

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.

Museums for America Grant Awarded

The National Willa Cather Center recently received a \$250,000 Museums for America grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Funds will support the development of two new permanent exhibits for the recently restored Burlington Depot and Pavelka Farmstead. The new exhibits are part of a larger effort to refresh interpretation at sites connected to Willa Cather's literature, with a goal to increase understanding of life in rural Nebraska during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



The Burlington Depot is one of two recently restored historic sites that are to be enhanced with new permanent exhibits.

The Burlington Depot functions as the crucial backdrop to telling the story of Willa Cather's initial encounters with the frontier and its people. The Pavelka Farmstead was a setting in the final scenes of Cather's novel *My Ántonia* and home to Anna Pavelka, who Cather fictionalized as Ántonia. When interpreted properly with engaging and accessible exhibits, these historic sites will become more immersive destinations that spark engagement, inquiry, and reflection.

The grant covers design refinements, curation, and installation of the exhibits. The Depot exhibit will be the first project to get underway. Objects related to the Red Cloud Burlington Depot, its telegraph school, or other personal histories related to the building are welcome as part of the project. *To see the exhibit conceptual design, please visit willacather.org/depot-exhibit.*

Willa Cather Childhood Home Re-Dedication and Ribbon-Cutting

A crowd of more than 100 gathered on a sunny June afternoon to re-dedicate the Willa Cather Childhood Home after a sixteen-month restoration. The festivities began with a video message from Honorary National Campaign Chair and former First Lady Laura Bush. Gathered to speak from the front porch of the

National Historic Landmark were the Reverend Charles Peck, Master of Ceremonies; former State Senator Burke Harr, who introduced Legislative Bill 379 that enabled the transfer of the site from the Nebraska State Historical Society to the Willa Cather Foundation;

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Willa Cather Childhood Home Re-Dedication and Ribbon-Cutting

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Robert Thacker, Past President of the Board of Governors; Miranda Davis, Nebraska Youth Poet Laureate; Matt Mason, Nebraska State Poet; and Ashley Olson, Executive Director.

The dedicatory poems by Davis and Mason were a highlight of the event, and a nod to Cather's own work as a poet. In his acknowledgements, Past President Robert Thacker thanked the National Park Service for their generous Save America's Treasures grant and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development for their Shovel-Ready Capital Improvement Grant. More than 680 donors contributed to the project, along with generous support from numerous foundations, including the Acklie Foundation, Ethel S. Abbott Foundation, John K. and Lynne D. Boyer Foundation, Holland Foundation, Anne Thorne Weaver Foundation, Mammel Foundation, and the Gifford Foundation.

"The team from BVH Architecture worked diligently to create designs that would preserve the historic integrity of the site while making it more accessible for visitors," Thacker said. "Our general contractor Tru-Built Construction arranged every detail, including carefully elevating the house to build an entirely new foundation overlaid with original brick. Len Schamber of Schamber Historic Preservation took great care with restoration of everything from windows and shutters to doors and hardware." He also acknowledged Hillary LaFevere and her team from the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center for their work on the wallpaper conservation.

Executive Director, Ashley Olson acknowledged that the recent enhancements may not be what guests remember about their visit.

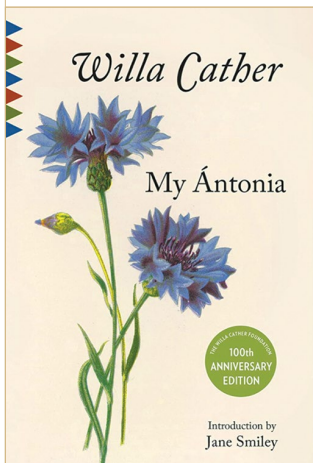
"They are more likely to remember the nickel-plated parlor stove that matches Cather's description in *The Song of the Lark*, or the small passageway occupied by Grandmother Boak—a space that strongly recalls Grandma Harris's living quarters in 'Old Mrs. Harris.' They'll surely remember peering into the delicately papered room that was home to Willa between the ages of ten and sixteen," she said.

"What makes this site so special is that it brings us closer to an author whose prose has been so meaningful to our lives," Olson concluded as she invited visitors to be guests in the Cather family home. *Guided tours are available year-round Tuesdays through Saturdays and can be booked online at willacather.org/tours or by contacting Visitor Services Coordinator Nick Powers at 402-746-2653.*



The ribbon-cutting on the front porch on June 8 was followed by an open house of the restored historic site after the ceremony. *From left to right:* Charles Peek, Burke Harr, Ashley Olson, Robert Thacker, Miranda Davis, Matt Mason, Mark Bostock, Tracy Tucker, and Rachel Olsen.

