

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation

VOLUME IX, NUMBER 2

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

TENTH ANNIVERSARY PROGRESS REPORT

To you who have faithfully devoted yourself to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial during the first ten years

CONGRATULATIONS

- You have earned for your organization wider recognition than ever before.
- You have shared in the growth of the WCPM to a maturity beyond its years.
- You have given the WCPM the stature that attracts increasing numbers of active members and even stronger support than ever before.

To you who are new members of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

WELCOME

- You are joining with thousands of others who believe in this educational and cultural endeavor which knows no international boundaries.
- You are helping to accomplish the four aims and purposes of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

CATHERLAND OFFICIALLY PROCLAIMED

The Nebraska Legislature's Proclamation establishing the western half of Webster County as Catherland was presented to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial at its tenth anniversary Spring Conference May 8, 1965. Sponsor of the unanimously passed resolution was Speaker of the Nebraska Unicameral, Kenneth L. Bowen.

As he read the proclamation to the Spring Conference Banquet crowd, Senator Bowen commented that this official recognition of Catherland will have far-reaching

effects. The area will be designated on the state highway maps, and information about the WCPM and Catherland will be distributed through state agencies.

Senator Bowen went on to say that the state is grateful to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for all it has done during its first ten years to perpetuate an interest in the work of Nebraska's foremost citizen.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The American Association for State and Local History has named the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial the recipient of its coveted Award of Merit. The selection of the WCPM for this outstanding honor was made at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania during the national meeting of the American Association. The announcement was made at the Awards Luncheon October 15, 1965.

According to Alexander J. Wall, chairman of the awards committee, the Award of Merit is given: "For the effective and meaningful way in which the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial has presented the story of Willa Cather in her home surroundings."

FOUNDATION RECOGNITION

Early this month the WCPM received a grant of \$1,000 from the Albert and Agnes Schantz Foundation of Omaha.

This is the second such gift received this year. You will remember that a similar one came last spring from the J. M. McDonald Foundation.

Those of you who are familiar with foundations know that grants are made only after exhaustive, detailed investigation. A foundation grant is the most significant kind of recognition of achievement the WCPM could receive—the most eloquent citation you could be given for the effectiveness of your efforts.

PLACES MADE FAMOUS BY WILLA CATHER

One of the aims of the WCPM is to identify and restore to their original condition places made famous by the writings of Willa Cather.

. . . The Depot . . .

We cannot turn back the clock and re-create the hustle

and bustle of coming and going that was the daily life of the railroad depot in the years gone by. Nor can we fill the air with the whistle of steam locomotives that was the call to adventure for young Willa Cather and the youngsters of her day. But we can preserve the depot.

Thanks to the generosity of several people, the old Burlington red depot has been saved by a compromise with progress. This summer the railroad company sold the depot to a salvage company and replaced it with a smaller, more economical model.

Fortunately the man who bought the depot, Mr. V. H. Fette of McCook, has a feeling for historic landmarks and dislikes having them destroyed. Mr. Fette



not only has donated the building to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial but also is sharing in the cost of moving it just across the road from the original site. The land where the depot will stand was given to the WCPM by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Makinster of Red Cloud.

Mr. and Mrs. John Quirk of Hastings have volunteered to underwrite the cost of restoring the depot. The \$5,000 restoration project is now well-underway.

. . . **Historical Background** . . .

Railroad construction crews arrived in Red Cloud in 1878. By the time the train brought Willa Cather and her parents to Red Cloud from Virginia in 1883, the new town was a division point on the main Kansas City to Denver line of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad. Eight passenger trains a day were stopping here. Freight trains were going through day and night. Between trains, switch engines and a busy round-house provided excitement. A little community including a hotel and an eating house grew up around the depot.

Young Willa Cather, like youngsters the world over, was drawn to the noisy, exciting confusion of activity at the depot. She liked to walk down to the depot along the wooden sidewalk stretching for more than a mile from the center of town. When younger brothers and sisters needed entertaining, she took them with her to the depot, pulling the youngest in a wagon. It was great fun to join her neighborhood friends, the Miners, when they had their pony, Billy, hitched up for a drive to the depot. When she had to stay home, Willa Cather could watch from her upstairs window as the horse-drawn streetcar went by carrying new arrivals up from the depot to the hotels in town.

