NEWS FROM CATHER COUNTRY

In the Hart

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Save America's Treasures Grant Awarded for Restoration of the Willa Cather Childhood Home

With intent to preserve a National Historic Landmark and a major tourist destination, we are pleased to announce that the National Willa Cather Center is the recipient of a \$415,000 federal Save America's Treasures Grant. The award of this full-ask grant will enable restoration of the Willa Cather Childhood Home in Red Cloud, Nebraska.

The Willa Cather Childhood Home, a modest one-and-a-half story frame home, was built in 1879 in the vernacular tradition of early prairie houses. Willa Cather lived in the home from the age of ten to sixteen. While Cather moved away from Nebraska in 1896, her parents Charles and Mary Virginia Cather rented the home through 1904.

Although Cather only lived in Red Cloud for a short time, her life there provided a large portion of the subject matter for her fiction. Many of Cather's best known writings depict life in Red Cloud and Webster County. The Cather house is described in *The Song of the Lark*, "Old Mrs. Harris," and "The Best Years." As the most important Nebraska structure associated with



The iconic Willa Cather Childhood Home.

her career, the Willa Cather Childhood Home opened for tours in 1967 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1972. The property was deeded to the National Willa Cather Center by History Nebraska in early 2019.

"Visitors from all over the world remark that walking through the doors of Cather's Childhood Home and into her tiny attic bedroom is an unforgettable experience," said National Willa Cather Center Executive Director Ashley Olson. "We're grateful to the Historic Preservation Fund and the National Park Service for helping to ensure this landmark property will be preserved for generations to come."

The multi-year grant will support planning and implementation of critically needed restoration work. Efforts will include foundation repair, interior and exterior structural and nonstructural repairs, efforts to ensure the conservation of the original wallpaper in Cather's attic bedroom, building system improvements, landscape drainage improvements, and historic landscape restoration.

The National Willa Cather Center is one of forty-one recipients nationwide selected for a share of \$12.6 million in Save America's Treasures grants administered by the National Park Service this year. The NPS, in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), awarded these matching grants to support the preservation of nationally significant historic properties and collections through the Save America's Treasures program.

Wallpaper Conservation at Willa Cather Childhood Home

As part of the collections and buildings transfer between History Nebraska and the National Willa Cather Center, the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center has provided expert assistance for wallpaper conservation in the author's preserved attic bedroom at the Willa Cather Childhood Home.

For many of our guests, seeing Willa Cather's attic bedroom, still adorned in its original paper with pink roses, is the highlight of their visit to Red Cloud. Unfortunately, decades of light damage and environmental instability have taken a toll on the wallpaper. Cather got the rose-strewn wallpaper in trade for her work at Dr. Cook's drugstore. She would later write the bedroom description—and the papering experience—into *The Song of the Lark* (1915) for Thea Kronborg's bedroom:

"The ceiling was so low that a grown person could reach it with the palm of the hand, and it sloped down on either side. There was only one window, but it was a double one and went to the floor. In October, while the days were still warm, Thea and Tillie papered the room, walls and ceiling in the same paper, small red and brown roses on a yellowish ground."

In early May, we were thrilled to launch a major conservation treatment of Cather's beloved wallpaper. Paper conservator Hilary LeFevere and conservation technician Megan Griffiths from the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center at History Nebraska were on-site for four days to begin the process and evaluate the 130-year-old original wallpaper. They cleaned the paper on the walls and stabilized as many loose areas as possible. This tedious work was fascinating to watch as accumulated dust and oils were removed inch by inch, brightening the circa 1888 paper. While cleaning, the team was able to locate a manufacturer.

The discovery of the wallpaper's manufacturer allows us to further explore recreation of the paper, in an effort to make Cather's wallpaper more accessible to all visitors for generations to come.



Paper conservator Hilary LeFevere carefully cleans and evaluates the original wallpaper in Cather's childhood bedroom, uncovering areas where light damage has not affected the period colorways.

"Projects like this have any number of potential solutions," said National Willa Cather Center archivist Tracy Tucker. "The results of this testing will be crucial in helping to plan for the best conservation of the paper for the next 130 years."

