

NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY

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

Willa Cather Sesquicentennial: Commemorating 150 Years

Willa Cather's 150th year is underway, and the National Willa Cather Center will commemorate the occasion with special events throughout 2023. This monumental year is also the 100th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours*, as well as the publication centenaries for *A Lost Lady* and *April Twilights and Other Poems*.

Activities and programs are being planned in Red Cloud and elsewhere in Nebraska, but also in a growing list of locations around the country, including Los Angeles, New York, Virginia, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

Cather's prolific writing career and contributions to American letters will also be honored in 2023 when her statue is unveiled as part of the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol (date TBD). Willa Cather will become one of less than a dozen women represented in the collection. Her sculpture was created by Littleton Alston, who prevailed in the Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Competition over more than seventy applicants. Alston's larger-than-life sculpture will be revealed publicly for the first time at the event, when Alston also makes history as the first African American artist to be represented in the National Statuary Hall Collection.



Another significant initiative underway is the restoration of the Willa Cather Childhood Home. This National Historic Landmark was Cather's residence between the ages of ten to sixteen. Notable for its preserved vernacular style and original wallpaper in Cather's attic bedroom, the site will reopen to visitors in the latter half of 2023. The restoration is made possible in part by a Save America's

Treasures grant from the National Park Service, with matching funds provided by our *Campaign for the Future*. The campaign is a multi-million dollar initiative to restore and reinterpret six Cather-related sites, expand educational offerings, and enhance visitor amenities.

Book clubs and teachers around the country are encouraged to explore discussion questions and curriculum support resources at www.willacather.org or download the National Willa Cather Center app on your Android or iPhone to browse exhibits and virtual tours. Organizations and communities that would like to request a speaker or are interested in hosting a Cather event should contact us at 402-746-2653 or info@willacather.org.

For more information and a regularly updated list of events, visit www.WillaCather.org/150.



Ceremonial Groundbreaking for the Potter Block Rehabilitation Makes Way for Hotel Garber

In a joyous event for all involved, a standing-room-only crowd gathered at the Potter Block on Friday, October 7, 2022, for a ceremonial groundbreaking. The event celebrated the recommencement of construction on the Potter Block building in downtown Red Cloud, which is being rehabilitated to become an event and lodging facility called Hotel Garber. While construction resumed earlier in the summer, the ceremonial groundbreaking was an opportunity for the public to see the interior of the building before its transformation, preview updated architectural renderings, and hear about the project's economic impact.

Planning for this rehabilitation effort began as early as 2018. Basement excavation and underpinning that was completed in 2020 prepared the historic building to support the return of a third floor that was lost to fire in 1961. Enjoying a prominent location at the corner of U.S. Highways 281 and 136, this unique event and lodging facility will be ready for tourists and groups in 2024.

Recent construction efforts have focused on assembly of an elevator shaft, slab on grade in the lower level, electrical and plumbing rough-in, and first floor structural repair. 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, a small library and reading area, artwork and historic images on exhibit, and guest rooms for overnight stays. When conjoined to our Farmers and

Merchants Bank next door, the accessible buildings will educate visitors about Red Cloud's history and Willa Cather's life and writing with new exhibit areas and enhanced space for historic site tours.

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 was established 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.

The project has reached 87% of a \$7.3 million goal with just under \$1 million remaining to bring it to completion. Please consider supporting the project with a charitable gift. Naming and recognition opportunities are available, and 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 or made online at www.WillaCather.org.



Pictured left to right: Jennifer Honebrink (Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture), Bob Thacker (President, Willa Cather Foundation), Justin Armstrong (Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee), Jay Yost (Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee & Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors), Jarrod McCartney (Heritage Tourism Development Director), Ashley Olson (Executive Director, Willa Cather Foundation), Dennis Hansen (Red Cloud Community Fund), Todd Mahin (Red Cloud Hotel Committee), Liz Rasser (Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee), Todd Brown (Mayor, City of Red Cloud)



Building imagery: The Potter Building in the early 1900s, today, and as designed for rehabilitation.

