

Story^{the} Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Margaret Coel Loves Mystery

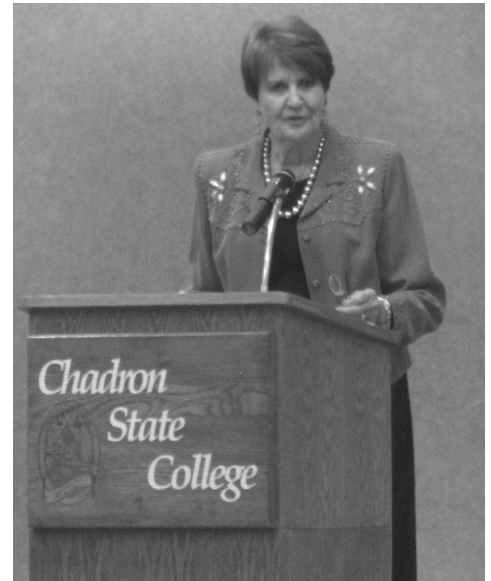
A female Native American attorney and an Irish Catholic Priest transplanted from Boston bring mystery alive on the Plains thanks to the award-winning writing of author Margaret Coel. Coel, the author of the Wind River Mystery series set on the Arapaho Reservation in Wyoming, uses Father John O'Malley and Arapaho attorney Vicky Holden to tell the stories of a proud people and their rich culture. The New York Times bestselling author delivered the annual Pilster Great Plains lecture – sponsored by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society – at Chadron State College.

The author of 20 books, Coel says she writes about what she enjoys, history and mystery. In the series, she decided that Father John had become a boring character. “So I made him a recovering alcoholic and added a romantic spark between he and attorney Vicky Holden,” she said.

The Arapaho talk about four hills in life. After they climb the fourth hill, they have wisdom and that is why the Arapaho revere their elders, Coel explained. Thus, interviewing the elders is tricky. “You don’t ask questions, you start by sitting and exchanging pleasantries with an elder,” Coel said. “The elder will talk only if he believes you have a good heart. After the discussion, the elder will decide whether or not to talk to you. If he does, he’ll tell you stories and impart knowledge to you,” she said. Not asking questions is very difficult for a former journalist like Coel. But the success of her books has helped. She said she likes to start with a roadmap and decide where the characters are going to go. “I’ll take my characters to Denver, then New York, then wherever,” she said. “I always stick with the map.”

Good literature, Coel said, needs to be told by an outsider. “Take the reader along. Teach them some history along the way,” she said. “The Mission was built on the reservation by the government in 1878 and then the government put the Arapaho and their arch enemies the Shoshoni on the same land.” That created conflict and interesting stories. Coel’s first attempt at writing came “one paragraph at a time, writing and rewriting.” She said she finally tired of that tedious task and “just decided to write pages one to 365, then go back through and edit and do rewrites of the whole text.” You have to write the whole story to release the excitement of it, she said. “I don’t share that first draft with anyone, not even my husband gets to read it.”

Her method works. Every book she has written has been published. And every one of them is still in print.



Margaret Coel, Author and 2014 Pilster Great Plains Lecturer at Chadron State College in September.

Join the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society TODAY!

Join us in keeping the spirit and work of Mari Sandoz alive by supporting the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society with a new membership, gift membership or renewal! You can visit our website at www.marisandoz.org and complete the online form, or you can download a copy of the membership form and mail it to us.

Join

Sandoz Research on Sappa Creek Massacre Exposed Genocide, Bigotry and Hatred

In the course of her research for "Cheyenne Autumn," Mari Sandoz discovered that an 1875 army report grossly underestimated the death toll of a confrontation with the Northern Cheyenne at Sappa Creek in Kansas

Kurt Kinbacher, a Sandoz Society Board member and instructor at Chadron State College, addressed the event, the nature of historical memory and the conflicting Cheyenne and American worldviews during the opening discussion at the annual Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference at Chadron State College.

Sandoz uncovered the spirit and the general causes of the incident, Kinbacher said. Some critics have said that her characters were composites and could not have been real people. He said they note that several people interviewed had apparently lived through more than one extensive massacre. While that could have happened, it's highly improbable.

Hitchcock County resident H.D. Wimer and Mari Sandoz discuss information he provided for "Cheyenne Autumn."

Photo Credit: from the photo collection at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College, courtesy of David Wimer



What is real, Kinbacher said, is the genocide, racial hatred and bigotry on both sides. HD Wimer of Hitchcock County NE. (1902-1977) a contemporary of Mari Sandoz, gave credence to some of her findings in "Cheyenne Autumn." While her numbers differ from other published reports, she told the story from the Cheyenne side, Kinbacher said. Mari Sandoz was a cultural anthropologist in her own right. The fact that she didn't name her subjects was out of respect. Her notes may be lacking, but her narrative is detailed, he said. "She tells a tragic story but makes no

attempt to go beyond her story," Kinbacher said. Quoting Faulkner, he added, "The past is never dead, it's just passed."

