

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial

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and Educational Foundation

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

Newsletter—Literary Issue

Summer 1973

Edited by Bernice Sloté

Twice a year literary issues of the Newsletter will present new Willa Cather material: reprints of some of Cather's early, hard-to-find, and still uncollected journalistic writings; early reviews, interviews, and notes about Cather's work; bibliographical information; and—from Cather readers—original brief notes, observations, explications, or short critical articles. (Submit manuscripts to CATHER NEWSLETTER, 201 Andrews Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508).

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THE WILLA CATHER STAMP

An eight-cent stamp, honoring Willa Cather in the centennial year of her birth (1873-1973), will be issued September 20, 1973, at Red Cloud, Nebraska. Special first-day covers are available for fifty cents. They may be ordered by addressing "Willa Cather Memorial, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970," enclosing the proper remittance and with the request postmarked no later than September 20.

The Cather stamp is one of four in the American Arts series, for Novelist Willa Cather, Composer George Gershwin, Painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, and Poet



Robinson Jeffers. All were designed by Mark English. The stamp will be printed by gravure on the Andreotti press by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

The issuance of the Cather stamp by the United States Postal Service culminates four years of effort by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation, other governmental officials, and many friends. Board Member Virginia Faulkner was in charge of the program for obtaining the centennial stamp.

The Philatelic Release announcing the stamp includes the following note on the work of Willa Cather:

"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before," wrote Willa Cather in "O Pioneers!" and she practiced what she preached.

Miss Cather (1873-1947) echoed in many of her novels the same theme — the spirit and courage of pioneer life, which she knew so well. Usually this was life in Nebraska, but she turned also to Canada and the southwest for "Shadows on the Rock" and "Death Comes for the Archbishop."

Upon graduation from the University of Nebraska, she worked on a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, newspaper, and later for a magazine in New York, deciding in 1912 to devote her time to novel writing.

Her Pulitzer prize-winning novel in 1922 was followed a year later with "A Lost Lady." This one made her famous.

In 1931 she became the first woman to receive an honorary degree from Princeton. In 1944 she received the gold medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

WILLA CATHER: STORYTELLER FOR CHILDREN

Just as her grandparents and parents had read to her when she was a child, so Willa Cather continued to read stories to her small brothers and sisters and to compose new tales for them to enjoy. A few of these stories for and about children have been found in the HOME MONTHLY, the Pittsburgh magazine which Willa Cather edited in 1896-97. These include "The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog" (1896) and "The Way of the World" (1898), both signed, and "The Princess Baladina" (1896), under the pseudonym of Charles Douglass. (This story was located and identified by

Mildred R. Bennett.) All have been reprinted in WILLA CATHER'S COLLECTED SHORT FICTION, 1892-1912 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

A marked clipping sent home by Willa Cather to her family in early 1897 has led me to another group of stories and articles published in 1896-97 in the NATIONAL STOCKMAN AND FARMER, a Pittsburgh weekly published by the same company and at the same address as the HOME MONTHLY. There is abundant evidence to show that Willa Cather edited and wrote for the page called "Our Young Folks" in the NATIONAL STOCKMAN AND FARMER, in it reprinting and adapting some of her HOME MONTHLY pieces and using some stories with references to the Cather family. These are printed below.

"Wee Winkie's Wanderings" (Nov. 26, 1896) is almost certainly an autobiographical account from Willa Cather's Virginia childhood. The scene uses many details of the locale also described in SAPHIRA AND THE SLAVE GIRL (1940) — the Cather home of Willow Shade on Back Creek, the footbridge over the creek, the haying meadow and sassafras bushes, the familiar Hollow road, North Mountain in the distance, and the slopes which rose in front and behind the house. The name "Winkie" is, of course, a play on the nursery-rhyme character of Wee Willie Winkie — and so it was in Willa Cather's own family. Most often they called her "Willie" or "Daughter," but in later years her cousin Bess Seymour, reminiscing in a letter about the nicknames and stories of the Cather children, also referred to Willa as "Winkie." "Wee Winkie's Wanderings" was reprinted for the first time in the June 1973 issue of VOGUE.

