

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

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Bonita English, Editor

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## WCPM Friends Invited to Celebrate

# Grand Opening Slated for December 9

Fall promises new growth . . . reasons for celebrating. On November 1 last year the official transfer of Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial properties to the State of Nebraska was a form of "grand opening" celebrated by the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, and a multitude of Cather- and humanities-devotees.

New possibilities opened for the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial. Its energies could be focused more intensely on tours, conferences, workshops and other Cather-related activities. But with the transfer, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial office needed to be moved from the then-deeded Garber Bank Building.

Now, this fall, another cause for celebrating: the modest but conveniently located building purchased by the Foundation during last year has been transformed into not only a pleasant office space but also a handsome art gallery-book and gift shop. Visitors can easily walk from the State's Cather Historical Center and Museum to the Foundation's new center three doors south to begin their Catherland tours, to purchase books and gifts, and to view art and artifacts.

Helping make the grand opening more grand will be an exhibition at the new gallery of many paintings by John Bergers of Sonoma, California. Among these will be "Blind D'Arnault (Blind Tom) in Concert at the

Red Cloud Opera House," **My Antonia**, p. 118; another, "Beside the Brick Wall," **Obscure Destinies**, pp. 203-207. Bergers and his family lived in Red Cloud for more than one year ('76-'77). He is well into his project of over forty paintings which will be on permanent loan to the Foundation.

In addition to the attractiveness of the new "house" and the treasures it will help to perpetuate in art and activities, those celebrating the grand opening Sunday will gratefully remember behind-the-scene contributors.

Miles E. Sandstrom, owner of Contract Design Associates in Oakland, California, designed and drew blueprints for the art gallery-book and gift shop. Robert Graning, a local contractor, worked diligently all summer to bring these plans into reality. The greatest share of the monies used for the project came from the Rawson Estate, given in memory of Mrs. Ralph F. Rawson's mother, Grace Garber Tait.

This grand opening, Sunday, December 9, leaves doors wide open to all Cather friends and scholars. It is a celebration of a strong move forward in accomplishing WCPM aims.



M. E. Sandstrom's drawing shows the new front of WCPM's recently purchased and renovated building which houses more than just the Foundation's office.

## MEMBERSHIP

The time to renew your membership or make annual donations to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation has arrived.

Though the maintenance and restoration of Cather-related sites is no longer our main responsibility, the needs of the Foundation are great. Our future endeavors will be emphasizing education and scholarship in Cather studies and the humanities.

A committee of our Board of Governors is in the process of correlating and organizing seminars and three-day workshops to be held in Red Cloud and other sites.

We are looking to the future with a positive attitude.

## A Note on Willa Cather and Flaubert

In **Willa Cather: A Memoir**, E. Sergeant mentions two sentences from Flaubert, pinned above the secretary of S. O. Jewett. The quotation p. 58 "Ecrire la vie ordinaire . . . faire rêver" is actually a collage of passages from two different letters of Flaubert to his friend Louise Colet. The first sentence belongs to a 27 March 1853 letter to L.C. and the second to a 26 August 1853 letter to the same person. The first sentence is part of a much longer sentence which thus reads: "Vouloir donner à la prose le rythme du vers (en la laissant prose et très prose) et écrire la vie ordinaire comme on écrit l'histoire ou l'épopée (sans dénaturer le sujet) est peut-être une absurdité". And Flaubert further comments: "Mais c'est peut-être aussi une grande tentative et très originale!" (Oeuvres Complètes de Flaubert, édition Louis Conrad, Paris 1910-1954, vol. III, pp. 142-143).