The activities Willa Cather watched at the depot appear again and again in her stories. In MY ANTONIA, young Jim Burden arrives from Virginia and the Bohemian immigrant family is huddled on the platform. In A LOST LADY, very important people arrive in private railway cars. In LUCY GAYHEART, young people going East to school make a lively and colorful scene. The travel-wise train crews staying over in the depot bunk-house appear in both MY ANTONIA and THE SONG OF THE LARK. The successful young man comes home to keep an appointment in "The Treasure of Far Island." The world-famous artist arrives at the depot on his final journey home in "The Sculptor's Funeral." Groups of actors and musicians traveling from place to place by train appear in many of her stories; in MY ANTONIA there is Blind Boone; in LUCY GAYHEART, the opera company.

. . . **Cather Setting Preserved** . . .

Because of the spontaneous interest and trust of three benefactors, the depot has been saved and continues to be a major stopping place on the tour of Cather settings in Red Cloud.

This project is a dynamic example of the support you have attracted. You have established a strong organization with a reputation for integrity of purpose.

. . . **Catherland Visitors** . . .

More and more people are coming to Catherland and taking away with them a deeper appreciation for Willa Cather. They consider even a brief sampling of the sights and atmosphere of Cather Country to be an en-

riching experience. After her visit to the home of "my favorite American novelist," a Cather fan from Vallejo, California put it this way: "These are the experiences that thrust deeply and are safe from time's erosion."

. . . **Catherland Tours** . . .

Scheduled tours for students and young people's groups continue to make spring and fall the busiest seasons. However this summer a number of enterprising organizations and summer school groups demonstrated that touring Catherland is not necessarily a seasonal thing. These groups chartered their own air-conditioned buses to make the trip to Red Cloud. And for at least two of these groups, the Greater Omaha Historical Society and the Omaha Altrusa Club, it was a long, 400 mile round-trip.

. . . **Increasing Traffic** . . .

Visitors are coming in such numbers and with such regularity that residents of the entire county are learning to take streams of strangers in stride.

Native Red Cloudians are becoming accustomed to sixty-passenger buses as part of the normal traffic on their quiet streets. Residents of houses marked by Catherland tour signs are no longer surprised to find eighty people on the front lawn taking pictures.

Along the tour route out in Cather Country, farmers are no longer puzzled by unfamiliar school buses wandering, with no apparent purpose, up and down back roads in the middle of the day when youngsters ought to be in school. In the village of Bladen, the half-way mark on the tour of Webster County, townspeople have learned to share their one cafe with strangers who are attracted there by the youngest daughter of MY ANTONIA, Mrs. Elizabeth Boyd.

WCPM MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

Another aim of the WCPM is to provide a museum and archives for the Willa Cather collection. The historic, four-story building which houses the collection was constructed by Silas Garber, the Captain Forrester of Cather's A LOST LADY. Thousands of people have visited the museum since it was opened three years ago.

. . . **Museum Display** . . .

Willa Cather was the first woman ever to receive an honorary degree from Princeton University. During her life time seven other colleges and universities honored Willa Cather with academic degrees.

On display in the Museum are the academic hoods Willa Cather received from Princeton University, the University of California, Columbia University, Yale University, Smith College, and the University of Michigan. Attached to each is an identifying note written by Willa Cather.

To make the display more nearly complete, Creighton University of Omaha has donated a hood like the one it awarded to Willa Cather in 1928.

PROGRAM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Following the example set by Willa Cather with her life-long interest in young people, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial continues to develop its youth program. More evident than ever before is the response to WCPM efforts to stimulate an appreciation for Willa Cather's writing and for artistic and literary excellence.

An increasing percentage of the tremendous volume of correspondence received by the WCPM is from students who are studying Willa Cather and writing about her.

More teenagers than ever before are ordering Cather books and books about Cather from the Museum—according to the 1965 accounts, more than twice as many as in 1964.

A growing number of young people are touring Catherland. An increasing number of schools and colleges are making the Catherland tour an annual event. Response is particularly noticeable among these schools because enthusiasm for Cather is passed on from one class to the next.

. . . Student Project . . .

For five years the senior classes of Superior High School have been voluntarily helping with WCPM preservation and restoration projects. The class of 1966 is continuing the tradition.

Starting in October, during a four day vacation, groups of seniors have been spending their spare time and weekends traveling thirty miles to Red Cloud to complete a special class project, "Operation Catherland."

These students are designing, building, and furnishing a reproduction of a pioneer dugout. Such a dwelling is described by Willa Cather in MY ANTONIA.

"As we approached the Shimerdas' dwelling, I could see nothing but rough red hillocks, and draws with shelving banks and long roots hanging out where the earth had crumbled away. Presently, against one of these banks, I saw a sort of shed, thatched with the same wine-colored grass that grew everywhere, near it a tilted and shattered windmill frame, that had no wheel. We drove up to this skeleton to tie our horses, and I saw a door and window sunk deep in the draw bank . . ."

