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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

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WILLA CATHER DAUGHTER OF KINGS

The story of Willa Cather's ancestry begins with William the Conqueror whose son Henry the First was grandfather of Henry II (the one who murdered Thomas á Becket). Henry III, grandson of Henry II, fathered Edward I crowned 1274, a crusader, whose son, Edward II, the first Prince of Wales, was crowned, 1307. His son, Edward III, had a son known as John of Gaunt. Gaunt's daughter married Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland.

"Their son, Richard Neville, married the Countess of Salisbury, and he took her title. Their daughter, Eleanor Neville, sister of the great Earl of Warwick, the kingmaker so called, married Sir Thomas Stanley afterwards created Earl of Derby. His second wife was Margaret of Lancaster, Duchess of Richmond, and mother of Henry VII, King of England."

"Thomas Stanley's son George was held as hostage for the fidelity of his father by Richard III. Richard III was killed at the battle of Bosworth and Henry of Richmond was proclaimed on the battlefield by his father-in-law, Sir Thomas Stanley, as Henry VII."

George Stanley died before his father. He left two sons, Thomas who succeeded his grandfather as second Earl of Derby, and James, who was created a baronet and lived at Crosshall County, Lancaster, England. James had four sons, the three eldest died without issue. Henry the youngest succeeded and inherited the large estates of his father. He married Margaret, daughter of Peter Stanley, of Bickenstaff, another branch of the family.

Henry Stanley had several sons and daughters. His daughter Margaret Stanley married in 1595 Richard Houghton, of Wavertree Hall, near Liverpool, they had an only son and several daughters.

His son Evan Houghton of Wavertree Hall, was his heir and married Ellen Parker of Bridge Hall, County of Lancashire. They had a daughter, an only child named Catharine. She married William Henshaw, of Poxteth Park, near Liverpool, and they lived with her father at Wavertree Hall.

William Henshaw and his father-in-law, Evan Houghton, were killed on the 20th of June, 1644, at the storming of Liverpool, by Prince Rupert. They were fighting against King Charles I.

In 1651 the wife of William Henshaw died, leaving two sons, Joshua, age seven, and Daniel, about eighteen months younger. In 1653 the executor of the estate pretended to send those boys to London to attend school and reported afterwards that they both died there of the plague. In reality he sent them to New England and placed them in the family of Rev. Richard Mather, of Dorchester, near Boston, an eminent divine, who educated them with the money forwarded for that purpose. Their property to a large amount was appropriated by the executor to his own use or rather that part which came from the Houghton family. That part which came from Henry Stanley by marriage settlement upon his daughter Margaret probably went back into the family of Stanleys. The executor of William Henshaw's estate was Peter Ambrose, a man much employed by the Parliamentary Sequestering Committee in 1644-1650.

The youngest of the abducted boys died without issue. The eldest, Joshua, married Elizabeth Sumner of Dorchester, an ancestor of Governor Sumner of Massachusetts.

Their son John married early, moved to Philadelphia but not prospering well, moved to the valley lying between the Blue Ridge and the Great North Mountain. John Henshaw and his eldest son, Nicholas moved to that section, where he bought land from Lord Fairfax. He located on Mill Creek, Frederick County, Virginia, about thirteen miles from Winchester. A copy of the parchment patent from Lord Fairfax is available.

Nicholas's son William married Agnes Anderson who became the mother of eleven children, one of whom was Rachel who married M. Joseph Lemon. (This body of information regarding the Henshaw

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NEBRASKA COMFORT

(Occasioned by reading Willa Cather's story "The Best Years")

Nebraska blizzard rages
above cedar shingles
as snow mist
sifts gently down
on Lesley and
her brothers warm
in blanketed beds
thinking of sunflowers.
When mother peeks
into childrens' garret
her vision lingers
beyond even death.

— Richard F. Fleck
Department of English
University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming

family is taken from *West Virginia History Magazine* 4:149-171 April, 1904.)

Rachel Lemon was the mother of Ruhammah Lemon (SAPPHIRA AND THE SLAVE GIRL) who married Jacob F. Seibert, and their daughter Rachel was Rachel Boak, the maternal grandmother of Willa Cather ("Old Mrs. Harris"). Proof for the parentage of Joseph Lemon and his wife, Rachel, of Ruhammah Lemon Siebert lies in the Will Book 4, Page 243 "the Estate of Joseph Lamon dec'd in account with John Gray guardian to the heirs. Oct. 15, 1805 to 75 cents paid Hiram Baldwin for schooling Rheuamah Lamond. Dec. a pair of shoes for Rheuamah Lamon $1.50 — March 1806 4 lb. cotton for Reuamah Lamone $1.33 — August 1806 shoes and stockings for Rheuamah Lamon $2.00. 1808 Sept. cloathing (sic) for Rheumah Lamon $9.48."