The Inaugural Willa Cather Residency Program

The Willa Cather Residency was established to commemorate the 150th year of Cather's birth and to provide a unique opportunity for a small cohort of writers—and eventually artists of all media—to reside and create in Red Cloud, Nebraska for two weeks. A new initiative of the National Willa Cather Center, the program reflects the lifelong reverence that world-renowned author Willa Cather had for art, storytelling, and her hometown—an inspirational setting amidst the Great Plains of Nebraska—from which she created the communities in half of her novels.

In a nod to the long road that Willa Cather traveled before she became free to focus on her own writing—a road that included freelancing, teaching, editing, and managing a national magazine—the Willa Cather Residency welcomes writers who are struggling

to transition from a hectic career to a life in art. While open to all, our purpose is to assist such artists.

Our select cohort of writers will live and work in Red Cloud over a two-week period from October 15-29, 2023. Each resident will be provided a private furnished room in the Cather Second Home Guest House—with its comfortable communal kitchen, dining, and living spaces—and a separate place to work. Residents will also receive \$400 for provisions while in Red Cloud.

While knowledge of Cather's work and personal connection to Nebraska is not essential, it is important that applicants embrace and appreciate the relative isolation of Red Cloud and seek a quiet place to do their work. Applications will be accepted through April 15.

For more information or to apply, visit www.WillaCather.org/Residency.

Willa Cather Childhood Home Rehabilitation Continues

Last August, the Willa Cather Childhood Home was closed for the planning and executing of a major collections move ahead of rehabilitation work. After decades of being tour-ready nearly every day, the house was in desperate need of rest and renovation. This year we are adding an accessible entrance, which will allow us to welcome guests of all physical abilities for the first time, while also updating electrical and heating and cooling systems, improving the foundation, and making restorative repairs to the roof, windows, and more.

These historically sensitive changes will not only improve the visitor experience, but they will ensure the safety and preservation of many Cather family artifacts. The 2019 transfer of the house and collection into our care provided the occasion to remove materials from years of display for cleaning, conservation, and rest.

Prior to beginning construction, Willa Cather's bedroom was encapsulated to prevent construction dust and debris from soiling the room's original wallpaper. The attic has been insulated; its knee walls and ceilings have been enclosed with tongue-and-groove siding that matches both the profile of existing materials and the nailing pattern of materials that are missing from the attic. A climate control system has been installed to aid with conservation of the wallpaper and the well-being of visitors and staff, as the attic



Exterior restoration in progress.

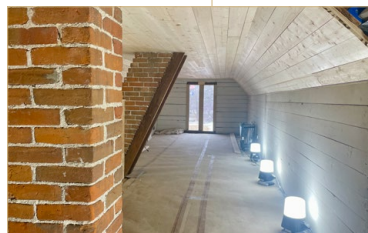
has routinely reached temperatures upward of ninety degrees in the summer. Exterior improvements have included siding repairs and priming, along with a combination of restoration and fabrication of windows, shutters, trim pieces and storm windows.

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 rehabilitation is made possible through a Save America's Treasures Grant from the National Park Service, which is being matched dollar-for-dollar through a private fundraising effort as part of our *Campaign for the Future*.

As rehabilitation continues, 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.

The project has reached 78% of a \$1.1 million goal with \$245,000 remaining to fully fund the rehabilitation and wallpaper conservation. Please consider supporting the project with a charitable gift. Recognition opportunities are available, and 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 or made online at www.WillaCather.org.



The ceiling in the attic has been partially enclosed according to historic nailing patterns.

Jaydene Miner Drew Joins Cather Legacy Society to Preserve Ancestral Home

It was a chance roadtrip with her father after college in the 1990s that first interested Jaydene Miner Drew in her Nebraska family history. Jaydene joined her father in Las Vegas to make a return trip to the Northeast, and he insisted they visit Red Cloud so that she could see the town associated with her ancestry.

Jaydene's grandfather James Louis Miner grew up as the third generation in the J.L. Miner House, or the Harling House in *My Antonia*. He was the grandson of the home's namesake and son of Charles Hugh Miner and Alfretta "Retta" Ayre, Willa Cather's first cousin. It was Hugh's sisters, Carrie Miner Sherwood and Irene Miner Weisz, to whom Cather dedicated *My Antonia*.