The historical event in Sandoz' book details the heroic passage of man. She wanted to come as close to the truth as she could without offending any of her friends on either side, Kinbacher said. There is no recognition of the Sappa Creek site by the Kansas Historical Society. There has been no archeology done at the site which is on private land. Kinbacher said the notes Sandoz left behind were not characteristic of her work. She corresponded with the Northern Cheyenne and realized in the 1940s that something had happened in 1875. We can't dig and probe everything that happened, but we should capture and recognize the oral history and give the Cheyenne a voice, he said.

2015 & 2016 Pilster Lecture & Sandoz Conferences Set

The 2014 Pilster Lecture and Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference is barely over and plans are being announced for the next two years. Board member John Wunder and his committee have outdone themselves already and the details are just coming together.

Sandhills Women will be the theme for the 2015 Conference on Sept. 17-18 at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Center on the Chadron State College campus. University of Wyoming Associate Professor of History, Renee Laegreid, will deliver the Pilster Lecture on the Thursday night at the Student Center. Friday sessions will include several speakers at the Sandoz Center. Among them will be Christina Reinhardt, author of a recently published cookbook – "A Culinary History of the Nebraska Sandhills: Recipes and Recollections from Prairie Kitchens."

Custer and Sandoz will be the topic for the 2016 Conference scheduled for October 1-2. University of Mexico History Professor Paul Hutton will speak about Custer and Sandoz. He is the author many books, museum exhibits and documentaries on Custer and the 19th Century wars in the American West.

Look for Pilster Lecture and Sandoz Conference updates on our website www.marisandoz.org.

Sandoz Book on Crazy Horse Makes Sense

Crazy Horse as a historical figure has become larger than life. Along with the mythic proportions of Crazy Horse's life are the legendary details about his death and burial. Mari Sandoz renders these events clearly and plainly, but some mysteries may never be fully explained.

A franchise strip club, a liquor brand, rock star Neil Young and his band, and the Crazy Horse memorial all prove that the legacy of the man is larger than life, said P. Jane Hafen, a professor at the University of Nevada- Las Vegas. She told attendees at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference that these things are just a way for white people to tell themselves they'll have the last word. Hafen mentioned a handful of other authors who made reference to the death of Crazy Horse and the battle at Greasy Grass and Custer's victory. The writing styles vary, looking at the magical one, the horrific violence. Kurt Vonnegut mentions it. He will be murdered by Little Big Man. Or was it a guy named Lexi in "Flight". There are other books out there: "Reservation Blues," "The Killing of Crazy Horse."

The sympathy and point of view of Sandoz in "Crazy Horse" was the most acceptable and makes the most sense to the Lakota people, Hafen said. Little Big Man stabbed him with a bayonet. He was killed in the barracks after his May 1877 surrender at Pine Ridge. The facts and the emotions come together. Death. Brave and good and wise. He never wanted anything but to save his people. He was only 30. They had to lie to him and kill him that way. The mystery continues beyond his murder in the barracks where he was in a room with several officers and Little Big Man while his people, pleading for his release, were kept outside. Nobody knows today where he is buried. Perhaps at Pepper Creek. The old people knew, but they wouldn't tell. And they are dead now.

Black Elk said he thought the grave was hidden. Or maybe out in the Badlands. Luther Standing Bear concurs. Crazy Horse's wife said she would never tell anyone where he is. No living Sioux knows where the grave is. White people who say they know don't know the truth, Hafen said. He was fearless. He died a martyr's death at the hand of his friend, Little Big Man. Ever living, ever dying, ever living. Some say he made a long speech before he died. He was a quiet man. He was a symbol of the Indian's resistance against overcoming odds, she said. The people still depend on his spirit. The events at Sandy Creek and Wounded Knee and the writings of Robert Johnson – who had an influence on Jimi Hendrix – when he wrote "he never died, he just picked up a slide guitar. A drummer and a dreamer. Waiting in the margin of my awareness."

Hafen said the mystery of the placement of his bones is less compelling than the efforts to kill off his people. She noted that Sandoz called it a remarkable, historical and ethnographic effort. Sandoz refers to Black Elk and notes that where Crazy Horse's body lies is not important. Where his spirit lies is most important. Mari Sandoz wrote 19 works and she'd never say this was the most important. This book came as close as possible as ever to representing her efforts to write what was a flash in her mind. I had to try to get into the psychology of another race, she once said. Hafen noted that sounds can bring back years past better than any other sense. As a little girl sitting on a fence post on the Niobrara, Sandoz noted the sounds of the horses' hoofs. The cadence brought back how I felt at that time, she said. She built in the cadence so it didn't feel like white man's words, Hafen said.