The second sentence as quoted by Sergeant omits one of the racy expressions Flaubert favoured in his conversation and correspondence. It also contains a few inaccuracies. The exact words are: "Ce qui me semble, à moi, le plus haut dans l'art (et le plus difficile), ce n'est ni de faire rire (not "vivre" as printed p. 58), ne de vous mettre en rut ou en fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est-à-dire de faire rêver". (Oeuvres, vol. III, p. 322)

S. O. Jewett had probably noted down Flaubert's words more correctly than E. Sergeant did and we may be certain that W. Cather was well acquainted with Flaubert's views on art and fully understood, as pointed out by Sergeant, the meaning of those lines. Flaubert haunted by the ideal of literary perfection dreams of a prose that would be poetic, yet natural, as natural as pure prose. The task of the novelist is to paint ordinary life as faithfully, as seriously as the historian deals with his material, without betraying (or distorting) his subject. That is, no doubt, what W. Cather called "integrity of vision" in Flaubert. In her own way she had that honest, scrupulous attitude towards reality. The novel, to her, as a form of imaginative art, was to rely on the selection of "the eternal material of art" ("The Novel Demeublé", **On Writing** p. 40). She also often succeeded in creating, on her own terms, the rhythmic prose Flaubert wanted to achieve.

The second sentence which in Flaubert's letter defines the function of art concerns W. Cather even more deeply. The highest mission of art is not to provide for our amusement, according to Flaubert (and to Cather, as well, as evidenced in "Novel Demeublé").

It is not either meant to arouse cheap and violent emotions in the reader. Flaubert, indeed, rejected melodramatic or erotic ("mettre en rut") sensationalism, polemical or doctrinaire literature as well. Art, instead, should, if my translation is correct, "operate after the fashion of nature" (or "in the same manner as nature"), i.e. "make us dream". Flaubert's rather cryptic statement has been diversely interpreted. Other comments by him, which cannot be discussed here, help us however to grasp what he meant. "Art is not reality" wrote Flaubert to

Huysmans in 1879. There is more to it than our senses can perceive. It is the purpose of art to achieve such a goal. By nature, we apprehend and select reality through the filters of our temperament, emotions, sensitiveness. The artist has to adopt the same natural process. For Flaubert reality is to be rendered with precision and at the same time be suffused with the artist's imagination, emotions, dreams, desires, memories. Only then reality is to become literature — a complex alliance of truth, beauty, sensibility, a transmutation of the *literal* into the *literary*, capable to "induce us to dream". Paradoxically reality is all the more faithfully represented as it has been interpreted, i.e. re-created by the artist. For Flaubert, a formidable task to be sure, almost impossible, but the only one worthy of a true artist struggling towards perfection.

W. Cather's best fiction and critical views testify that Flaubert's lesson was not lost on her. She, for instance, insisted on the necessity to avoid literal-

ness and interpret imaginatively, selectively (cf. Flaubert to Huysmans: "by necessity, one must make a selection among the elements offered by reality"), suggestively, what she called "the material and social investiture" of characters in a novel. Especially the often quoted passage from "Novel Demeublé" "Whatever is felt upon the page . . . poetry itself" seems to me to express strikingly what Flaubert

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When Willa Cather visited the south of France, she was inspired to begin writing an Avignon story. Now, for many years, **Michel Gervaud** of Aix en Provence, France, has been inspired by Cather. He teaches American literature at Université de Provence, took part in the International Cather Seminar in 1973, and has visited Cather Country three times.

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## Spring '80 Conferees Will Move Back to Catherland

For the twenty-fourth Annual Cather Spring Conference, May 5, 1979, nearly two hundred visitors came to Red Cloud, immersed in the 17th Century Quebec of Cather's novel **Shadows on the Rock**.

"The Passing Show" panelists invited and received much audience feedback, causing many to describe the afternoon discussion as "the liveliest . . . the best yet."

Mildred Bennett's special surprise highlighted the afternoon program also. Displaying the original Prix Femina Americaine awarded Cather in 1931 for **Shadows**, Mrs. Bennett explained that, as a gift to the WCPM from Helen Cather Southwick and Charles Cather, the award certificate will be placed in the Cather archives.