Big Read of *My Ántonia*



The Vintage Classics 100th anniversary edition of the novel with an introduction by Jane Smiley.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) included Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* among the fifty titles selected for their 2024 Big Read program. An initiative of the NEA in partnership with Arts Midwest, the Big Read supports community reading programs designed around a single "Big Read" book. The National Willa Cather Center received funding to bring communities together while reading and discussing the novel.

Programs, exhibits, and educational resources are available to organizations and communities that wish to take part in a shared reading experience. Activities will take place through June 30, 2025. Available resources include complimentary books; lectures and book discussions led by National Willa Cather Center leadership; place-based and online creative writing workshops; three new traveling exhibits related to the novel; *My Ántonia*-themed guided tours; and a special event at the recently restored Pavelka Farmstead, a setting from the final scenes of the novel.

Learn more at WillaCather.org/BigRead or contact Rachel Olsen at rolsen@willacather.org to inquire about booking a program or exhibit.

Connections to Cather's Hometown Inspire Kohout's Legacy Gift

During the Willa Cather Spring Conference, Sharon Kohout always makes time to say hello to her "Mama Simons." Kohout's great grandmother, Belle K. Simons, died in 1972 at 102 years old and is buried in her hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska.

Kohout grew up in Texas, but each summer she visited her mother's family in Lincoln, Nebraska. She has vivid memories of time spent with Mama Simons, who had moved from Red Cloud to Lincoln to be closer to her daughter and son-in-law. It was during these visits that Kohout discovered her grandfather's basement library. He worked as a book salesman for Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, and was an avid reader. Kohout attributes her love of reading to him. Even with her family connection to Nebraska and Cather's hometown, it wasn't until Kohout was in college that she encountered Cather's writing for the first time.

"Like many students, my entry [to Cather] was *My Antonia*," Kohout said. "It just spoke to me. Her writing continues to speak to me. In any work I can find an emotion that I can relate to. Her use of the language is simple, but evocative. She was a craftsman, but she makes me feel something—that's very rare in a writer, for me."

Kohout studied English at Texas Tech University, but she devoted the majority of her career to public health. Now retired, Kohout travels often, and devotes more of her time to her first interest—literature. She splits her residences between Vermont and Texas, and often takes her grandson Jayden with her on adventures to places associated with Cather's writing. Recent stops include Quebec City and Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

Kohout's travels don't stop there. She has attended the Willa Cather Foundation's immersive weekend in Taos, New Mexico, and this summer traveled to explore Cather's island retreat at Whale Cove in Grand Manan, New Brunswick, with friends she met through Cather events. She looks forward to rekindling those friendships every summer at the Willa Cather Spring Conference, an event she first attended in 2013.

"I love the fact that it's just scholarly enough to pique my background in English," Kohout explained. "I like the challenge



Sharon Kohout pictured here on a visit to the Willa Cather gravesite in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

of the scholarly presentations, but I love that you don't have to be a scholar to appreciate the rich tapestry of Cather's writing."

With her family connection to Red Cloud and her fondness for Cather's literature, Kohout said it was an easy decision to include the Willa Cather Foundation in her estate plan. She says she most admires the devotion of the organization to educational programs and preservation. "I remember the first time I went out on a visit to the properties, and people read passages from Cather's writing at each place. It was so special to connect Cather to the collection of historic sites. The properties really are a rare gift," Kohout said.

In joining the Cather Legacy Society, Kohout ensures the Foundation's work can continue long past her lifetime, and visitors can experience the same engaging tours, conferences, and seminars that she has. "The Willa Cather Foundation is just so special to me. It's like I'm keeping a part of my mother's family and my great grandparents alive," she said. "It's Cather, but it's an intersection of all of these pieces: my family, my love for Cather, and the many friendships that now enrich my life."

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 Jeniffer Beahm, Development Coordinator, at jbeahm@willacather.org.

Educators Gather for 2024 Teacher Institute

Our third annual summer Teacher Institute took place in July and provided four days of immersive learning and history study for seven educators from across the country—and our first international teacher! While in Red Cloud, they experienced historic site tours, lectures, and time in the archives while working to create educational assets for their classrooms and our growing network of educators.

The next Willa Cather Teacher Institute will take place July 13–17, 2025 and applications are due March 1. Learn more at WillaCather.org/Teacher-Institute.