The account of Jim and Elsie at Christmas appeared in the column "The Editor's Talk," in the NATIONAL STOCKMAN AND FARMER of Dec. 24, 1896, and was signed "The Editor." It is, of course, about Willa Cather's younger brother Jim and her sister Elsie (members of the James Cather family have agreed), the scene is Red Cloud, and the Christmas of 1894 would fit their ages exactly — Elsie was four and Jim "almost six."—Bernice Slote

* * * *

WEE WINKIE'S WANDERINGS

Wee Winkie sat looking sadly about her that July afternoon. She was tired of playing and nothing would go right. The acorn cups would not stand up properly on the little moss bank around which her dolls were seated, and the pies made of pinning sassafras leaves together over ripe cherries did not taste as good as usual. Winkie explained to her corn-cob doll that the pies did not "rise." She was not absolutely sure that this was right, but she had a vague idea that everything that was baked should rise. Then her dolls were glum and would not talk; they were all pouting,

Winkie said, because she would not let them play in the mint bed along the creek and soil their white frocks. Winkie considered it a great misfortune to have children with sullen dispositions. As she was meditating upon these things she heard the sharp click of the mower in the meadow.

Now she had it! She would bundle every one of those sullen dolls into bed, it would be good for them, and she would break the unsatisfactory acorn cups and give the sassafras pies that had not risen to her pet pink pig, and she herself would put on her wide white sun hat with the blue ribbons and go down and ride on the mower with her father. That would be something like it.

So Wee Winkie caught up six dolls at once and rushed into the house. "Mamma, I am going down into the meadow to ride on the mower. Please get my hat."

Winkie's mamma looked up with some surprise from the book she was reading.

"No, I think you had better not go today, little daughter. You remember how the yellow jackets flew up and stung you the last time. I think you are tired now and need a nap more than anything else."

When Winkie wanted anything she wanted it very much, as mamma knew. Her bright face clouded over and she dropped her dolls.

"I think it's real mean you won't let me go. O please, do! I won't cry if the yellow jackets do sting."

"No, Winkie, not this afternoon. I think you had better go upstairs and lie down, or I shall have to make you hem some towels."

Winkie began to pout.

"No, I don't want to hem towels. I don't like anything about this place and I just think I'll run away to the mountains, so I do."

Now this was not the first time Winkie had threatened to run away, and her mamma thought this was as good a time as any to cure her of the notion.

"Now don't say that, Winkie, you know you won't."

"Some day I will," said Winkie, tossing her head.

Her mamma got up and said in a voice that was strange to Winkie and hurt her feelings more than ever,

"Very well then, get your hat and go. Just run away now and have done with it."

"But I must take some cookies and my dolls and things," objected Winkie, rather startled, "people always do when they run away."

"Lay what you want on the table and I will tie it up for you. You will have to start very soon now if you are going to get to the mountains tonight."

Winkie did not understand this sort of treatment at all, she had expected her mother to ask how she could ever get along without her little girl. She did not feel quite so happy about running away now. She laid her small possessions out on the table, and mamma tied them up in one of papa's big handkerchiefs and put on Winkie's hat. Then she said, "Hurry up, little daughter, you will have to go fast if you get to the mountains," and shut the door without even kissing Winkie good-bye.

Some way it seemed to Winkie that the sun did not shine so brightly as it had, and the mountain seemed further away than it ever had before. She walked slowly down the dusty road carrying her little bundle over her shoulder, as she had seen the gipsy women do. Now that no one cared for her any more and she had no place to live she would be a gipsy too. That seemed to be a good idea. She walked down the old Hollow road a little way to where she could see the gipsies' covered wagons through the trees. But she did not feel very much like going up to them and asking to join them. The women were tanned so dark and the men were so rough that she was rather afraid of them, so she decided she would go off and start a gipsy camp of her own.

Slowly Wee Winkie turned her steps back toward the mountain that seemed so big and dark and steep. As she crossed the little foot bridge of the creek she wondered what would happen if she should fall in with no one there to fish her out. She would drown probably, but her mother wouldn't care much if she did. Winkie cried a little when she thought about it. She stopped to pick a spray of golden rod, but a big noisy bee, all splashed with pollen, flew out at her so fiercely that she ran away in fright. Then she met their old cow Pinkey grazing by the roadside, and was a little cheered by the sight of that familiar cow. But nothing went right with Winkie that day, and even Pinkey, the gentlest old animal about the place, lowered her head and ran away with a loud "Moo!" and her bell clattering wildly. This was entirely too much, Winkie felt like an outcast indeed. She resolved that she would not speak to anything else, not to a single living creature.