For the evening banquet, everything from "Nouvelle-France" program covers to the potted parsley table decorations and the poulet à la creme entree accented a Cather or **Shadows** theme.

Native Nebraskan composer, Gerald Ginsburg, now of New York City, accompanied Patty Mountford Doty on the piano as she sang his musical adaptations of Cather poems "Prairie Dawn" and "L'Envoi." John Murphy, noted Cather scholar, spoke, and showed slides relating to "Willa Cather and the Catholic Experience."

### A. L. Rowse Accepts

On Saturday, May 3, 1980, it will be "back to Catherland" for a well-known Englishman and for many others. Because of his great interest in Willa Cather, Alfred Leslie Rowse, Cornwall, England, has agreed to be the featured conference speaker.

In early '79 during a two-night Dick Cavitt Show appearance (re-run this fall), Mr. Rowse expressed his interest in the background of authors and, particularly, in the works of Willa Cather. The book he is writing on American authors includes a chapter on Cather.



Last May's visitors stepped aside for awhile from Quebec. Morning bus tour took them to the G. P. Cather house which drew mixtures of images from **One of Ours** and "A Wagner Matinee."

Mr. Rowse is a leading historian of the Elizabethan Age. He has written numerous books including **The Elizabethans and America**, **William Shakespeare: A Biography**, **The Churchills**, **The English Spirit**, and a volume of poetry, **Poems Partly American**.

Over fifteen years ago when Rowse came to Catherland, he also stopped in Lincoln to visit Elsie Cather. Soon after, he dedicated a poem to her which was published in **Prairie Schooner**.

Mr. Rowse is a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, a Fellow of the British Academy, and a Senior Fellow of Huntington Library, California.

### Two Thirds, Haverford?

Though much of the action of Conference '80's thematic book, **Lucy Gayheart**, takes place in Chicago, the real source of the movement is Lucy's heart which took shape in Haverford (Red Cloud) where she spent her youth;

"In the darkening sky she had seen the first star come out: it brought her heart into her throat. That point of silver light spoke to her like a signal, released another kind of life and feeling which did not belong here. . . . It was too bright and too sharp" (pp. 11-12).

The *spirit* of **Lucy Gayheart** and the generous presence of Mr. Rowse should succeed in transporting 1980's conferees to Catherland in the most important sense.

"The impression on the reader is not slight . . ."

Read

**LUCY GAYHEART**

— thematic book —

25th Annual Conference  
Red Cloud, May 3, 1980

## WCPM and Mildred Bennett Among Ten to Receive Awards

At Nebraska's second annual Governor's Arts Awards banquet in Lincoln, Friday, September 29, Mildred Bennett and the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation were honored by Governor Charles Thone as joint recipients of one of the ten 1979 awards.

All awards were for significant contributions to Nebraska's cultural life; specifically, Mrs. Bennett and WCPM's was "for contributions to preserving the literary heritage of Nebraska, especially the works of Willa Cather."

Another recipient, UNL Professor Bernice Slote is a WCPM Board of Governor's member and Cather scholar. She was recognized "for her literary service to thousands of students and readers."

Each of the ten was presented with a signed, limited-edition pottery bowl created by Omaha artist Jerome Horning.

WCPM's President Viola Borton, Board Chairman Mildred Bennett, and board members and spouses — Bertrand and Marian Schultz, Robert and Virginia Knoll, Ron Hull, Helen and Harry Obitz, and Bill and Miriam Mountford — were among over 250 persons from the arts community across the state who attended the banquet.

## Through Cather Dimension Two Focus on Past-Present

Central to University of Nebraska Professor Robert Knoll's "The Humanities and the Gift of Sight" and to University of Pittsburgh Professor Attilio Favorini's "Hearts and Diamonds" is the "inexplicable presence of the thing not named" — the "what" that forms our vision.

"The Humanities and the Gift of Sight," a special television program written and narrated by Robert Knoll, sets out to define one use of the humanities. Knoll explains that "the humanities both reflect and form our understanding of the world around us. Whether we recognize it or not, the humanities 'raise our consciousness,' both of ourselves and of our world."