A gathering of teachers in the Robert and Joanne Berkshire Archive Study Room at the National Willa Cather Center.

Writers Residency Cohort Arrives in Red Cloud



From left to right: Hillary Behrman, K.M. Chenault, Margot Kahn, Donna O'Shaughnessy, and S.M. Sukarki.

Five writers from around the country arrived in Red Cloud on October 13 for a two-week residency. The Willa Cather Residency aims to support the development of new work by emergent writers. The program was launched in 2023 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Cather's birth and to provide a unique opportunity for writers to reside and create in Red Cloud.

This year's cohort includes **Hillary Behrman** from the Pacific Northwest, a children's civil rights lawyer and public defender, whose award winning writing is rooted in a strong sense of place, community, and connection to wild and natural places; **K. M. Chenault**, a Virginia farmer and Nebraska native who was a

longtime foreign correspondent in Asia and Africa, and author of *Exit Wounds*, a play about the suffering from ethnic hatred and racial violence; **Margot Kahn**, a biographer, poet and editor whose work explores gender, identity, ambition, and desire, and who lives in the Pacific Northwest; **Donna O'Shaughnessy**, a retired Hospice nurse who writes about death, dying, and the faith that sustains humanity, from her homestead in central Illinois; and, **S. M. Sukarki**, a writer, essayist, and occasional critic whose work explores abjection, domesticity, and Asian American girlhood.

A public reading of author works in progress will be held at the National Willa Cather Center on October 26, at 4:00 p.m.

69th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference Highlights

Our 69th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, themed "Cather and the Readerly Imagination," celebrated Willa Cather and the joys of reading. The event was attended by more than 150 Cather enthusiasts. Highlights included the Willa Cather Childhood Home dedication and ribbon-cutting, a special star gazing tour on the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, and our annual banquet.

Author Kali Fajardo-Anstine, presented an engaging talk, "From Bookshelf to Dreamworld: Cather and the Underground Stream." She described her own readerly and writerly journey and how she more recently discovered the wonders of Willa Cather. Fajardo-Anstine is the best-selling author of the novel *Woman of Light* and the widely acclaimed short story collection *Sabrina and Corina*. She wrote the introduction to the 2023 Penguin Classics edition of Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Our annual rendition of *The Passing Show* was a lively discussion on the importance of books and reading, "Pleasures & Disruptions: Reading Cather Collectively," and featured Nebraska Public Media's Pat Leach, authors Arielle Zibrak and Kali Fajardo-Anstine, and was moderated by conference academic advisor Kelsey Squire.

Other highlights included a writing workshop led by Ana McCracken of the Ames Writers Collective; paper presentations;

an artist reception with Travis Hency featuring his collaged paper and graphite drawings that made up an exhibit titled *The Field, The Fire*; and an art exhibit titled *Hommage: Willa Cather*, organized by the Associació Internacional Duana de les Arts that featured works by artists from around the world.

A special thanks to academic advisors Sarah Clere and Kelsey Squire, and to Humanities Nebraska for their support.



Cather's life-long love of reading was highlighted as actors Lauren Silverman Durban and Eric Moyer shared curated selections from her letters and published works in a program titled "A Very Genuine Pleasure," a readers theater that served as the culminating event of the conference.

2024 Scholarships Awarded

Congratulations to this year's scholarship winners who shared their essays at our 69th Annual Spring Conference. Awardees are **Avery Fangmeyer**, Red Cloud High School, National Willa Cather Center Scholarship; **Libby Macklin**, Blue Hill High School, Leslie and Helen R. Wilson Scholarship; **Miranda Davis**, Norris High School, Norma Ross Walter Scholarship; **Emma Rasmussen**, Cambridge High School, Norma Ross Walter Scholarship. Not in attendance but reading their pre-recorded essays were **Eleanor Buchanan**, Western Albermarle High School, Antonia Scholarship; and **Cadence Schleicher**, Gering High School, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship.

Scholarships awarded through the Willa Cather Foundation since 1987 total more than \$200,000 and have assisted more than eighty students pursuing a higher education degree. *Application information for 2025 is available at willacather.org and annual deadlines are January 31, February 28, and April 20.*



From left to right: Avery Fangmeyer; Libby Macklin; Miranda Davis; Emma Rasmussen; and Rachel Olsen, Director of Education and Engagement.

