Willa Cather Scholars Explore Northern Ireland

The Willa Cather Foundation and symposium director Dr. Willa Murphy welcomed over sixty Cather scholars, Cather relatives, and Cather readers to Limavady, Northern Ireland, at the end of June. In addition to hearing new work and presentations from twenty-nine scholars, attendees explored the ancestral home of the Cather family and a number of must-see attractions in the area: Giant’s Causeway, the walled city of Londonderry, the seaside at Magilligan Point, the gorgeous Irish countryside, and the grand Drenagh House estate, where we held a wonderful conference banquet.

Eleven international scholars joined a familiar cast of Cather researchers, making this a truly international event.

Traditional Irish music and hospitality helped round out our visit. The Willa Cather Foundation would like to thank Dr. Willa Murphy for organizing the event, and Ulster University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council for their support of the event.

Director Willa Murphy welcomes Christine Cather and Liz Duffy to Limavady for the symposium.
Cynthia Adams shares her classroom techniques as part of the Educators’ Panel at the 63rd annual Willa Cather Spring Conference. (credit: Robert Olsen)

For several years, the Willa Cather Foundation has offered an annual Educators’ Scholarship to help defray the costs of attending Spring Conference for high school teachers and administrators. This year we were pleased to offer two scholarships to high school English teachers Leslie Armstrong of Windsor, California, and Cynthia Adams, of Buffalo, New York. Both Leslie and Cynthia have taught Cather in their classrooms for years but wanted to, as Leslie writes, “add depth and interest by focusing on Willa Cather as a woman and a writer.” Our scholarship winners take advantage of the no-cost tours, scholarly presentations, and arts and humanities programming that are a part of every Spring Conference and take these experiences back with them to their communities and classrooms. If you are an educator, or if you know an educator, who is interested in including Cather in their classroom, we encourage you to watch for our annual announcement of scholarships, or contact education director Tracy Tucker for more information at ttucker@willacather.org.

Yet another highlight of the Cather International Symposium in Ireland was a memorable moment at the banquet when we paused to honor the service of outgoing board members John Murphy and Rev. Charles Peek. The Willa Cather Foundation is forever indebted to John and Chuck for making Cather studies and the work of the Cather Foundation such an integral part of their lives for so many years.

John Murphy was recognized for his thirty-three years of service to the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and his commitment to Cather scholarship. Murphy has published widely on Cather, served as past managing editor of the Willa Cather Review, and continuously encouraged the study and promotion of Cather’s works on a national and international level.

Rev. Charles Peek was recognized for his fourteen years of service to the Willa Cather Foundation Board of Governors and to Cather scholarship. Peek is a past president of the Board of Governors who has regularly presented on Cather at conferences and seminars and worked diligently to encourage enhanced education and outreach. He is the author of Speaking Aloud at Grace Church: Homilies from the World of Willa Cather.
Invitational Exhibit Commemorates *My Ántonia* Centenary

As part of our ongoing celebration of *My Ántonia*'s centenary, the Willa Cather Foundation invited local, regional, and national artists to participate in an exhibit entitled *Complete and Great*. Exploring the themes and settings of *My Ántonia* through their preferred media, the work of thirty artists—nearly fifty pieces!—were on display from May 7–June 30, 2018. Education director and gallery exhibit organizer Tracy Tucker said, “The incredible showing from our artists really speaks to the power of this novel. While some work in the show is representational of the settings here in Webster County or the people who make up the novel’s cast of characters, looking around this exhibit, I see that Cather’s abstractions and even her omissions have found their way into this show.” Artists from as close as Red Cloud and as far away as New Mexico and Maryland participated in the show honoring Cather’s beloved novel.

Willa Cather Foundation Receives Governor’s Arts Award

The Willa Cather Foundation was the recipient of a Governor’s Arts Award for Organizational Achievement at the Nebraska Arts Council’s celebratory banquet on May 8th. The biennial Governor’s Arts Awards recognize individuals and organizations that shape Nebraska’s artistic landscape. The Organizational Achievement Award is given to arts organizations that have demonstrated a consistently high level of excellence in programming and outreach. For over sixty years, the Willa Cather Foundation has worked to promote Willa Cather’s legacy through education, preservation, and the arts. The Organizational Achievement Award came following the completion of the National Willa Cather Center, a one-of-a-kind archive, museum, and arts center that serves as a living memorial to Willa Cather.
The 64th annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, “Cather and the Theater,” will be held in Red Cloud, May 30 to June 1, 2019. Co-directed by playwright A. P. Andrews and Cather scholar Mark Robison of Union College, this conference will focus on Cather’s experiences with the theater: her performances, her criticism, her inspirations, and her depictions of all things theatrical. Watch our website for details in the coming months, and plan to join us for what is certain to be a memorable event next spring!
You’re Invited: Willa Cather Celebration Weekend in Jaffrey

The Meeting House in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

We hope that you will join us in New Hampshire this fall for “Willa Cather’s Spirit Lives On,” a series of events held on Friday, October 19 and Saturday, October 20, as a national celebration of the 100th anniversary of My Ántonia. Ashley Olson, executive director, and Tracy Tucker, education director, are featured speakers during the weekend, which also includes tours of local Cather sites, readings, a piano recital, a Cather-themed dinner, and the composer Tom Dunn’s musical play Kindness and Cruelty: Willa Cather in Jaffrey. Located at the foot of Mount Monadnock, Jaffrey was, Cather wrote in a letter, the place “where I have done most of my best work” and where she is buried today.