. . . A Cather Tradition . . .

Last year's Superior seniors adopted the abandoned cemetery which is the final resting place of Larry Donovan, the scoundrel of MY ANTONIA. They cleared away fifty years' accumulation of brush and debris. Then they erected a white picket fence around the ancient headstone, bearing the prophetic epitaph: "Gone but not forgotten."

Advance scouts representing the junior class of Superior High indicate the class of 1967 is looking to the future and will carry on the tradition with their own "Operation Catherland."

. . . Broader Horizons . . .

A study of Cather is broadening horizons for great numbers of young people.

Teenagers came from all over the area—southern Nebraska and northern Kansas—to hear poet John G. Neihardt when he visited Catherland in October. The eighty-four year old poet, another artist who is vitally interested in young people, arranged a special lecture session for young adults during his three-day stay here.

WORLD WIDE INTEREST IN WILLA CATHER

To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather is another purpose of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

. . . New Cather Book . . .

WCPM President, Mildred R. Bennett, has gathered together forty-four Cather stories written before 1912. Along with Mrs. Bennett's brilliant introduction, these stories have been published by the University of Nebraska Press under the title WILLA CATHER'S COLLECTED SHORT FICTION, 1892-1912.

Virginia Faulkner, UN Press Editor, reports the first printing of COLLECTED FICTION, which was estimated to be large enough to last for two years, was completely sold out in less than a month after its September 1 release. The second printing has been ordered and was to have been available December 1.

This increasing enthusiasm for Cather is reflected in the fine reviews given COLLECTED SHORT FICTION and the number of essays on Cather appearing in September. It was featured on the front page of the NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW for September 5, 1965, and during the month most of the leading publications carried at least one article about Willa Cather and COLLECTED SHORT FICTION.

. . . Publications About Willa Cather . . .

Bernice Slote, who is a member of the WCPM board of governors, is putting the finishing touches on THE KINGDOM OF ART. Miss Slote's book, the next in the series of Cather publications planned by the University of Nebraska Press, will be ready in early 1966.

Also among the 1965 Catherland visitors was WCPM board member, John March from New York City. Mr. March is doing a comprehensive bibliography on Willa Cather.

Richard Giannone, assistant professor of English at Notre Dame, is preparing a critical study, WILLA CATHER'S USE OF MUSIC, for the University of Nebraska Press. An article concerning music in THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE by Mr. Giannone appeared in COLLEGE ENGLISH for March, 1965, and another in the June, 1965, "Library Quarterly" of Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

Planning to do additional research is Philip L. Gerber of the University of South Dakota. Dr. Gerber wrote his doctoral dissertation on Cather's work and has published a number of articles about her.

Visiting from Chambéry, France was Christian Stzalowski who is writing about Cather.

Willa Cather is included in two recently published studies of American novelists—PIONEER AND CARETAKERS: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists by Louis Auchincloss and THE MIDDLE-WESTERN FARM NOVEL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY by Roy W. Meyer.

Willa Cather continues to be an increasingly popular subject for scholars and authors.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This tenth anniversary year of 1965 has been an exciting one. It has been a time for taking stock of what has been done in the past and for making provisions for an expanding organization.

. . . Constitution Changes . . .

Because of the rapid growth of the WCPM and the increasing value of its educational aspects, our attorneys

recommended two changes in the constitution of the corporation. At its spring meeting the board of governors voted on these constitutional revisions.

To emphasize the nature of the organization, the name was lengthened to be the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

To ensure the continuation of the WCPM thru succeeding generations, provision was made for it to be a perpetual organization.

Conference Date Set

Because of the wide-spread interest in the annual conference of the WCPM, the third weekend of April has been set as the permanent date for the event.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Mildred R. Bennett
W. K. Bennett, M. D.
Virginia Faulkner
Josephine Frisbie
Dr. L. V. Jacks
Ted Kennedy
Helen Lengfeld

John March
Miss Mamie Meredith
Miriam Mountford
Harry Obitz
Helen Obitz
Frank O'Rourke
Jennie Reiher

David E. Scherman
Dr. C. B. Schultz
Carrie M. Sherwood
Bernice Slote
Marcella Van Meter
Grace Wolfe

The Key to Success

This has also been a year of recognition for all the accomplishments you have made possible.

But most important it has been a time for looking to the future—for making plans to expand the programs and projects that will accomplish the aims and purposes of the WCPM.

By continuing your interest and support, you can look forward to even more impressive progress in 1966 as the organization begins its second decade. You are the key to the future success of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

Sincerely yours,

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

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

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP \$5.00 Annually

- 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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