The Blue Hill Leader Donates Images

A staff member recently noticed an intriguing post on the *Blue Hill Leader* social media page that shared some old photographs taken through the years that were “up for grabs.” With the recent merger of the *Blue Hill Leader* and *Red Cloud Chief* into the *Webster County Sun*, editor Melissa Lounsbury found two files of old images in the clean-out. In addition to those shared on social media, she had set some aside for the NWCC collections. Many images had Red Cloud or Bladen connections, and several were taken by Bradbrook and Wegmann, photographers who had studios in Red Cloud's Moon Block in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Though not much was known about why these images would have been at the newspaper office, they add to our knowledge of the photographers' studio and expand our collection of their work. Among the images gleaned from the Facebook exchange for the NWCC was an early twentieth century photograph of “Seb Johnson” from Blue Hill. “Seb Johnson interested me because he was wearing a WWI-era Army (or National Guard) uniform; knowing that Grovesnor P. Cather was a part of Blue Hill's Company K Guard unit, I wanted to see what I could find out about him,” said NWCC's Director of Collections and Curation, Tracy Tucker.



An image of “Seb” Johnson, a World War I soldier from Blue Hill, Nebraska, was recently donated.

Further research discovered that Johnson played an important role in Company K history. On his farm two miles east of Blue Hill, Company K built their federal regulation rifle range. It was completed in October 1915 as the Nebraska National Guard began preparing to send men to Lincoln to train for deployment to the Mexican Border. G.P. Cather, who inspired the main character of Cather's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *One of Ours*, would have spent a great deal of time on that target range.

Generous donations like the historic images from the former *Blue Hill Leader* are an example of the considerate reciprocity that repositories rely upon to bolster and preserve their historic collections within a community. Our archives assure that important historical materials will not be lost to time—or eBay and antique shops—but carefully preserved and shared with anyone interested in investigating the past.

Do you have an item of interest related to Willa Cather or Greater Webster County? Would you like to visit the NWCC Collections & Archives? Contact Tracy Tucker at ttucker@willacather.org.

Hotel Garber Construction Expands and General Manager Hired

Recent months have brought continued progress and important additions to the Hotel Garber development project. To fulfill a goal of the Red Cloud Creative District, the entire lower level of the Potter-Wright building will be rehabilitated to house a Creative Hub. The project team has also grown with the addition of John Schwichtenberg as General Manager.

The Creative Hub in the lower level of Hotel Garber will include a full kitchen, public corridors, and two large multipurpose rooms that will create space for art workshops, residencies, and other special events. The goal for the Creative Hub is to foster artistic and cultural creativity and advance economic vitality as part of Red Cloud Creative District's vision to create a vibrant destination where residents and visitors alike can experience the arts. A spacious dining and lounge area will enable creation of culinary offerings to complement events, such as gallery receptions or live music programs at the Red Cloud Opera House.

"The Creative Hub will take the Hotel Garber's cultural and economic impact on the community to the next level," said Heritage Tourism Development Director Jarrod McCartney. While the hub will serve as headquarters for the Creative District's activities and provide area residents with opportunities to engage with the arts, McCartney also described its potential to attract smaller and mid-size conferences through modernized meeting spaces and food service.

In addition to enhancements to the construction plans, John Schwichtenberg joined the team on July 1 as General Manager. A native of Rising City, Nebraska, Schwichtenberg brings more than two decades of hospitality experience. He served as General Manager of Tanglewood Resort and Conference Center in Pottsville, Texas, prior to returning to Nebraska. Schwichtenberg currently commutes from Lincoln, but looks forward to making Red Cloud home.

"The hotel is coming to life each passing day, and with each passing day, it is also becoming more evident how special the Hotel Garber will be now and for generations to come," said Schwichtenberg. After promoting the destination at recent events, he referred to the excitement as "genuine and palpable," and noted that he



The rebuilt third floor that was lost to fire in 1961 is now overlaid with brick, and additional ornamentation has been added to the exterior facade to recreate the building's original features.

quickly realized there is not only great demand to visit by Willa Cather enthusiasts, but by all hospitality segments.

As Schwichtenberg makes plans to prepare for the opening, it has been a busy spring and summer at the construction site. Drywall work is now complete, as are rough-ins for mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. Construction on the hotel is expected to be complete in the coming months, and construction of the Creative Hub will begin soon thereafter. The facility is expected to open in the first quarter of 2025.

