CATHER LETTERS ADDED TO COLLECTION

The Willa Cather Foundation has recently received several new Cather letters as we continue to expand our growing collection of Cather artifacts. One letter, written by “Miss” Willa Sibert Cather, is addressed to “Mrs. Cleary,” a woman we know as Kate M. Cleary, a fellow Nebraska writer. Mrs. Cleary, we surmise from the letter, had written to praise Cather’s story “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” which had appeared in a 1905 issue of McClure’s magazine. “Anyone who has lived in one of those little western towns,” Cather writes, “must, I think, have a very keen and definite feeling about it, but it is almost hopeless to try to communicate it to anyone who has not had that experience.”

Though Cather scholars have known of the existence of this letter for some time, until now the letter has been held in a private collection. Thanks to the generosity of Connie and Gene Koepke, we are honored to give it a permanent home and make it available to Cather readers and scholars.

PRAIRIE JOINS ECOTOURISM COALITION

We are happy to announce our membership in the Great Plains Ecotourism Coalition, launching November 7. The coalition, a project of the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska, is committed to promoting environmental conservation and nature-based tourism throughout the Great Plains region.

A specially commissioned series of posters featuring scenes from around the state and the Great Plains have been released to mark the launch of the coalition. The promotional posters are modeled after the Works Progress Administration’s National Park posters of the 1930s and will be available soon at the Cather Foundation bookstore.

The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is a 612-acre mixed grass prairie located five miles south of Red Cloud. This unplowed area has been available soon at the Cather Foundation bookstore. This year, we celebrate Willa Cather’s birthday with us at the Red Cloud Opera House, as the Willa Cather Foundation hosts a December Night Soup Showdown! The Showdown will be held from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Sunday, December 7.

Each year, we celebrate Willa Cather’s birthday with friends of the Cather Foundation—we have hosted birthday teas, open houses, cocktail parties, and many other events—but this year, there are two ways for you to join in the fun.

First, you can become one of our Red Cloud celebrity chefs! “A soup like this is not the work of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup.” ~ Death Comes for the Archbishop

Simply sign up and provide a large roaster of your favorite soup; tables and serve ware will be provided by the Foundation.

Second, come and warm up at the Opera House after the December Night Soup Showdown! Other partners in the coalition include Switzer Ranch and Nature Reserve, the Nebraska State Museum, Grand Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Nebraska Star Party, the Nature Conservancy Nebraska Program, and the Big Blue Ranch. Additional partners will be named at a later date. Information on the coalition can be found at visittheprairie.com.

Celebrate Cather’s Birthday with Us

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To book a guided tour of the Cather Prairie, contact Tracy Tucker by phone at (402) 746-2653.

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ROAD SCHOLARS RETURN TO RED CLOUD

In September, we again welcomed lifelong learners from across the country to Red Cloud through our Road Scholar program, “Red Cloud: Willa Cather’s Window to the World.” Our scholars spent five days in Red Cloud, enjoying lively book discussions with instructor Steve Shively of Utah State University, taking the Cather tours, and exploring downtown Red Cloud. They also saw a fabulous show in the Red Cloud Opera House, performed by the Wes Hird Trio featuring vocalist Vickie Nickel and took a tour of the Cather Prairie.

Special guests to the Road Scholar program this year were Andrew Jewell, co-editor of The Selected Letters of Willa Cather, and Antonette Turner, the granddaughter of Annie Pavelka, the prototype for Antonia. Another special guest was “Carl, the Trolley,” who took our participants around Webster County to visit the historic Cather country sites.

Our Road Scholars also enjoyed getting a sneak peek of our collection of Cather objects. Education Director Tracy Tucker and Executive Director Ashley Olson led the group as they examined rare books, letters, jewelry, photographs, and clothing that once belonged to Willa Cather.

This year’s participants came to Red Cloud from Oregon, New Jersey, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Iowa, Colorado, Texas, West Virginia, and Illinois; they all appreciated Red Cloud’s small-town hospitality and historic atmosphere. During their free time, they enjoyed visiting the Starke Round Barn, the Webster County Museum, the Republican River, and the downtown merchants.

We would like to thank our community partners who helped make this program a success: Chapter Y P.E.O., Republican Valley Arts Council, Webster County Public Transportation, Red Brick Cafe, The Palace, Subway, KO Star in Bladen, Green Acres Motel and the Red Cloud Opera House volunteers.

CATHER BOOK CLUB RESUMES MEETINGS

The Willa Cather Book Club launched its new season in October with the One Book One Nebraska selection for 2014, Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen, by Bob Greene. Several members shared their own reminiscences of the North Platte Canteen, and book club leader Tracy Tucker shared her family’s collection of World War II ration books and stamps, draft cards, and Office of Price Administration correspondence.

This year, the Cather Book Club has two meeting times: the
INITIAL CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON NWCC, FUNDRAISING CONTINUES TOWARD GOAL

On October 9, 2014, phase one of construction began on the historic Moon Block building in downtown Red Cloud, Nebraska, which will become the National Willa Cather Center. “Beginning construction is a milestone in recognizing Willa Cather’s enduring legacy. We are grateful to more than 350 individuals and foundations nationwide who have made this possible,” said Honorary National Chair, Ken Burns.

This phase of construction will prevent further deterioration to the historic building and prepare it for reconfiguration and finishing work. Executive Director Ashley Olson stated, “After many years of careful planning, it’s rewarding to see preliminary work proceed while we continue the campaign to raise the balance of funds necessary to begin the final phase of construction next spring.”

When complete in 2016, the National Willa Cather Center’s archive and public museum will safely house and provide access to countless original documents and objects related to the life and work of nationally-renowned author, Willa Cather. Also included are classroom and multimedia space, enlarged backstage facilities for the Red Cloud Opera House, exhibition space, an expanded bookstore, loft apartments for visitors, and street-level retail spaces.

We continue our capital campaign to raise the remaining $764,000 needed to bring the project to completion. The entire project is estimated to cost $6.7 million. To date, $5.9 million has been raised in private gifts and grants, including support from the Peter Kiewit Foundation, Robert B.

Doughtery Foundation, and a community development block grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Please consider making a contribution to the Willa Cather Foundation to help complete the campaign. Gifts may be made over a 5 year period; naming and recognition opportunities are available at various giving levels. For more information, please contact Ashley Olson, Executive Director at 866-731-7364 or aolson@willacather.org.