

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

VOLUME X, NUMBER 2

and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## Catherland

*Here on the divide between the Republican and the Little Blue lived some of the most courageous people of the frontier. Their fortunes and their loves live again in the writings of Willa Cather, daughter of the plains and interpreter of man's growth in these fields and in the valleys beyond.*

*On this beautiful, ever-changing land man fought to establish a home. In her vision of the plow against the sun, symbol of the beauty and importance of work, Willa Cather caught the eternal blending of earth and sky.*

*Willa Cather wrote from her heart the wonderful tales she heard and the vital drama she saw in her growing years. In her books those she loved and admired live forever. My Antonia, earth mother of the plains, grew to maturity, loved, worked, and died within a few miles of this spot, yet she is known and loved all over the world.*

*"The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or woman." The history of this land began in the heart of Willa Cather.*

## Catherland Marker Dedication

Sunday, August 29th a corn-ripening south wind blew across the divide. From far and near members and friends of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation gathered on the huge triangular plot of buffalo grass bounded on three sides by merging highways. The occasion was the dedication and unveiling of a new Catherland sign erected by the Historical Land Mark Council and the Cather Foundation.

Nebraska Governor Frank B. Morrison was there to dedicate the marker which stands on the highest point of the divide overlooking Willa Cather Country—a wide stretch of the prairie and the Republican River Valley. Here lived the pioneers who were the characters for Cather's Nebraska writings; here is their land which is the setting for her stories.

### National Award

Also there was Marvin Kivett, representing the American Association for State and Local History, to present its Award of Merit to the Willa Cather Foundation. The American Association made the award "for the effective and meaningful way in which the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation has presented the story of Willa Cather in her home surroundings."



New Catherland marker and three of the people taking part in the dedication ceremonies, Carrie Miner Sherwood, Beth Ann Pavelka, and Mildred R. Bennett.

Mrs. Sherwood, a spry 97 year old, is radiating pride at this, the latest recognition given her girlhood friend and confidant, Willie Cather.

Beth Ann is celebrating her twelfth birthday by cutting the ribbon for the unveiling of the marker which also pays tribute to her grandmother, Anna Pavelka, known and loved throughout the world as My Antonia.

Mrs. Bennett, Cather authority, author, and president of the Cather Foundation, is acknowledging one more milestone of progress by the eleven year old organization.

### Spectators

John March came from New York to join his fellow Cather Foundation board members for the occasion. Also among the crowd of spectators were four of Willa Cather's cousins as well as a number of Antonia's sons and daughters and grandchildren.

The 1967 Annual Spring Conference of the Willa Cather Foundation will be held the third weekend of April. It promises to be an especially interesting event next year because the Nebraska Writer's Guild will be meeting in Red Cloud simultaneously.

## Catherland Tours

### . . . Visitors . . .

While preparations are being made to celebrate in 1967 Nebraska's 100 years of statehood, Nebraskans are becoming increasingly aware of their heritage. The study of Willa Cather is spreading by leaps and bounds in schools and clubs throughout the state. Enjoyment of her writings is being enriched by the five Cather volumes already put out by the University of Nebraska Press with two more to be released soon. Nebraska's Educational TV programming this fall is also stirring up Cather interest among adults as well as students.

All of these things have helped to swell the number of visitors to Catherland—more than twice as many in the last three months as in all of 1965.

To take care of the crowds, additional volunteers have been trained as tour guides. A greater number of ladies than ever before have volunteered to help the Cather Museum staff with the task of keeping the various visiting groups sorted out and making sure that each is accorded the attention and leadership that is customary at the Cather Museum.

### . . . Tour Signs . . .

Half of the fifty signs marking the 53 mile country-tour route are in place. The remaining signs will go up just as soon as there are a few days free from conducting busloads of people and caravans of cars on tours.

### . . . Autumn Tours . . .

Fall has been an exceptionally long season this year and the weather has been unusually cooperative, seeming to put on its company manners for the larger than ever number of Catherland visitors. The whole country seemed anxious for those touring Cather settings to experience the feeling of "that first glorious autumn" in the early scenes of *MY ANTONIA*.