As with many places associated with famous authors, Cather's bedroom has become a literary shrine for visitors, and her original wallpaper is an essential part of the experience. Cather created her space well ahead of the concept of *A Room of One's Own* as Virginia Woolf would recommend for women writers in her 1929 essay. It was also the kind of attic bedroom, with its sloping matchboard ceiling, that Cather requested when later staying and writing from the Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey and the attic of her cottage at Grand Manan. Remarkably, preserved in rural Red Cloud is a simple attic bedroom that—for a few pivotal years in a small and busy household—provided the space needed for a young and brilliant mind to imagine the whole world.

If you would like to support our ongoing collection conservation efforts, please contact executive director Ashley Olson at aolson@willacather.org or (402) 746-2653.

64th Annual Spring Conference Examines Cather and the Theater

Over two hundred Cather fans took part in our 64th annual Spring Conference, May 30–June 1, which explored Willa Cather's theatrical and performance interests and her early journalism as a drama critic. The three-day event officially kicked off with "Homecoming & Horizons," a public celebration of the transfer of the Willa Cather State Historic Sites and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection from History Nebraska. Many of these returned items were on display in a "Welcome Home" exhibit, including the famed "Hiawatha" dress that young Willa wore for a formal photographic portrait before leaving for Nebraska. We welcomed conference-goers

continued on next page

and area residents, many of whom brought items of local historical interest to share in our successful "Artifacts & Oddities" program.

Playwrights Julia Hinson, conference co-director A.P. Andrews, and Bonnie Morris joined us for "Cather Takes the Stage," a panel that allowed the artists to reflect on the process of adapting Cather's work for the theater. Special guest speaker Ron Hull recalled his memories and work with our founder Mildred Bennett, and L. Kent Wolgamott regaled the crowd with his experiences as arts critic for the *Lincoln Journal Star*—a position he and Cather shared



Julia Hinson's production of *A Little Pleasure* explores Willa Cather's lifelong love of the theater. Commission of the play was made possible with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts.

more than a century apart—and his research into her theatrical reviews. The fine art exhibit *Impact Willa Cather* also made its very successful debut in our gallery. The exhibit was created by the juried Impact Nebraska artist collective.

Our conference concluded with an evening banquet and the performance of *A Little Pleasure*, a newly commissioned work by Julia Hinson, a compilation created from Cather's short fiction, her drama criticism, and her life and letters. Our thanks to the conference codirectors, Mark Robison and A.P. Andrews.



Littleton Alston unveils his commission-winning maquette to an appreciative audience. A revised statue is in development and the final product will be installed in the U.S. Capitol Visitor's Center as part of the National Statuary Hall Collection.

Save the Date: 65th Annual Spring Conference to Celebrate Youth and the Bright Medusa

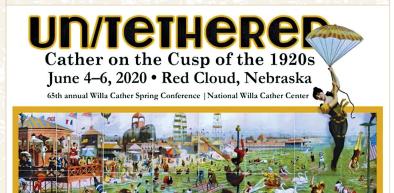
June 4–6, 2020, are the dates of next year's Willa Cather Spring Conference, which will celebrate the 100th publication anniversary of Willa Cather's short story collection, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920).

For Cather and for the nation, the dawn of the 1920s was a tumultuous time, marked by new freedoms and new entanglements. The Great War had ended and women had won the right to vote, but 1919's Red Summer and Palmer Raids signalled lingering social discord. Into this unsettled world, Willa Cather brought out *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, her collection of short stories that marked her departure from Houghton Mifflin and launched her long and successful partnership with a new publisher, Alfred Knopf. In the stories of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, Cather's artists move through a world that is by turns inspiring and enervating.

Un/Tethered explores the themes of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and the tensions of this time through broad conference offerings, including a keynote lecture by *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross, Nebraska film and textile artist Michael Burton's innovative animation

installation based on Cather's "A Gold Slipper," a day of insightful scholarly presentations, and a soon-to-be-announced Red Cloud Opera House performance you won't want to miss!

The conference will be co-directed by two well-known Cather scholars, Diane Prenatt and Elaine Smith. Visit WillaCather.org for the Call for Papers.