The several sequences in Knoll's program shot on the Willa Cather Prairie and/or based on passages and ideas suggested from the work of Willa Cather support this thesis. It took Cather and others like her to see pioneer America on its own terms, to share this vision and thereby to teach others to see familiar places "for the first time."

Produced by Nebraska Educational Television with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities in cooperation with Yale Media Design Studio, "The Humanities and the Gift of Sight" [will be

broadcast twice this month, November 14 at 8:00 p.m. and November 18 at 3:00 p.m.]

Of interest to WCPM members is that Dr. Knoll choose fellow board member Helen Obitz to appear in several segments of the program, most especially a section dealing with parts of Cather's story, "A Wagner Matinee."

The "what" that forms our vision in Attilio Favorini's "Hearts and Diamonds" is also through a Cather dimension. For his documentary drama to be given at the University of Pittsburgh in March, Favorini is featuring Willa Cather as the "heart" and Lillian Russell, the "diamond."

Depicting turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh, the play opens in 1922 — the year Willa won a Pulitzer Prize for **One of Ours** and the year Lillian died. Through flashbacks and against the backdrop of changing attitudes toward women, "Hearts and Diamonds" examines the character and values of each of these women who lived in Pittsburgh for a time.

The drama features authentic music of the period, e.g., "La Lune Blanche" written by Ethelbert Nevin for Willa Cather.

Dr. Favorini feels that the play is very current "because these values and many of the issues these two women dealt with have not changed." "The overall objective of documentary drama," he says in a **Pitt News** interview, "is to illuminate history . . . the past is organically connected to the present."

## Gifts to WCPM

- from Lois Dailey of Los Gatos, California, a double gift: a) a letter of reminiscences and information concerning the acquaintance of Willa Cather and Ms. Dailey's uncle, Charles Moore of Lincoln, and b) items which Willa had given Charles Moore — one autographed copy of **April Twilights**, two photos of Willa during university days, and photos of Stratford, England, which Willa had sent to Charles Moore. (The gold ring in the shape of a snake which Willa wore much of her life was given her by Charles Moore.)
- from Frisbie-Frisbee Family Association of America, a set of needlepoint kneelers handmade by members of the family for Grace Episcopal Church.
- from Mrs. Richard Mellen (Jessica Auld's daughter) of Colorado Springs, Colorado, the 1834 Episcopal prayer book of Grandmother Boak's.
- from Mary Ben Cather Newman of Kansas City, Missouri, the bound collection she compiled over a fifty-year period, tracing the Cather-Cather family line.
- from Kathleen Genuchi of Snyder, Texas, a copy of her master's thesis entitled "Memorializing an Author."

# ❦ Holiday Wishes From WCPM ❦

## Gift Shop Suggestions

Plates — Frankoma	\$ 5.00	Notepaper of Memorial Building, Cather	
Trivet — Frankoma	3.00	House, Scene from <b>Lucy Gayheart</b>	
		15 notes per box	\$1.50
<b>Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir</b>			
Woods/Slote	25.00	All-occasion cards, photo of Laguna	
		Pueblo Church, New Mexico — 25 notes	
<b>Alexander's Bridge</b> (paperback)	2.95	by Lucia Woods Lindley	3.50
Introduction by Bernice Slote			
		Bronze or silver stick pins	2.00
<b>LUCY GAYHEART</b> (paperback)	2.95	Silver letter opener (train motif)	3.50
*1980 Conference Theme*			
<b>Collected Short Fiction</b>	15.00	We also have for sale all of Cather's other works and biographies.	
1892-1912			

❦ Postage and handling \$.85 per item ❦

### On the Scene . . .

**WASHINGTON D. C.** — National Trust for Historic Preservation, March/April '79 issue, included a review of Mildred Bennett's **The World of Willa Cather**.