Marriage account of (and birth of Rachel) Jacob Funk Seibert to Rohanna Lemmon, p. 38 from THE SEIBERT FAMILY by Raymond Martin Bell, Washington, Pennsylvania 1959.

In the abstracts of Jacob Seibert and his wife, sometimes she is called Rhua and sometimes Rhui. Sometimes Rhu. (Note various spellings of names — a common problem in genealogy.) The wills and abstracts are to be found at Martinsburg, West Virginia.

From the Will Book No. 25, p. 565, Frederick County, Virginia, Jacob F. Seibert leaves his eldest child by his last wife a lot of ground. She cannot sell the ground but can move the house if she wishes. Ruhamah, his wife, was executrix. Dated 28 February 1856 Jacob Seibert owned one black man, two black women, one with child, two girls and two boys. (Note: Just in case you notice that William Henshaw died in 1644 and in 1651 his wife died leaving a seven-year-old son and one eighteen months younger, remember that whoever the father might be, the royal blood flowed in the mother's veins.)

Credit for finding this genealogy goes to John March of Lawton, Oklahoma. He has long been a researcher on Cather ancestry. Materials which prove the above story, and add much detail too complex to include, are filed with the Cather Historical Center in Red Cloud.

— Mildred R. Bennett

TWO CHILDREN OF THE PRAIRIE

When one looks for writers who, beside Willa Cather, have dealt with the Middle West in a convincing way, the name of Hamlin Garland is one of the first to come to one's mind.

As early as 1894, in CRUMBLING IDOLS Garland deplored the conventional aspect of most stories about the Middle West "absolutely colorless, when they are not pirated exotics." As for him, he wanted to describe life on the prairie where he had spent his youth without sentimentality yet with a true appreciation of its positive aspects. As he was to write later, in A SON OF THE MIDDLE BORDER: ". . . Is it not time that we of the west should depict our own distinctive life? The middle border has its poetry, its beauty, if we can only see it."

Undeniably, such was the goal he pursued in the numerous short stories he wrote around 1890 and the texts collected under the title BOY LIFE ON THE PRAIRIE in 1888.

Garland's stories and Willa Cather's fiction offer curiously similar episodes. Thus the first chapter of BOY LIFE entitled "A Night Ride in a Prairie Schooner" anticipates MY ANTONIA's introductory chapter written some 30 years later. Young Lincoln Stewart, just like Jim Burden in Nebraska, arrives at night in Mitchell County, Iowa, in the fall of 1868. The next morning, just like Jim again, he gazes on the strange flat land and its boundless stretches of wild shaggy grass strewn with thousands of purple and yellow flowers. Both books describe the seasonal round of work on the farm but in a more documentary way in Garland as suggested by such chapters as "The Fall's Plowing," "Seeding," "Planting Corn," "Threshing in the Fields," "The Corn Husking." As in Cather's prairie stories, the cycle of seasons is described in chapters like "Winter Winds," "The Great Blizzard." Wildlife is studied in "Snaring Gophers" or "The Terror of the Rattlesnake" or "A Chapter on Prairie Game." We even find a chapter called "A Momentous Wolf-hunt" which brings to mind — however remotely — the tragic story of Pavel and Peter. More peaceful pastimes are observed in "A Fourth of July Celebration," "The Coming of the Circus," "Owen Rides at the Country Fair." Similarly, the monotonous prairie life in Cather's work is brightened up by such simple festivities and rejoicings. Finally A BOY LIFE ends with Lincoln going to college, just as Jim Burden at the close of Book II leaves Black Hawk for the University of Lincoln. Such similarities, however striking do not of course mean that W. Cather was deliberately imitating Garland. Considering their personal experience of the middle West it was almost inevitable that these two gifted children of the prairie should use the sparse material it afforded their inspiration. Besides, each author handled it according to his own temperament and vision, Garland in a more realistic way, Cather with an ampler imaginative scope. Without being unduly partial to her, it can be said that she expressed "the beauty and poetry" of prairie life more successfully than Garland did. On the other hand, as shown by her first critical essays, W. Cather was familiar with Garland's work, even though she did not seem to care for it. She had

read his short stories in various magazines, including those collected in MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS (1891) and had dismissed them as uninteresting. "Poor Hamlin Garland" she wrote in the "Nebraska State Journal" (Jan. 1896) had neither imagination nor style, adding for good measure:

> No man ever tried his hand at fiction and persisted in the vain attempt who so utterly lacked these essential things as Mr. Garland. Art is temperament and Hamlin Garland has no more temperament than a prairie dog.