Walter, Turner, and Ántonia Scholarships Awarded

We are pleased to announce the 2019 recipients of the Norma Ross Walter, Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, and Ántonia scholarships. The recipient of the Ántonia scholarship was Miranda Tucker of Milford High School. Alexis Boyd of Gothenburg High School received the Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship, and recipients of the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship included Hannah Doorenbos from Gretna High School (third place), Alexandra Espinoza from Millard North High School (second place), and Genevieve O'Gara of Pius X High School (first place).

The scholarship award recognition took place as part of the 64th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference. Each young scholar produced an original essay on Cather's work, written as part of the scholarship's extensive application process.

The Norma Ross Walter Scholarship fund was established through a generous bequest from Norma Ross Walter, a lifelong fan of Cather's work, a frequent visitor to Red Cloud, and a firm believer in education for young women.

The Ántonia and Antonette Willa Skupa Turner Scholarship funds were established by Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, granddaughter of Anna Sadilek Pavelka. The scholarships are named in honor of Anna Pavelka, the prototype for Ántonia Shimerda Cuzak in *My Antonia* and Antonette Turner, who spent decades speaking about Ántonia to school students and other groups.



2019 scholarship honorees. Back row: selection committee member Carol Duncan, scholarship recipients Miranda Tucker and Hannah Doorenbos, committee chair Virgil Albertini. Front row: scholarship recipient Alexis Boyd, benefactor Antonette Skupa Turner, and recipient Genevieve O'Gara.

Since 1987, the Willa Cather Foundation has awarded over sixty scholarships to students studying English and history. Awards to date total more than \$175,000. Through the various programs, scholarships are available to students across the country. For more information or to support the scholarship funds, please contact Tracy Tucker, Education Director, at (402) 746-2653 or ttucker@willacather.org. Application forms for 2020 are available at WillaCather.org and annual deadlines are January 31 and February 28, respectively.

Educator Scholarship Winners Attend Spring Conference

With the support of the Thistlewood Foundation, the High School Educators Scholarship is furthering our educational mission. This year, three high school educators received a complimentary Spring Conference registration, a travel stipend, tickets to the conference banquet, and teaching resources. It is our hope that these opportunities will facilitate a dynamic exchange of ideas between Cather scholars and high school educators, upon whom we rely for our next generation of Cather readers.

This year's recipients included Vicki Vaughan from The Colorado Springs School in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Vaughan teaches *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as part of a photography seminar that takes twenty students to New Mexico. In its 10th year, Vaughan's program allows students to visit Mabel Dodge Luhan's home and the pink adobe house in which Cather stayed while researching *Death Comes for the Archbishop.* Stanley Szczesny from Williamsburg Academy in St. George, Utah, teaches "Neighbour Rosicky" and studies Cather as a doctoral student at the University of Dallas. Szczesny also plans to teach *My Antonia* in his American Literature course. Finally, Melinda Erickson of Aspira Antonia Pantoja High School in Chicago, Illinois, uses *My Antonia* in her alternative school classroom to discuss the American Dream and immigrant experiences. She was inspired to do so after attending last year's conference, which focused on the 100th anniversary of the novel.

Dan and Stacy Benedict Honored with Miriam Mountford Volunteer Award

Dan and Stacy Benedict of Red Cloud were recognized with the 2019 Miriam Mountford Volunteer at this year's Spring Conference banquet. The couple has provided invaluable assistance behind-the-scenes for recent Red Cloud Opera House programs. Program coordinator Carla Post said "that the Benedicts are knowledgeable, capable, and very much exude a 'servant's spirit' in their work."

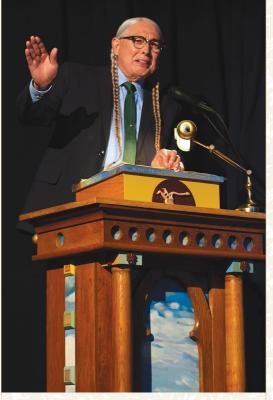
The volunteer award was established in memory of Miriam Mountford to recognize individuals for their outstanding volunteer service. Mountford was the Willa Cather Foundation's first volunteer, alongside its founding board members, and the first president after founder Mildred Bennett. She also assisted in devising the first guided tours of the Cather historic sites and editing the organization's newsletter.

The National Willa Cather Center has a variety of volunteer opportunities available year-round which include assisting with programs at the Red Cloud Opera House, landscaping at historic sites, and greeting and providing information to visitors and guests. If you are interested in volunteering, please call (402) 746-2653 or email Jill Swartzendruber at jswartz@willacather.org. Volunteer benefits include merchandise discounts and tickets to Opera House productions.