Registration for the weekend will sell out and is strictly limited to 140 participants! For more details, see the event schedule on our website. Online registration is available at www.jaffreychamber.com.

Many thanks to the Jaffrey organizations who collaborated to sponsor these events: the Jaffrey Historical Society, the Village Improvement Society, the Jaffrey Library, the Jaffrey Civic Center, the Chamber of Commerce, The First Church in Jaffrey, and the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough.

The 17th International Willa Cather Seminar will be held in the lush, complex place of Cather’s Virginia, where she was born and spent her first nine years, and where her family had roots dating to the 1730s. Here, Cather first encountered the differences and dislocations that fueled the tension and energy in later writings. Though seminarians will visit many of the sites in Winchester and the surrounding area that were important to Cather and her family, our conversations will not be based solely on locale. Instead, the scholarly focus will be on those differences and dislocations that marked Cather’s life and work, beginning in her undergraduate stories and culminating in her late-life return to Virginia in her last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl. Rounding out the seminar will be a day spent in Washington, D.C., with an opportunity to visit the new National Museum of African American History and Culture and other museums and sites relevant to Cather’s writing.

As always, the Seminar will welcome papers taking a broad array of approaches to Cather’s life and work.

The seminar’s program directors, Marilee Lindemann, University of Maryland, and Ann Romines, George Washington University emerita, especially invite new approaches to the many forms of difference and the many moments of dislocation that her readers encounter. We aim to jumpstart a conversation that has been somewhat muted in Cather studies in recent years and to invite new voices and new perspectives into the discussion.

500-word proposals of individual papers should be sent to the Willa Cather Foundation’s education director, Tracy Tucker, at ttucker@willacather.org, by February 1, 2019. Roundtables and other formats are also welcome to send proposals. Graduate students are encouraged to submit proposals and apply for funding assistance through the Willa Cather Foundation. For full details and to download the complete CFP, please visit our website at: https://www.willacather.org/events/17th-international-willa-cather-seminar
Caroline Jackson of Riverton, Nebraska, was recently recognized with the 2018 Miriam Mountford Volunteer Award. Jackson logged an impressive number of volunteer service hours during the 2017-18 season of events at the Red Cloud Opera House.

“We would like to express our sincere thanks to Caroline Jackson for her dedicated volunteer service,” said Executive Director, Ashley Olson. “Caroline is a joy to work with. Her friendliness and positivity have long been appreciated by patrons, staff, and fellow volunteers.”

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 Willa Cather Foundation 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.
The 63rd annual Willa Cather Spring Conference experienced record-setting attendance with over 250 conference-goers hailing from twenty-seven states and four countries. The annual event was held May 31 to June 2 in Red Cloud.

Through the conference theme “Here at Last is an American Novel: Celebrating 100 Years of My Ántonia,” guests enjoyed scholarly presentations, thought-provoking programs, tours of historic sites, entertainment, and new exhibits.

On the opening evening of the conference author and essayist Roger Welsch was joined by his daughter Antonia Welsch Barlage to deliver an address they called “Our Ántonias.” Roger shared recollections of his “Postcards from Nebraska” segment that aired on CBS News Sunday Morning, while Ántonia offered humorous and moving stories about living with her recognizable name.

One of several hands-on events was a kolache making demonstration and baking activity led by education director, Tracy Tucker. Kolache are a Czech fruit pastry that have been a breakfast staple at the Cather conference for many years.

Other highlights included a keynote address and book signing by Nina McConigley, author of Cowboys and East Indians; musician Chris Sayre with a production called “Nebraska’s Musical Smorgasbord;” and panel discussions featuring Cather scholars, educators, and young immigrants. At the conclusion of the conference, ragtime pianist John Reed-Torres dazzled attendees with a concert reminiscent of the 1889 John William “Blind” Boone concert given in the Red Cloud Opera House.

The Willa Cather Foundation would like to thank Todd Richardson (University of Nebraska at Omaha) and Kelsey Squire (Ohio Dominican University) for co-directing the event, as well as Humanities Nebraska, the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for their support.
COMING UP!
AT THE RED CLOUD OPERA HOUSE

Magic & Mystery Dinner Theater
Performed by the Murder Mystery Co.
Saturday, October 27 at 7:30 p.m. - $40

Lightning Bugs
A Big Band Trio
Saturday, November 10 at 7:30 p.m. - $15

Blue Plate Special
Hits from the 50s, 60s & 70s
Saturday, December 8 at 7:30 p.m. - $15

Visit us online at www.WillaCather.org for information on upcoming events.