**MASSACHUSETTS and NEW MEXICO** — *Books:* During a two-year period Stephanie Kraft, teacher, newspaper reporter, and free-lance writer, left her own home in Amherst to visit the homes of over thirty American authors. In her resulting book **No Castles on Main Street** (Rand McNally '79), she skillfully defines the sense of place so important to these authors. She visited Catherland for seven days last June and has devoted eleven pages, including five pictures, to "Willa Cather, the Prairie and Red Cloud."

Selected and edited by T. M. Pearce of Albuquerque, the 115 Mary Austin letters included in **Literary America 1903-1934** (Greenwood Press '79) can be viewed as "a literary panorama of people, places, and events . . . [presenting in a unique way] a truly innovative and creative period in the history of the United States." The paraphrased Cather letter gives reference to the pleasant hours Willa enjoyed in Mary's library in Santa Fe. Pearce believes the last part of **Death Comes for the Archbishop** may have

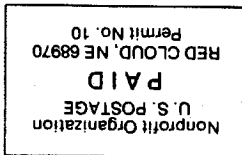
been written in Mary Austin's house which Willa, in a June 26, 1926 letter, called a most peaceful and harmonious place to work.

**CATHERLAND** — Cather Memorial Prairie in the spring is beautiful to see, to hear, and to study. June 4, forty-two participants came to Red Cloud for the five-day Prairie Workshop jointly sponsored by WCPM, the Cather Center, the Nature Conservancy, and Kearney State College.

Spring and summer drew a record number of visitors, with the high of 950 registering in May. Comparative figures including March through October: in '78, a forty-five visitor-per-month increase over '77; in '79, a 205 per-month increase over '78.



*On the scene . . . at the new Cather Gallery is the pottery bowl, this year's Governor's Arts Award presented to Mildred Bennett and WCPM. At the Grace Episcopal Church are the Frisbie-Frisbee Family handmade needlepoint kneelers.*



Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970  
**Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial**



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meant by "faire rêver". Art does succeed in causing us to dream when it manages to convey the invisible, yet present, though most elusive, elements of reality, what W. Cather admirably calls "the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact of the thing or the deed . . ." (On Writing pp. 41-42). Echoing Flaubert's "le plus haut dans l'art . . .", W. Cather concludes that this is what "gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself".

To illustrate, too briefly, her point (and Flaubert's) we can say that, for instance, her evocation of the prairie and the life of its inhabitants, seen through the prism of her imagination and sensibility finally

reveals its true essence more forcibly and *truly* than pages of literal descriptions would.

Flaubert opened new vistas to W. Cather. She did not imitate him (in that respect, I maintain that tracing the influence of Flaubert on her choice of subjects may be interesting but that, so far, it has only brought out superficial and inconclusive evidence). To her he was a model of excellence and artistic integrity, above all. He helped her, no doubt, to find her own road, to develop fine qualities, dispositions of the mind that potentially existed in her. In that light, it is not exaggerated to say that Flaubert as much as S. O. Jewett (and perhaps more than the New England spinster) had a share in Willa Cather's triumphant literary "maieusis".

J. Michel Gervaud  
Université de Provence 1 (Aix)

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

- By being a Cather Memorial Member and financial contributor:
 

BENEFACTOR .....	\$1,000.00 and over
<b>ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS</b>	
Patron .....	\$100.00
Sustaining .....	25.00
Family .....	15.00
Individual .....	10.00

WCPM members receive:  
 Newsletter subscription  
 Free admission to restored buildings
- By contributing your Willa Cather artifacts, letters, papers, and publications to the Museum.
- By contributing your ideas and suggestions to the Board of Governors.

**ALL MEMBERSHIPS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND BEQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE**

Under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1965

Special group memberships (such as clubs or businesses) are available. Write to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial for details.

**AIMS OF THE WCPM**

- To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

Newsletter Contribution Only ..... \$5.00  
(not a membership)

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

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