Executive Director Ashley Olson presents the Benedicts with their award at our annual Spring Conference banquet in June.

Walter Echo-Hawk Shares Pawnee Heritage, Inspires Audience



Walter Echo-Hawk's wisdom and experience resonated with the crowd at the well-attended book talk.

On April 13, Walter Echo-Hawk—author, attorney, and tribal judge—gave a book talk on *The Sea of Grass: A Family Tale from the American Heartland* in conjunction with our *Savages and Princesses* exhibit opening. Among many topics, he spoke of his Pawnee tribe's history in Webster County. The Pawnee people, who had an advanced and elaborate cosmological belief system, considered this area of Nebraska and Kansas the center of the universe.

Marion Arneson, president of the National Willa Cather Center Board of Governors, was fascinated by Echo-Hawk's *Sea of Grass* memoir. "It helped me realize what a minor blip the European footprint is on our America compared to the thousands of years Native Americans followed the buffalo," he said. Arneson, whose ancestors were among the first homesteaders in Webster County in the 1870s, appreciated that Echo-Hawk maintains and promotes his Pawnee heritage while navigating the broader culture. "He has a calm demeanor. I always admire people who don't live anxiously," Arneson added.

Echo-Hawk has played an instrumental role in the passage of landmark laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) and American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendment (1994). *Sea of Grass* is a lightly fictionalized and highly readable Echo-Hawk family history, and copies are available in the NWCC bookstore. In September, *The Sea of Grass* received a Nebraska 2019 Book Award "Fiction Honor" sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book.

Scholars Explore Willa Cather's Virginia at 17th International Seminar



Seminar participants explore Gainesboro Cemetery, the final resting place of several Cather ancestors, just outside Winchester, Virginia.

During the week of June 17, over one hundred Cather scholars and enthusiasts from around the country and the world gathered for the 17th International Cather Seminar at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. Activities took place in and around Frederick County, Willa Cather's first home and where her extended family had settled since the 1730s. Through the lens of Willa Cather's final novel *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and a thematic framework dubbed "Unsettling Cather: Differences and Dislocations," participants in this year's seminar contended with a host of complex issues. Foregrounded by the history of Cather's home state of Virginia, our group grappled with Cather's representations of race, illness, queer identity and gender, family history, and geography.

Monday's plenary discussion kicked off the conference with research about historical Virginia; anthropological digs at slave quarters; nearby Josephine City, a local black community established during the Reconstruction; and the prototypes for characters in *Sapphira*. Participants were also treated to a tour of Cather's Virginia childhood home, Willow Shade, and Capon Springs, a resort mentioned in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Siobhan Somerville's keynote address about the performative nature of citizenship ceremonies was provocative and shed new light on immigrant representations in Cather's writing, particularly *My Antonia*. Subsequent plenary sessions covered disability in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, connections to wealth and queerness in *The Professor's House*, the role the Potomac river played in *Sapphira* as it relates to racial identity, and Cather's connections to the Harlem Renaissance.

Concurrent sessions carried on throughout the week featuring original and refreshing perspectives on topics ranging from Cather as a farm novelist, to linguistic code-switching, and even to the significance of a traditional American folk song that appears in Cather's fiction. Attendees were also treated to a day in Washington, D.C., to sightsee and experience the National Museum of African American History & Culture, followed by a rousing battle of Cather Trivia. The seminar concluded with a banquet featuring vocalist Barbara Davis' fierce renditions of African American spirituals and a bluegrass dance party courtesy of Patent Pending. Many thanks to seminar co-directors Marilee Lindemann (University of Maryland) and Ann Romines (The George Washington University, emerita), as well as our site director John Jacobs (Shenandoah University, emeritus), for a wonderful week of Willa Cather scholarship.

Brazilian Publisher Releases A Lost Lady in Portuguese

Mauricio Tamboni, editor and publisher of Ponto Edita, has released *A Lost Lady* in Brazil. He translated the work into Portuguese and Cather scholar Mark Robison, professor at Union College, wrote the preface. We spoke with Tamboni about his work and translating Cather; the interview is published on our website, www.WillaCather.org.





