Our gift to the world

Bringing literary settings back to life
To Our Friends and Supporters

It seems clichéd to use the word “unprecedented” to describe the last year. By now, we have heard that word too many times to count. Let’s talk about gratitude instead. We are grateful that you stepped up in support of our efforts to enrich lives through Cather’s literature. While the pandemic necessitated a pivot from traditional ways of delivering programming, it also provided us with an opportunity to focus on major goals related to site preservation and accessibility, as well as collections access. Technology and the addition of virtual programming helped further our reach to a record 60,000+ people.

As the cover imagery of this report makes clear, we achieved a major strategic goal with the recent completion of the Pavelka Farmstead restoration. With the return to its period of significance, this memorable setting from the final scenes of My Ántonia has the potential to become yet another of our nation’s celebrated literary destinations. Additionally, the recently restored Burlington Depot is not only more accessible to our guests, but will also offer expanded space to experience the site and encounter museum artifacts.

Our new iOS and Android mobile app is an indispensable resource for self-guided exploration of Cather’s Red Cloud world, whether a guest is on-site or visiting from the comfort of home. Cather enthusiasts also have the opportunity to explore Cather-related art, archival materials, and artifacts online with a meaningful selection of our growing collection available digitally. The striking photos and well-researched descriptions have brought some of our most memorable objects to life, and thousands remain to be added in the future.

While all of these projects are significant milestones, more work remains to ensure that a visit to the newly restored historic sites is both an enriching and educational experience. Plans are underway to conceptualize modern exhibits and site interpretation that will be compelling to students and lifelong learners. Using Cather’s life and writing as a platform for further study, we seek to serve people who are interested primarily in her work as well as area residents and travelers who want to learn more about our historic sites and their relation to local and regional history. Our new site interpretation will tell a larger story through themes in Cather’s writing that are central to understanding the American experience.

The last year has demonstrated the immense value of the arts and humanities to our wellbeing, as individuals and as a community. Your continued support will help us engage readers and students, spur reflection, spark conversation, and encourage literary and historical exploration. Thank you!

Very gratefully,

Ashley Olson  Glenda Pierce
Executive Director  Board President

Our Mission
To promote Willa Cather’s legacy through education, preservation, and the arts.

Our Vision
To become a premier cultural center that offers broad educational opportunities for patrons to experience Cather’s work, explore historic landmarks related to her life and times, foster their own creativity, and embrace the arts and humanities.

Our Programs and Services
- Operation of a museum, archive, and study center at the National Willa Cather Center
- Preservation of the largest collection of nationally designated historic sites devoted to an American author
- Conferences and seminars held annually in Red Cloud and biennially across the country and internationally
- Arts and humanities programs in the restored Red Cloud Opera House
- Guided town and country tours of more than 20 historic sites relating to Cather’s life and work
- Publication of the Willa Cather Review
- Outreach to and curriculum support for teachers and students
- Scholarship awards for student research and to support English and history majors
- Arts and educational exhibits at the National Willa Cather Center
- Restoration and conservation of the 612-acre Willa Cather Memorial Prairie
- Management of a Cather bookstore and gift shop

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Broadening Awareness and Enhancing Experiences

“I’m so pleased I was invited to participate in the Willa Cather Spring Conference. The opportunities to visit the Pavelka Farmstead and join the native prairie tour brought context and insight into her works. It was a joyful experience for both my son and me. Thank you to the Willa Cather Foundation and all who make this annual conference a success and continue to shine a spotlight on the significance of Willa Cather’s writings to Nebraska and the world.”

— Paul Timm
2021 Nebraska Teacher of the Year (seen here with his son Alexander)

Last year started on a high note with two sold-out concerts held at the opera house that Cather frequented in her youth. By March, we joined other institutions across the country in looking for new ways to educate and inspire. Your support enabled us to develop new forms of programming, including the increasingly popular virtual author series and our first virtual Willa Cather Spring Conference. Through the conference theme “Un/Tethered: Cather on the Cusp of the 1920s,” over 300 attendees explored the themes of Cather’s Youth and the Bright Medusa in its centenary year 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 selection of insightful scholarly presentations, and an old-time radio show featuring stories from Youth and the Bright Medusa by Lone Tree Live—a collaboration of regional and national writers, actors, and musicians.

The year ended with the introduction of two new tools that enable students and readers to explore Cather’s world from afar. Our National Willa Cather Center iOS and Android mobile app offers tours of the Willa Cather Childhood Home, the exhibit American Bittersweet: The Life & Writing of Willa Cather, and the Cather Prairie. And hundreds of pieces from our growing collection of letters, photographs, artwork, and personal items are also now available for exploration online.

In A Gold Slipper, the work of filmmaker and artist Michael Burton incorporates animated scenes of Willa Cather’s short story of the same name, as well as the physical objects themselves used to create the scenes. Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Hall is pictured here in The Stage, one of five tableaux vivants from the film.

Garan Coons and the Many Moccasins Dance Troupe perform at the Red Cloud Opera House and for the student body of Red Cloud Community Schools.
Reimagining the Cather Historic Sites

“This [Pavelka Farm] restoration is a dream come true. I remember coming out here when I was growing up. It was so in need of repair. There were holes in the roof, and so many things that needed done. This is such a special house, but it just wasn’t maintained as it should have been over the years. To see something that my ancestors built now being fixed and knowing that it will now be maintained is so precious. Now it can be enjoyed as it was at the time.”