Growing up, Jaydene was regaled with stories from her father and aunt Kay Jones Smith about summers in Nebraska at the J.L. Miner House. Jaydene's father slept on the back porch, while Kay remembered having to be on the lookout for a peering Aunt Carrie, fearful she'd catch her sneaking out of the house at night.

In the years since her first visit, Jaydene began researching her Miner family history and reading Cather to learn more. "It was really *My Antonia* that started it all," she said. "Being able to see the Miner house and then to connect that with characters—like 'Charley' in the book was Charles Hugh Miner, my great grandfather—I realized that this book so vividly describes this house and my family."

Jaydene considers the settings and scenes in Cather's literature as a rare, beautiful family legacy, which is why she has decided to include the Willa Cather Foundation in her estate plan. "After seeing how the history of the family has been maintained, it felt like it was important to leave something behind," she said. "How many people have the opportunity to say that their family heritage, their story, is still being told and preserved? That's special to me."

Understanding the family's Nebraska history is something Jaydene has prioritized with her own children. In 2016, she traveled to Red Cloud with her husband, Tom, and their two sons, Chance and Jett. They stayed at the Cather Second Home, explored the town, visited the Miner Ranch and the site of the former Miner Brothers' Store, and toured the J.L. Miner House.

"I wanted the boys to see their heritage, and I also wanted them to see a different life," Jaydene explained. "Sometimes when you



The family gathered in 2016 in Red Cloud, shown here on the J. L. Miner House porch.

grow up in New Jersey, you don't understand a lot of differences in America. I wanted them to see what small town life is like."

Jaydene's gift to the Cather Legacy Society has been earmarked for continued care of the J. L. Miner House. With this gift, she helps ensure the Miner family stories will live on within the historic home closely associated with the Miner and Cather families; she also paves the way for future generations of Miner descendants to encounter their

history firsthand with a road trip to Red Cloud, Nebraska.

Feeling inspired? A charitable bequest is one of the easiest gifts you can make. Simply include a provision in your will that leaves a gift to the Willa Cather Foundation: a specific asset, a dollar amount, a percentage of your estate, or the residue (what is left after all gifts have been made to your heirs). If you would like additional information about joining the Cather Legacy Society, or if you have named the Willa Cather Foundation as a beneficiary in your estate plans, please contact Jeniffer Beahm, Development Associate, at jbeahm@willacather.org.



Commissioned by the National Willa Cather Center and streamed live at our 66th annual Spring Conference, Animal Engine Theatre Company's *Henrietta Solway* production was finally performed live this March in several theaters across Nebraska. The troupe staged three productions at the Johnny Carson Theater in Lincoln; two productions at the Red Cloud

Opera House, including a matinee for 200 local school students; and for students and readers at the Merryman Performing Arts Center in Kearney and Fox Theatre in McCook. Over 700 educational zines were distributed to communities to supplement the production. The zines featured the full text of Cather's short story "Tommy the Unsentimental," along with archival imagery, information about the historical context, and details about the adaptation process. A special thanks to The Lied Center's Arts Across Nebraska program with generous support from the Friends of Lied and the Richard P. Kimmel and Laurine Kimmel Endowment Charitable Foundation.

Registration Open for 18th International Cather Seminar

In collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and The New School, we have created a conference that explores the city Willa Cather knew, but also the city that was present around her, though perhaps not always visible to her. Our goal is to intellectually locate Cather in the broader context of New York in the first half of the twentieth century, and, further, to imagine her work as a product of that urban experience.

Willa Cather lived most of her professional writing life in New York (1906-1947), first in Greenwich Village and later, after she had risen to the top of the literary profession, on Park Avenue on the Upper East Side. The city was her home for nearly forty years and a key element of her personal and professional life.



Highlights will include a conversation between authors Margo Jefferson and Elizabeth Kendall who will discuss Cather's New York stories, a talk on Greenwich Village history—and Cather's place in it—with Hugh Ryan, and a very special closing reception in a luxury rooftop venue!