Willa Cather's postcard to her friend Charles Moore, alongside photographs of Stratford-upon-Avon that Cather sent to him.

New Cather Correspondence Featured

In the recent transfer of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial collection, we were happy to run across this postcard of Cather's to Charles Moore. Written during her first trip to Europe in 1902, Cather sent the card from Stratford-upon-Avon, telling Moore that she has just sent him "some photographs of this beautiful place." Moore's niece later donated the prints and postcard to the WCPM, though she never found the "pack of letters" from Cather that she recalled seeing in her childhood. Moore was one of Cather's Lincoln acquaintances and the nephew of R.E. Moore, a Lincoln financier and president of First National Bank of Red Cloud after 1882. The snake ring that Cather wore (now a part of the *American Bittersweet* exhibit) was a gift from Charley Moore, according to Elsie Cather's recollections.

Special Guests: Paul Giamatti and Clara Wong



Post prairie walk and picnic. L-R: Patricia Arneson, Paul Giamatti, Clara Wong, Board President Marion Arneson, and Executive Director Ashley Olson.

Actors Paul Giamatti and Clara Wong, of Showtime's hit series *Billions*, made a special visit to Red Cloud and the National Willa Cather Center this fall. Wong and Giamatti, who joined

filmmaker Alexander Payne for a weekend of events at Omaha's Film Streams, enjoyed tours of the Cather historic sites, the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, and a quiet stay in the Cather Second Home guest house.

"My mother was a high school English teacher," Giamatti said. "My Ántonia was something she taught a lot, and so Cather was always around." Giamatti was an English major before becoming an actor and shared that he was currently reading Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and had particularly enjoyed *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, a novel he would love to see adapted for the big screen. For Wong, a native of Illinois, this visit marked her first Cather experiences. Both actors live and work in Brooklyn, New York, and appreciated their quiet visit to Red Cloud, eating at local restaurants, and exploring on their own.

"It was incredible to get to feel so close to Willa Cather," Giamatti wrote of his stay, "and to get so close to the lovely folks in the town." Giamatti is best known for starring in Payne's *Sideways*, Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave*, and the adaption of David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of *John Adams*.

Exhibit Items Highlight Virginia Heritage



A display of Civil War items and mourning accoutrements that the Cather family brought to Nebraska.

As we prepared for the International Willa Cather Seminar in Virginia, we were interested in showing ways that the Cathers' lives in Virginia continued to influence their lives in Nebraska. Located as they were near Winchester, Virginia, we anticipated that the Seminar would explore issues related to the tensions of the Civil War era, and so from the WCPM collection at the National Willa Cather Center, we selected this carved tagua nut Civil War commemorative bracelet, with ferrotypes of Ulysses S. Grant and William S. Rosenkrans (misspelled on this bracelet). Other examples of this type of piece also include a ferrotype of William Tecumseh Sherman, which may be the missing image in this bracelet.

Another important aspect of the Cathers' lives relates to their motivations for coming to Nebraska. William and Caroline Cather suffered the deaths of two young children and an adult daughter, and as they considered the move to Nebraska, they feared for the lives of two more children, daughters Jennie Ayre and Alverna Clutter; they hoped the healthful climate of Webster County would allow them to be spared. Both would die not long after reaching the new homestead. According to custom, nothing could be used or worn that was bright or flashy during the mourning period; because most mourning garments and jewelry were made at home, not only were mourning veils like Mrs. Cather's dark and somber, but so were the straight pins and thimbles used to make and pin the clothes in place. The tiny box of pins in this collection feature black glass or jet heads on blackened metal, and may have been used to pin the black silk mourning veil in place.

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





United States Air Force Offutt Brass

Premiere Ensemble of U.S. Air Force Heartland of America Band Friday, November 8, at 7:00 p.m. – FREE

Memories of Conway Twitty and A Salute to Loretta Lynn

Grandchildren of Legendary Performers Tre Twitty & Tayla Lynn Saturday, November 16, at 7:30 p.m. — \$20 advance/\$30 day of show

The Most Wonderful Crime of the Year

Silver bells are ringing at this seasonal stand-up performance Saturday, December 6, at 7:30 p.m. — \$35 (includes hors d'oeuvres)

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.