— Anna Taylor
Great-great-granddaughter of Anna Pavelka

Over 600 generous donors from across the country have enthusiastically supported our Campaign for the Future, an integrated effort to restore historic sites, expand programming, grow endowment, and improve visitor amenities. These gifts enabled us to undertake significant restoration and rehabilitation work at the Pavelka Farmstead, the Burlington Depot, and the Farmers and Merchants Bank. While the construction projects were essential to ensuring long-term preservation and improving site accessibility, the most important aspect of the reimagining of these historic sites is the reinterpretation effort that will follow. If interpreted properly with engaging and accessible exhibits, the historic sites can become immersive destinations that spark engagement, inquiry, and reflection. New interpretation will address the struggles and successes of the real citizens who lived, labored, dreamed, and died here, inspiring Cather to tell their stories through her fiction. Exhibits will also tell larger stories, including those of the indigenous communities who occupied the region before the settlers whom Cather wrote about.

Placing the semaphore at the Burlington Depot was one of the final tasks for the exterior rehabilitation, which consisted of siding replacement and paint, window and door restoration, brick paver rehabilitation, and accessibility improvements.

The Pavelka Farmstead in the early stages of the restoration, which returned the home to its circa 1916 layout in the very first rehabilitation of this setting from Cather’s My Ántonia.

Restoration of the brick and sandstone façade at the Farmers and Merchants Bank will preserve this 132-year-old building while interior improvements will provide expanded space for new exhibits that will touch on many themes, including the lives of Silas and Lyra Garber, prototypes for Captain and Mrs. Forrester in Cather’s A Lost Lady.
A visit to the places that were prominent settings in Cather’s literature has long been an illuminating experience for readers. New interpretive enhancements at the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie have recently helped to enhance the visitor experience and answer routine questions like “what is a prairie?” and “where are the buffalo?” The signage seeks to educate visitors about the history of the prairie, from its first inhabitants to the arrival of settlers like the Cather family. Guests learn about its flora and fauna, the use of prescribed fire and grazing for conservation, plant and animal communities, and the impressive dark sky views.

Aside from the settings that were inspiration to Cather, our monthly “Annotations from the Archive” feature spotlights an item from the collection with historical insights or recently uncovered details. Our collection continues to grow, most recently with books and photographs that make up the Jack and Irma Cather Family Collection. Additionally, a recent Collections Assessment Program report provided important validation regarding the preservation environment in our archive, useful recommendations for reappraisal of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection, and a road map for future conservation efforts. Your ongoing support ensures that our precious materials remain important resources for future generations of readers and researchers.

“I loved seeing the house Cather spent those years in, loved seeing the peeling wallpaper she put in hours at the hardware store to buy. But I came to Red Cloud to see the prairie, to walk across it, to photograph it, to see what she saw when she looked across those hills of waving grass.”

—Pam Houston
Author & Educator

This recent addition of Roman and Medieval Art belonged to Frances Smith Cather, Willa Cather’s “Aunt Franc.” Enclosed were several papers that illuminate her participation in local literary societies, including meeting plans for members of the Catherton Literary Club, an 1894 program of the Ladies Clio Club in Red Cloud, and enrollment cards for the Nebraska Teachers Reading Circle. These pieces expanded understanding of the subjects and social workings of local literary societies and reinforced just how important education was to early settlers.

New signage explains that our Cather Prairie, like much of the Great Plains, is part of a larger community of temperate grasslands. Prairie ecosystems are notable for having mostly grasses, flowering plants, and shrubs instead of large trees as their dominant vegetation.
## Statement of Financial Position
For the years ended December 31, 2020 and 2019

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
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<td>Investments</td>
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<td>Pledges receivable, net</td>
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<td><strong>Total assets</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$16,051,954</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liabilities</th>
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<td>Accrued expenses and taxes withheld</td>
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<td>Deferred revenue</td>
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<td>Capital lease obligations</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net Assets</th>
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<th>2019</th>
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<td>Without donor restrictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>With donor restrictions</td>
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<td><strong>Total net assets</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total liabilities and net assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>$17,551,726</strong></td>
<td><strong>$16,051,954</strong></td>
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The financial statements of the Willa Cather Foundation are audited annually by an independent public accounting firm. A copy of the audited financial statements and the Foundation’s tax filing (Form 990) may be obtained by contacting the Foundation’s office.
Support

The following individuals and organizations were donors to the Willa Cather Foundation in 2020. Space does not permit us to list donations under $50.00, but we are grateful for these contributions. Every gift is important to us.

$250,000 and Above

Anonymous

$100,000 to $249,999

Anonymous

$50,000 to $99,999

Anonymous

$25,000 to $49,999

Anonymous

$10,000 to $24,999

Anonymous

$2,500 to $4,999

Anonymous

$500 to $999

Anonymous

The Founders Society

These generous individuals have made cumulative lifetime gifts of $1,000,000 or more to advance our mission.

The Cather Legacy Society

These generous individuals have made charitable gift plans to benefit the Willa Cather Foundation beyond their lifetime through a gift intention in their will or through a beneficiary designation.

$250,000 and Above

Acklie Charitable Foundation, Lincoln, NE

$100,000 to $249,999

Anonymous

$50,000 to $99,999

Anonymous

$25,000 to $49,999

Anonymous

$10,000 to $24,999

Anonymous

$2,500 to $4,999

Anonymous

$500 to $999

Anonymous (2)

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**The Willa Cather Foundation**

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A long-overdue facelift for the Burlington Depot

“We had a terrible time getting paint to stay on that building. I don’t know how many coats of paint we put on. The wood just sucked it up as if it had nothing at all to drink for centuries.”

—Early observations on preservation challenges at the Burlington Depot by Willa Cather Foundation founder Mildred Bennett