Other hostile — to say the least — comments appear here and there in various articles signed by W. Cather. Thus in 1895, reviewing a play be Franklin Lee, entitled "Nebraska" she manages to kill two birds with one stone:

> . . . Just what there is in this particular part of the universe to make a play of it is difficult to say. Probably the drama will deal with "barren, wind swept prairies: fields of stunted corn, whose parched leaves rattle like skeletons in the burning south wind," and all that sort of rot which Mr. Hamlin Garland and his school have seen fit to write about our peaceable and rather inoffensive country.

To us, what is rather startling is that W. Cather here disdainfully rejects the very "sort of rot" she herself had already written about, for instance in "Peter," "Lou the Prophet" (1892) and "The Clemency of the Court" (1893) and was to treat even more extensively later, causing dismay and resentment among some readers stung by her depiction of their "inoffensive" country. Actually in her frontier novels, W. Cather's vision of the prairie is more serene than tragic, contrary to Garland's. Yet, in some of her early short stories, W. Cather's inspiration evinces a pessimism hardly less intense than Garland's in MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS. "A Wagner Matinée" (1904) expresses a desperate rejection of the prairie whose bleakness destroys sensitive souls like Georgiana Carpenter, or in a later work Mr. Shimerda. In contrast, Garland's story "Mrs. Ripley's Trip" published in the Harper's Weekly (1888) about a similar theme, looks quite serene. After many years of backbreaking work, Old Mrs. Ripley has managed to save enough money for a trip to her native village in New York state. Then having fulfilled her dream she contentedly returns to her farm in the Middle West. As opposed to "A Wagner Matinée," the story is not sad, brightened as it is by the silent solid affection existing between the old woman and her husband, whereas Georgiana Carpenter must endure her bitter exile in the company of a boorish husband.

Cather and Garland, though frequently using the same themes, are artistically extremely different. But what they do have in common is an intense feeling of nostalgia for the vanished prairie and youth forever lost — a melancholy which in Cather's work has a more elegiac tone. Like Carl Linstrum and Jim Burden, Lincoln Stewart, the hero of BOY LIFE returns to his *patria* after a long absence, anxiously looking for vestiges of the ancient prairie. On eventually discovering a still preserved patch of wild land, he is overwhelmed with emotion.

What contributes to give Willa Cather's prairie stories a universal appeal perhaps less evident in Garland's work is the role immigrants play in her stories. W. Cather's early interest in them is too well-known to be discussed here. Garland as a child in Iowa had Norwegian playmates, as he recalls in A SON OF THE MIDDLE BORDER. Yet Garland, in his work, does not seem to show immigrants the keen sympathy Cather felt towards them. He is not especially concerned with the difficulties they met in adjusting to the New World. As Roy W. Meyer notes in THE MIDDLE WESTERN FARM NOVEL "[the immigrant] is just a part of the setting Garland uses." W. Cather, on the contrary, used the prairie as a setting to the human drama of which immigrants were the main protagonists or more exactly in her stories she fused the land and its people into one powerful theme. Garland undeniably in his best succeeded in conveying the "distinctive life of the west," to quote his own words. Using roughly the same material W. Cather achieved more. Better than Garland — we believe — she can be credited with "telling about the beauty of the country [she] loved, its romance, the heroism — of its people — plowed in the very furrows of its soil . . . ."

— Michel Gervaud
Aix en Provence
France

SINCLAIR LEWIS AND "THE GREATEST AMERICAN NOVELIST"

Seven years after capturing the Nobel Prize in Literature, Sinclair Lewis agreed to write a weekly literary column for *Newsweek* magazine. "Book Week" began on October 4, 1937 and continued through April 18, 1938. In his jumbo biography, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (1961), Mark Schorer comments on only two of Lewis's 29 *Newsweek* essays — "Glorious Dirt" (October 18, 1937) and "Seeing Red" (November 19, 1937) — the first attacking Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, the second blasting Communist writing. But at least one more little essay buried in the *Newsweek* files, Lewis's first "Book Week" column of the new year (January 3, 1938), seems of equal interest and importance.