Full program days will begin at 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, June 21, through the evening of Friday, June 23. Our closing reception and limited coffee service is included in the registration fee of \$275; all other meals are on your own so that you can enjoy the best the city

has to offer! Two hotels within easy walking distance from The New School have been blocked for special attendee discounts. Register online at www.WillaCather.org/events/nyc.

Back By Popular Demand: “Willa Cather and the Counterculture,” An Immersive Weekend in Taos, New Mexico



Participants will enjoy comfortable and historic lodging at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House

Rogers museum and more. Our time together will be hosted by the Mabel Dodge Luhan House, where Cather herself was a guest.

Taos has long been considered a nexus of countercultural thought, even before the term was coined in the 1960s. 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 lifestyle. Later, her house would be purchased by Dennis Hopper, who had his own vision of the counterculture lifestyle. “Willa Cather and the Counterculture” explores Cather's relationship with Taos and its resident artists—both good and bad—alongside the artists' relationship with the Taos area itself.

To register, visit www.WillaCather.org/Events.



Attendees at our first Taos gathering, pictured here at Taos Pueblo.

We hope you'll join us in Taos, New Mexico, for a 3-day, 3-night excursion, this November 9–12. Our first Taos program, held in November 2022, was a memorable sold-out program that connected Willa Cather enthusiasts from around the country. We'll once again explore the beautiful mountain town and the best of its historic and arts offerings, while learning about Cather's time in New Mexico. We'll discuss and share from Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *The Professor's House*, as well as a host of selected outside readings, in addition to touring the Father Martinez Hacienda and Taos Pueblo, the Fechin House and the Millicent

Teacher Institute Preparing for a Second Summer

We look forward to hosting the second Teacher Institute, July 7–11, 2023. The inaugural program in 2022 accomplished the objectives education staff hoped for: building connections with educators who teach or want to teach the works of Willa Cather, as well as developing new teaching resources. Omaha Central High School teacher Marcy Mahoney said, “The Institute is an invaluable experience for a new or seasoned veteran teacher. The activities that made up the Teacher Institute sparked new ideas for how to present

Cather’s work in a meaningful way that will resonate with my classes.” Perhaps the most important outcome of this new program is the opportunity to show teachers our appreciation for the challenging work they do by providing networking opportunities with fellow educators as part of a curated Cather experience.

Teacher Institute Applications are available online, and the last day to apply is April 30. Please contact Director of Education & Engagement, Rachel Olsen, at rolsen@willacather.org with any questions.

Archival Images Made Available Thanks to NEH SHARP Grant



Among the extensive collection in National Willa Cather Center Photograph Gallery are many images of Cather family members. This photo, taken circa 1924, is of Willa Cather with her parents, Charles and Mary Virginia Cather, and brother Douglass enjoying a picnic in Red Cloud.

to the National Willa Cather Center over the years, contributing to collections that were begun by our organization’s founders. As a result, the National Willa Cather Center houses the earliest Cather collections and continues to add to its growing collection of photographs, letters, artwork, and personal items, which we make available to visitors and researchers. Thanks in part to a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021, we have begun to make our collections available online for scholars and readers through an online collections tool. Visitors can browse nearly 1,200 images from the Willa

Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection that have been added over the past year. *Want to discover more? Contact our archivist, Tracy Tucker, to arrange an in-person visit: tucker@willacather.org.*

We are pleased to share a new addition to our digital archive—the National Willa Cather Center Photograph Gallery. The Cather family, their friends, and many other donors have been very generous

New Preservation Tour Available on Cather Mobile App

If you missed your chance to see the Burlington Depot, the Farmers & Merchants Bank, or the Pavelka Farm while they were being restored, you can still do so—digitally! Last fall we launched our virtual “Preservation Tour” on our National Willa Cather Center mobile app. The tour features historic images, in-process photos, and audio narration to trace the evolution of these three historic sites throughout their recent restorations. The app is a regularly updated resource that allows you to connect with Cather from wherever you are. Its photos and learning content also make the app an excellent supplement to an in-person visit or tour.



Board of Governors Transitions

Joining our Board of Governors recently are Dan Deffenbaugh, Charmion Gutske Hearn, Ana McCracken, and Mary June Talen, who were elected last fall to begin board service in 2023.