Fall is the time of year when the country-side is every imaginable shade of gold and bronze accented by the rich green of winter wheat, and the sky is vast and blue. Fall is the time to see blue stem grass which has reached maturity and with the first frost has turned "the colour of wine-stains." Fall is the time of "the blond corn-fields" and of "the tawny hawks which sail over head making slow shadows on the grass."

## Restoration Projects

### . . . Cather House . . .

Starting the restoration of Willa Cather's childhood home is scheduled for this winter. . . The initial work on this long planned-for project is made possible by a \$10,000 grant from the Woods Charitable Fund of Lincoln.

Until now you had to be content with looking at the house from the outside. The interior of this much-lived in old house has been remodeled so many times over the years of its long history that nothing is the same as it was when the Cathers lived there. Nothing, that is, except Willa Cather's tiny attic room, and that has been inaccessible to all but a few stalwart ladder-climbers because the stairway was torn out more than fifty years ago by one of the early remodelers.

We certainly hope that the initial phase of the renovation goes well and that when you arrive for your tour next spring you will be able to see at least a part of the house.

### . . . The Depot . . .

The old Red Cloud depot, once scheduled for destruction, has been preserved to become part of the Willa Cather Foundation. The depot is often used as a setting by Cather in her novels and poems. "Railroading opened the West" is the theme that appears prominently in many of her stories.

A special grant of 5,000 from Mr. and Mrs. John Quirk saved the depot from the wrecking crews. The original floor plans of the station will aid in the authentic remodeling of the building when additional money is available.

This activity is attracting a great deal of attention. A story about it which appeared in the CB&Q railroad publication, "Burlington Bulletin," was quoted by the New York TIMES. As was pointed out in the article, when Cather wrote about railroads, she meant the Burlington. Included in the story was Willa Cather's poem from APRIL TWILIGHTS, "Going Home — Burlington Route."

Her last story, "The Best Years," tells about that moment when No. 17 (The Overland Express) whistled in: "The station and the engine house were perhaps an eighth of a mile down the hill, and from far away across the meadows the children could hear the whistle. Then came the heavy pants of the locomotive in the frosty air. Then a hissing — then silence; she was taking water . . . On Saturdays the children were allowed to go down to the depot to see Seventeen come in . . . Yes, they were grand old warriors, those towering locomotives of other days . . . They seemed to mean power, conquest, triumph . . . They set children's hearts beating . . . They were the awakers of many a dream."

James Cather, Willa Cather's brother and last member of her immediate family, died August 18, 1966 in Long Beach, California.

Mamie Meredith, member of the Willa Cather Foundation board of governors, died July 13, 1966 in Lincoln, Nebraska.

## Interest in Willa Cather

### . . . Book Shortage . . .

"I wanted to read more of Willa Cather's books so I would be ready for today. But all the Cather books at our library had been checked out! I'm on the waiting list, and I'll get to read them sooner or later."

This is what we hear from people attending meetings all over the state where Cather Foundation board members have been asked to speak. We hear the same thing from people coming here to tour Catherland.

The problem is not confined to Nebraska. Reports indicate the demand for Cather books is growing everywhere.

Mr. Wayne Cather of Toledo, Willa Cather's cousin, is doing something about the problem. Once a year for the past several years Mr. Cather has ordered a set of the complete works of Cather from the Willa Cather Foundation for various school libraries. His gift this year went to the high school in Anderson, Ohio, Mr. Cather's hometown.

### . . . Cather Lectures . . .

Growing interest in Cather is additionally demonstrated by the increased number of requests for lectures. This fall Willa Cather Foundation board members have already driven a good number of miles to speak about Cather for a wide variety of gatherings ranging from club meetings to TV programs to state-wide meetings and conventions. More engagements are scheduled for the months ahead.

### . . . Meeting in Texas . . .

The greatest number of miles will be logged by board member Bernice Slote when she goes to Houston, Texas for the November 25 meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English. This will also be the most widely influential audience, and classrooms all over the United States will benefit.