Typically, Sinclair Lewis undercuts his provocative title — "The Greatest American Novelist" — by declaring: "There is no such thing as any one most important living American novelist . . ." The literary journalist, however, accedes to the

bookmen's annual voting game. Lewis submits 28 nominations and quips that "some are caviar to Aunt Mabel and some are to the higher critics corned beef." Whatever else, Lewis's mingle-mangle reveals his catholicity of taste. He interfuses, for example, Fannie Hurst, Louis Bromfield, Joseph Hergesheimer, Margaret Ayer Barnes, and Harry Leon Wilson with Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck. In a few years, Lewis anticipates, he might add eight more novelists to his list, among them Vardis Fisher, Oliver La Farge, and Paul Horgan. Finally, Lewis announces that if he had to choose the "One Greatest" living American novelist, his vote would go to — *Willa Cather*.

Sinclair Lewis's choice is especially interesting in light of his unfavorable review of *One of Ours* in the New York *Evening Post* ("A Hamlet of the Plains," September 22, 1922) and his later disappointment when the Pulitzer Prize went to *One of Ours* instead of to *Babbitt*. Despite their radical dissimilaries of temperament and artistry, Lewis had from early on named Willa Cather among the potpourri of novelists he customarily championed in his conversations, letters, lectures, and articles.

"No other," asserts Lewis in his forgotten *Newsweek* piece, "has so preserved our frontier — from Nebraska Lutherans to Quebec padres — as she has . . . . Yet no one has more lucidly traced the post-pioneer than she has . . ." For Sinclair Lewis, Cather's *A Lost Lady* ranks not only with Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, and Norris's *McTeaque*, but also with the *best* of Crane, Howells, and Hawthorne. Lewis proposes: philanthropists should donate the Houghton Mifflin 12-volume autographed edition of her works to libraries. For 35 years she has "gone on creating beauty" and — the satiric Lewis cannot resist adding — "vigorously *not* attending literary dinners to such awe-inspiring foreign geniuses as Emil Ludwig and Lady Ludmilla Bates-Beech, the explorer." Other writers have chased after novelty and nihilism, Lewis concludes, but "quiet and alone, Willa Cather has greatly pictured the great life."

— Martin Bucco
Colorado State University

NEW CATHER LETTER DISCOVERED

Mary Ruth Ryder, on her way home from the Merrimack Cather Symposium, stopped in Winchester, Virginia, to view Sapphira's country.

In the Winchester library as Ms. Ryder looked at a 1931 copy of SHADOWS ON THE ROCK, a folded letter from Willa Cather to a Miss Deane fell out. Apparently it has not been noted before in collections and even the Winchester librarian had not seen it before.

The letter predates 1927 as both Cather parents are still living. It was given to the Winchester (Hadley) library by Mrs. Miles Deane on November 29, 1946.

Does any reader have a clue as to who Miss Deane might be?

The Winchester library displays paintings from our Red Cloud art gallery.

Ms. Ryder also discovered that September 3, 1832 her great-great-great grandfather, Augustine Blacker, sold to James Cather a parcel of land previously purchased by her great-great-great-great grandfather in 1830.

(Condensed from a letter to Mildred Bennett from Mary Ruth Ryder, July 9, 1984.)

WELDED WOMEN

Welded Women, a collection of poetry by Nancy A. Westerfield and edited by Helen Winter Stauffer has been issued (1983) by Kearney State College Press.

Mrs. Westerfield is no novice at poetry. Her work has been published in prestigious journals here and abroad.

You will be astonished and delighted to find a woman's metaphysical poetry on universal themes. Cather's spirit still hovers here.

Take this one for example:

Mrs. Kontos

Is eighty-odd years of ancient Greece
Lived in these streets of Nebraska;
On sunworthy days, she walks
Her twin Pekingese dogs, her own
Peke-faced elderliness black-mantled,
Becoming the Aegean matron.
Mr. Kontos,
Who traveled, has traveled far
Beneath his stone cross in the graveyard;
The Orthodox, for the sake of his soul,
Have eaten from bowls of boiled wheat.
Speaking with rock-born hardihood,
Mrs. Kontos recalls his travels,
Her girlhood coming to this strange place,
Now her grief. In the sun, her features
Dent like a sundial, her nose
A sweep of shadow keeping time
For Ulysses' widow, in Penelope's broken face.

Welded Women may be ordered from the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation for $3.50 plus $1.50 postage.

WESTERN AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM

Dr. Martin Bucco, *Western American Literary Criticism*, Western Writers Series No. 62 begins

his crisp but comprehensive survey of Western literary criticism with a time, 1758, when west meant over the Appalachian Mountains. By 1815 William Tudor believed that by the next century the Noble Savage would be found only on Pacific shores. Another 1815 essay by Walter Channing claims the English language made for the Thames could not describe the Mississippi — one needed the oral tongue of the aborigines.

