made his home in Nebraska, he developed a deep appreciation of Nebraska and the Great Plains. When asked what he believed motivated his father to remember the Willa Cather Foundation in his estate plan, Alex Kyle said, "my dad was really impressed with the Foundation's dedication to celebrating literature and its way of educating people about early life on the Great Plains." With his bequest, Dr. Kyle posthumously joins nearly thirty members of the Cather Legacy Society. The Society is comprised of individuals who have arranged to extend their support of the Willa Cather Foundation beyond their lifetimes. Planned gifts from legacy society members enable the Foundation to grow and pursue opportunities that align with our mission to promote Willa Cather's legacy through education, preservation, and the arts.

*If you would like additional information about the Cather Legacy Society, or if you have named the Willa Cather Foundation as a beneficiary in your estate plans, please contact Ashley Olson, Executive Director, at [aolson@willacather.org](mailto:aolson@willacather.org)*

## One of Ours Centenary: Special Features



Our Spring 2022 issue of the *Willa Cather Review* focuses on scholarship around *One of Ours* and its relevance both now and a century ago. It is available to read on our website or you can purchase a printed copy from our online bookstore for \$5 each. The print edition is also a benefit of membership in the Willa Cather Foundation. You can also browse our online *One of Ours* Collections Gallery at our website which is part of our growing online digital collection in the Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives. It is available to all thanks to the ongoing work of our education team and a SHARP grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Grosvenor (G.P.) Cather sent this postcard to his future wife, Myrtle Bartlett, while stationed on the U.S. West Virginia in the United States Navy in 1909. The two married when he returned.

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

COMING UP!



#### Indigenous

A band with a soulful blues sound fronted by Mato Nanji  
Saturday, November 5, at 7:00 p.m.

#### Willa Cather and the Counterculture (Sold Out!)

An immersive weekend in Taos, New Mexico  
Thursday, November 10, to Sunday, November 13

#### Author Series: Joe Starita

Discussion of his book, *A Warrior of the People*  
Thursday, November 10, at 7:00 p.m.

#### Author Series: Lisa Mendelman

Discussion of her book, *Modern Sentimentalism*  
Thursday, December 8, at 7:00 p.m.

#### Paramount

High energy anthems from popular 1980s arena bands  
Friday, December 9, at 7:00 p.m.

Visit us online at [www.WillaCather.org](http://www.WillaCather.org) for information on upcoming events.



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