Miss Slote, professor of English at the University of Nebraska and editor of its literary quarterly, "Prairie Schooner," was awarded an honorary degree by Nebraska Wesleyan University last May. This fall she is conducting the first all Cather course ever to be offered by the University of Nebraska. Her latest Cather book, *THE KINGDOM OF ART*, is soon to be released.

### . . . New Printing . . .

In the Museum book store is the new Dodd, Mead Apollo Edition reprint of *EARLY STORIES OF WILLA CATHER* edited in 1957 by Cather Foundation president Mildred R. Bennett. This new printing of *EARLY STORIES*, which has been unavailable for several years, is one more indication of the surge of interest in Willa Cather.

## Tributes to Willa Cather

Tributes to Willa Cather come in all shapes and sizes and forms as a constant reminder of her tremendous influence on the American scene.

### . . . Artistic Tributes . . .

Writers use words eloquently. Novelist Ray Bradbury says in a letter: "Willa Cather has been one of the good influences in my life . . . Male writers are not supposed to acknowledge the fact that some female writer has exerted a gravity upon them, but the plain fact is that Willa Cather . . . played a great part in helping me with my work as I grew up, along with Steinbeck . . . and the usual others among the male writers. Certainly, at the head of the list, I would place Miss Cather. Undoubtedly, her influence peers out here and there from the summer climate of DANDELION WINE."

Artists paint pictures to say what they feel. The latest painting to be hung in the Willa Cather Museum is from Dwight Kirsch, a watercolor he calls "Marshlands."

The Tokyo chapter of the Willa Cather Foundation is expressing admiration for Cather by writing a book about her. Under the direction of Professor Nishikawa, Tokyo University, this group has been extremely active since it was chartered in 1964.

### . . . Student Tributes . . .

School boys and girls communicate with shining eyes and bright smiles their appreciation for what Cather has done to make them aware of their pioneer heritage and the beauty and power of a part of their country.

Students, to demonstrate that studying Cather is a rewarding experience, pool their resources to make some sort of contribution to the Cather Foundation—whether a donation of money ranging from a handful of coins to a check for \$51 or a contribution of labor such as restoring the deserted grave of "Larry Donovan" or building a sod-roofed dugout.

### . . . Cather Foundation Is a Tribute . . .

All kinds of people whose lives have been touched by Willa Cather write letters indicating approval of what is being done by the Willa Cather Foundation whose existence is a tribute to Willa Cather. These are the words of librarian Ella Mae Thornton. "I was so happy to receive the Spring Newsletter and I read it with great pleasure and admiration for the creative forces that have backed the enterprise from the beginning. The progress made indicates a truly inspired course of action."

**Catherland Is Centennial County**

Further recognition of Cather Foundation efforts came when prizes were awarded November 11 to the winners of the state-sponsored community betterment contest. Webster County won not only first prize in its population division but also topped all the other first place winners to win the Centennial County Award. While many other activities and projects were involved in the county-wide betterment program, certainly more than eleven years of Willa Cather Foundation activity has done a great deal to stimulate community pride and an awareness of the attractions and opportunities available here. The contest judges commended "a sense of

obligation to the international public to preserve for them the spirit of Miss Cather's life and times."

**Your Tribute**

The simplest form of tribute, and yet the most effective, is your check to the Willa Cather Foundation. Your regular contribution is the life-blood of this growing organization. You are building more than a static shrine whose purpose is to preserve. You are contributing to a dynamic, growing force whose purpose is to teach and interpret, to spread appreciation for Cather and to share her artistry with all the world.

Sincerely,

Miriam Mountford, Newsletter Editor  
Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial  
and Educational Foundation

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

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**YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION:**

● By becoming a member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP . . . . . \$75.00  
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- By contributing to a project fund.
- By contributing to the restoration fund.
- By contributing to the scholarship fund.
- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

**AIMS OF THE WCPM**

- To secure the bonding, insurance and housing of a permanent art, literary and historical collection relating to the life, time and work of Willa Cather.
- To identify and restore to their original condition, places made famous by the writings of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial in the form of art and literary scholarships.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.



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