Dan Deffenbaugh is Associate Dean of the Instruction, Arts, and Sciences Division at Central Community College in Hastings, Nebraska, and former chair and professor in the Departments of Philosophy and Religion at Hastings College (from 2001-2018). He received his Ph.D. and masters in philosophical theology from Vanderbilt University.



Charmion Gutske Hearn is Associate Professor of English at Belmont University in Nashville, where she has worked since 2015. She has contributed numerous articles and academic papers on Willa Cather scholarship, among other literary topics. She received her Ph.D. from the Interdisciplinary Program of The Human Sciences at George Washington University, with an emphasis on American literature, and where Ann Romines supervised her dissertation.



Ana McCracken is Executive Director of the Thistlewood Foundation (a family foundation) and has had an extensive career in academic and corporate development. In 2021, she founded and launched the Ames Writers Collective, which brings together writers and readers to celebrate the essential art of the written and spoken word. She received her MFA in Creative Writing and Environment from Iowa State University.



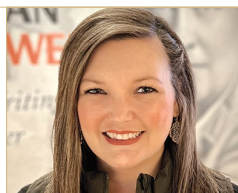
Mary June Talen is an accomplished non-profit consultant based in Omaha who is committed to civic engagement and nonprofit collaboration. Her background is in development work for nonprofits, and she received her masters in International Administration from the School for International Training in Vermont.

We also express thanks to four outgoing members of the Board of Governors who have generously given their time and talents to the National Willa Cather Center. **Virgil Albertini** (elected 1992), **Steve Shively** (elected 2001), **Julie Olin-Ammentorp** (elected 2014), and **Sally Stich** (elected 2017).

Their combined years of service, scholarship, and expertise have made a resonant impact on our organization. While their absence will be felt in future meetings, we are delighted that their engagement will continue through volunteer service on committees, task forces, and involvement in the broader Cather community.

Welcome to the Team!

We are delighted to welcome four new team members to the National Willa Cather Center. Jeniffer Beahm began in November in the new role of development associate. She is reinfusing a robust sponsorship program, while interacting regularly with our constituents. Alek Saucedo was hired to fill the role of facilities and preservation specialist, and is working to oversee building care and maintenance.



Jeniffer Beahm
Development Associate



Nicky Billinger
Program Associate



Alek Saucedo, Facilities & Preservation Specialist



Josh Reckling
Collections Associate

Nicky Billinger, was hired to fill the role of program associate, and is assisting with arts events and programs at the Red Cloud Opera House. Josh Reckling joined us in March in the new position of collections associate. Among many duties, he will perform collections care work in several historic house museum properties and the National Willa Cather Center exhibits and archives.

Board Officers

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Vice President: Mark W. Bostock, Malcolm, NE
Secretary: Amy Springer, Red Cloud, NE
Treasurer: C. Kay Stahly, Kearney, NE
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Tracy Tucker, *Director of Collections & Curation*
Rachel Olsen, *Director of Education & Engagement*
Jeniffer Beahm, *Development Associate*
Nicky Billinger, *Program Associate*
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Leah Meyer, *Facilities Assistant*
Karin Prellwitz, *Facilities Assistant*

Our Vision:

People everywhere will find meaning and inspiration in Willa Cather's writing, life, times, and places.

Our Mission:

To enrich lives by advancing Willa Cather's legacy locally and beyond through education, preservation, and the arts.



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

COMING UP!



68th Willa Cather Spring Conference

"Complex & Brilliant: Cather at 150"
June 1-3, Red Cloud, Nebraska

18th International Cather Seminar

"Bright and Beautiful and Alive": Willa Cather's New York Intersections
June 21-June 23, New York, New York

Missoula Children's Theatre presents *Cinderella*

An annual production for our talented area thespians
Friday, August 4, at 5:30 p.m. & Saturday, August 5, at 2:00 p.m.

Sarah Arneson & Anne Hooper Webb

World-renowned soprano and violinist
Friday, September 1, at 7:30 p.m.

Cash & Cline Tribute

Bill Forness and Melinda Feree pay tribute to Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline
Friday, October 6, at 7:30 p.m.

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.