She climbed over the rail fence and climbed slowly up the big hill in front of the house; that was the nearest way to the mountain. But when she got on top somehow she could not go over the brow of the hill and lose sight of the house. She sat down despondently on a stump and watched the sun going down, without the heart to even eat her cookies. Mamma, from the window where she watched, saw that disconsolate little figure sitting upon the hill top in the sunset, and she laughed and cried a little too. She watched a long time, but Winkie sat very still. At last Mamma saw her get up and come slowly down the hill toward the house. Then mamma went about her work, and presently she heard the door open softly and poor tired little Wee Winkie with her head hanging low and her bundle in her hand came slipping in. Her dress was wet with the dew of the long grass, and her shoes were scratched by the briars, and her ears were full of dust. But mamma washed her and gave her her supper, and tucked her into her little bed and never said a word about her running away, and neither did Winkie.

ABOUT JIM AND ELSIE

The Editor's Talk

I want to tell a story to the very little folk about some dear little children I once knew very well indeed. It occurred just about this time of the year, just before Christmas, when the ground was all white with its Christmas snow and the red holly berries were gleaming. This little boy I knew — his big brothers called him Jim — had been very anxious about Santa Claus and his Christmas visit. He had heard all about how Santa Claus would come in his big sleigh drawn by the eight tiny reindeer and bring him pretty presents, that is, if he were a good boy. But if he was naughty it was understood that he would get only a big bunch of switches. Jim thought a good deal about this and talked it over with his little sister who was only about four years old, and was just beginning to realize what Christmas means. Jim himself was almost six and felt quite a man.

But one thing puzzled him greatly, and that was how Santa Claus was ever to get down the small chimney in their house. Again and again the awful thought occurred to him that perhaps the good old Saint might find the chimney too small and never come in at all.

Now it happened that about this time the carpenters were making some repairs on the kitchen roof and a ladder was conveniently placed up to the end of the gable near the chimney. Now it occurred to Jim that it would be a good plan just to get up and investigate the chimney. So he called his little sister and they began climbing up together. The little girl was afraid, so Jim tied his jumping rope around his waist and then around his sister's, as he had seen pictures of people climbing the Alps. When they were fairly up, it was not hard to keep their footing, as there were little slats nailed on the roof like steps. They stood looking solemnly down the chimney. But Jim was not content with that.

"I'll tell you what, Elsie," he said, "I'll just let you down the chimney by the jumping rope and you can find out for me how big it is."

And poor silly little Elsie, who would have put her head in the fire if Jim had told her to, assented. So by tugging and pulling Jim finally got her up on the top of the chimney and gently pushed her over. The folks in the kitchen heard an alarming scuffle and crashing of brick, and soot rolling down the chimney and rushed outside. But Jim was standing serenely on



JAMES CATHER



ELSIE CATHER

These portraits of James and Elsie Cather were apparently taken a few years after the time of the Christmas story.

the low roof and calmly announced, "It's just Elsie, she's got stuck in the chimney, she's so fat anyway. But if she can't get through, I'd like to know how Santa Claus can." Now this is a true story, for it happened in my family and I know. Wishing you all a right Merry Christmas. — The Editor

A Note on . . .

THE WHITE BEAR STORIES

By Mildred R. Bennett

During the time when I was writing THE WORLD OF WILLA CATHER, I spent a week with Elsie Cather in her home. In the course of the conversations, I mentioned a story I had found signed by Willa Cather called "The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog."*

Miss Elsie was much excited, and after I came home I sent her a copy of the story. Here is what she wrote in reply:

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"Yes, that is the story about the Were-Wolf. How reading it did bring back old times! We would all gather round the old base-burner in the back sitting room and Ross would tell us stories by the hour . . . He was wonderful to us younger children, and used to read aloud to us and tell us stories on so many winter evenings. I had forgotten all about the White Bear, but now it comes back to me as clear as can be. There were several other stories about the same characters — with the White Bear always the hero, but I don't remember them all now.

"My guess is that Willie and Ross made the stories up together for the older children when they were all youngsters, and Ross retold them to Jack and me out of the kindness of his heart. He could tell a story almost as well as Willie could. He wrote almost as well too. I can remember when they used to plan to write things together. . . .

"I am so glad that now other **little world children** will be able to enjoy The Were-Wolf story as much as I did years ago." (from a letter of January 23, no date)

In time we may find the other stories tucked away in some out of the way magazine, published under another name or simply unsigned.

*HOME MONTHLY (December 1896). Reprinted in WILLA CATHER'S COLLECTED SHORT FICTION, 1892-1912 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION:

● By becoming a member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial.

LIFE MEMBERSHIP	\$100.00
SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP	\$5.00 Annually
LIBRARY SUBSCRIPTION	\$3.00 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 to 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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