While the addition of the Creative Hub necessitated additional fundraising, the project has raised 95% of its goal through a combination of charitable gifts, investments, grants, and historic tax credits. We are now within \$250,000 of the funds needed to ensure construction completion. All gifts of \$1,000 or more will be recognized on a donor wall, and pledges to the project are payable over five years.

"We are beyond grateful to more than 100 donors who bought into our vision and recognized the importance of this project to the National Willa Cather Center and the community of Red Cloud," said Executive Director Ashley Olson. She noted that the downtown revitalization project was also made possible with support from the State of Nebraska - Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Community Foundation, and Nebraska State Historical Society.

Conservation Need: Emily Caroline Cather's Trunk

During preparation for the restoration of the Willa Cather Childhood Home, an intriguing trunk was discovered tucked away in the eaves with "E. C. Cather" painted on the side. The trunk belonged to Willa Cather's paternal grandmother,

Emily Caroline Smith Cather. The fragile piece, covered in patterned paper and with a beautifully decorated tray, was transported to the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center for analysis in 2023.

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In order for the fragile yet precious artifact to be protected and displayed, the paper and leather on the trunk need to be stabilized to help prevent further loss of original material. The metal surfaces should also be cleaned and a protective coating should be applied to reduce corrosion. Additional steps will need to be taken to stabilize and support the lid to display the decorative interior. Object stabilization and preservation by conservators is estimated to cost \$9,500.

The E.C. Cather trunk is an important part of the Cather family story, as it represents their migration. Like the character she inspired in *My Antonia*, Emily Caroline Smith Cather moved to Nebraska from Virginia. The trunk accompanied her when she and her husband, Willa's grandfather, moved to Webster County in 1877.

Read more about the history and relevance of this trunk and how you can help support its conservation at WillaCather.org/trunk.



The E.C. Cather trunk has historical significance relating to the westward migration of the late nineteenth century.

Now Showing: *The Artistic Nebraska Odyssey of Linda Garcia Rivera*



Linda Garcia Rivera with a cut paper image of Frida Kahlo.

An artist reception on October 4 celebrated the opening of *The Artistic Nebraska Odyssey of Linda Garcia Rivera*. Rivera's exhibit features works in mixed media that tell stories—traditional, historical, folkloric, ceremonial, and personal tributes. Acting as a team with her husband José since the 1990s, Rivera has introduced the cultural traditions of “Dia de los Muertos,” through statewide workshops, art exhibits and installations of memory throughout Nebraska.

“My themes reflect the memories of being a farm-girl, of being a person of color living, working, and raising a family in Nebraska,” said Rivera. Her medium of expression has evolved over the decades from portrait art using acrylics on canvas to adopting paper that opened avenues of communication with patrons and students alike. The exhibit will be in the Red Cloud Opera House Gallery through November 9, and many beautiful pieces are available for purchase.

Save the Date for the 70th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference

We're looking forward to our next Spring Conference, which will be held June 5-7, 2025. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jane Smiley is an invited speaker, and the conference theme will be “Cather's House: Examining Built and Natural Environments in Her Work.” Featured books will include *My Antonia* as part of The Big Read celebration and *The Professor's House* in commemoration of its publication centenary.

Jane Smiley is the author of numerous



Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jane Smiley.

novels, including *A Thousand Acres*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, *The Last Hundred Years Trilogy: Some Luck, Early Warning, and Golden Age*, *Perestroika in Paris*, and most recently, *Lucky*. She is also the author of several works of nonfiction and books for young adults. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she has also received the PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Award for Literature.

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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.

Cather Legacy Society

Membership in the Cather Legacy Society is open to all who desire to continue their support of the Willa Cather Foundation beyond their lifetimes. To learn more, visit willacather.org/legacy-society.



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

COMING UP!



Not Too Far Distant

A play by Becky Boesen on the life of a Nebraska World War II soldier
Friday, November 1, at 7:30 p.m. | Red Cloud Opera House

Cather's Santa Fe: A Walking Tour

Explore one of Willa Cather's favorite cities with Garrett Peck
Wednesday, November 13, at 1:00 p.m. | Santa Fe, NM

Cather and the Counterculture

Our last immersive gathering at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House
Thursday, November 14 to Sunday, November 17 | Taos, NM

One of Ours: A Dramatic Reading

Developed for the Joslyn Castle & Gardens 15th Annual Art & Literary Festival
Saturday, November 16, at 6:00 p.m. | Red Cloud Opera House

Edem Soul Music

An eclectic performance and multicultural experience with twelve instruments
Saturday, December 7, at 7:30 p.m. | Red Cloud Opera House

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.