From these early Eastern misconceptions Dr. Bucco traces Western criticism and the rise of distinctly Western literary magazines.

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Order: *Western American Literary Criticism* by Martin Bucco (University of Colorado). Please send orders to

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You need this book for its knowledge and its wit. To cover 250 years in 55 pages takes discrimination!

— Mildred R. Bennett

GREAT CATHER READING

The "Great Plains Quarterly," Fall 1984 issue is out with eight fine articles from the Second National Cather Seminar of 1983. The issue also includes eight beautiful photos from the Lucia Woods Collection.

Order your copy now from The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, 326 North Webster, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970.

The price is $4.00 plus postage and handling $1.50.

WINTER '84 PRAIRIE SCHOONER

An article by Susan J. Rosowski and Bernice Slote, Willa Cather's 1916 Mesa Verde Essay: The Genesis of *The Professor's House*.

Order your copy from The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, 326 North Webster, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970.

The price is $3.25 plus postage and handling $1.50.

TWO BOOKS FOR CATHER LIBRARY

Richard Fleck, Department of English, University of Wyoming, has sent two of his books of poetry for the Cather Foundation Library. They are *Bamboo in the Sun Poems of Japan* and *Cottonwood Moon*.

CHAUTAUQUA '85

Chautauqua Week

The Great Plains Chautauqua Society is encouraging committees in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota to consider hosting the summer humanities tent show in its 10th season. The Chautauqua tent will visit two communities in each state beginning mid-June 1985. The Great Plains Chautauqua is a recreation of the entertaining and educational tent circuits that toured rural America in the first two decades of the century.

The theme for Chautauqua '85 is "Writers on the Plains." The five-day humanities extravaganza will feature a moderator portraying Hamlin Garland, whose harshly realistic stories of the plains frontier revolutionized American literature, and Willa Cather, William Allen White, Mari Sandoz, and Sinclair Lewis. Last month the Chautauqua Society selected humanities scholars to portray the five writers.

The summer season will begin in Kansas in mid-June. The tent program will move north to Nebraska and South Dakota in July, and to North Dakota in the first two weeks of August. Chautauqua begins on Wednesday in each community, with afternoon workshops and two-hour programs each evening through Sunday. Evening programs begin with local entertainment — fiddlers, town storytellers and poets, singers, dancers, and local thespians. Hamlin Garland will serve as host and moderator. He will each evening introduce one author, who will offer a 50-minute dramatic characterization of his or her life and ideas. On Sunday evening all five authors will share the stage in the Chautauqua Forum, loosely modeled on Steve Allen's popular Meeting of the Minds.

Chautauqua '85 will examine how well these writers have explored the Great Plains experience. Hamlin Garland homesteaded in South Dakota, then left the Midwest to write soberingly realistic accounts of the hardships of frontier. He was particularly sympathetic to the plight of Indians and women on the plain. Sinclair Lewis lashed small town values throughout his life. He found main street American claustrophobic, bigoted, intolerant, and smug. Any yet he maintained a lifelong fascination with the people who struggled in those confining and narrow-minded towns to achieve lives of integrity and dignity. Mari Sandoz wrote sad and heroic accounts of

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Special group memberships (such as clubs or businesses) are available. Write to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for details.

AIMS OF THE WCPM

- To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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the struggle of plains Indians to maintain their nomadic and mystic culture. And in her great biography OLD JULES, Sandoz offered American readers one of the most honest and vivid portraits of the homesteader, beseiged by an uncompromising land, sometimes hostile Indians, and predatory ranchers. Willa Cather wrote novels of great delicacy and a marvelous sensitivity to the small moments in life that are in fact of the greatest significance. Her novel, MY ANTONIA, is an American classic, and one of the most thoughtful accounts of plains immigrants in our literature. William Allen White was a progressive journalist in Kansas, one of the most influential men of his age, and an indefatigable observer of the plains as they came of age at the turn of the century. His essays, "What's the Matter with Kansas," and "Kansas Is a State of Mind," were extremely influential in White's day and after.

Dr. Helen Winter Stauffer of Kearney College will portray Mari Sandoz and Sally McNall of Kansas will depict Willa Cather.

Watch for further information.

CATHER TOUR

Plans for the European Cather Tour will soon be completed. Watch your mail for a brochure giving prices and itinerary. Only 40 may participate in this tour, therefore those who register first will be the fortunate ones for 1985. Already five places have been reserved, no questions asked, therefore, act immediately if you wish to join us.