2015 Story Catcher Workshop Moves to a Weekend Format

The popular Story Catcher writer's workshop for 2015 will be held on the Chadron State College campus and the Mari Sandoz High Plains Center from Friday June 12 through Sunday June 14. Sandoz Heritage Society Board Member Matt Evertson coordinates the annual program. He said the three-day format and a weekend schedule were suggestions from past participants and seemed to work well with the college schedule. He said there will be three new focus groups among those attending the event. Professional writers, graduate student writers and student levels of instruction will be offered. In addition to exposing people to the High Plains, Sandoz Heritage Society Board President Lynn Roper said "Mari Sandoz always helped new writers and that's our heritage and mission." An emphasis will be placed on having high school faculty encourage young writers from across the state to attend the workshop, Evertson said. Look for Story Catcher Workshop updates on our website www.marisandoz.org and www.storycatcher.org

Creative Writers Praise the Sand Hills, Discuss Creating a Sense of Place

Many authors have found the Great Plains fertile territory for their imagination. This writing panel will discuss how other artists have rendered these landscapes and cultures in their work, and how living in the Great Plains has affected their own place-based writing.

Five graduate students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln discussed their pursuit of creative writing during the closing panel of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference. Tom Bennett, Casey Pycior, Raul Palma, Nick White and Jordan Farmer discussed their diverse backgrounds and what brought them to creative writing in general and specifically Nebraska. Steve Coughlin, a new instructor at Chadron State College, asked if place really does matter. Panelists said if you can move your story to a



Panel of creative writing graduate students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln discuss writing as giving context to a sense of place. (panelists from left to right: William "Nick" White, Casey Pycior, moderator Steve Coughlin from CSC, Jordan Farmer, Tom Bennett and Raul Palma.

different location or setting, maybe it isn't the same. It's important to decide what can be added to the collective voice that has already been written. It's a dual transaction, a psychic DNA.

Do you face struggles as outsiders to the Great Plains? Just being, opening up ourselves. Not believing the stereotypes. Getting beyond that. Our first duty is to the character, what drove us to write the story in the first place? If you are empathetic to character and place, you can make it part of your own. That comes with your development as a writer. A burden to be from a place and write about it. I care about it and I want to present it in the best light. Empathy toward people and empathy toward place. Treat place as a character.

How do you make place more than property? Make it a character. There are palm trees in Miami. The big question

is, why are they there? In the Great Plains, there are no fence posts for the miles of barbed wire. They use rough-hewn tree limbs and sticks. One writer started to imagine the person out there placing each one, stringing the fence from stick to stick.

Land. Ownership. How do you write about the Great Plains when it is no longer wide – open – spaces? We don't own the land, the land owns us. No matter where we are from, we ask who belongs where? Within boundaries. Keeps some out, keeps others in. Margaret Coel wrote about land, reservations, placing the Arapaho on land occupied by their natural enemies the Shoshoni.

The story of the 21st Century is urbanization. How do young writers approach space? Is there a failure to acknowledge how places have changed? How do you define region? In mixed company we struggle to define these changes. We don't have anybody telling us what the Plains are. What about technology? Technology must be addressed as it continues to increase and become bigger parts of our lives. It's good to face these challenges. Technology is definitely affecting our human condition.

Sandoz Society Display On The Trail of Authors

Members and staff of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society took her story to the Trail of Authors in Beatrice on Saturday August 2. President emeritus Ron Hull gave a talk on his interviews with Sandoz and her view on living in New York City and Lincoln, Nebraska, far from her beloved Sandhills.

Board Treasurer Brian Rockey of Lincoln and Society member Ann Van Hoff of Omaha led book discussions. Guests enjoyed refreshments and had a chance to look at a temporary display of Sandoz works and historic posters from past annual conference/Pilster Lecture posters. The event was held at the beautifully restored Carnegie Library near downtown Beatrice. Main Street Director Michael Sothan said while Sandoz did not write about Beatrice, she wrote about things of interest to all Nebraskans. She covered topics ranging from homesteading to the capital city.

“ ... Take a Right Turn at Ogallala and You’re on Another Planet,” Doolittle Says

Sean Doolittle says he remembers arguing with a copy editor who took issue with him writing that a character got in his car in Omaha, crossed a river and wound up in Iowa. The editor wanted to know how that could be possible. Doolittle, who writes mostly crime and flash fiction, used that story to explain to his Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference audience how Nebraska can seem like an exotic place.

His predominantly crime – based novels include “Dirt,” “Rain Dogs” and “The Clean Up.” He read his flash fiction – call it a short short story – called “Next Right” to the more than 40 people eagerly listening at the Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center. It’s a quick crime story that started with a man and wife dropping their daughter off at college in Wyoming and then spending the night at a motel somewhere in Nebraska. The wife wandered off to the convenience store for some snacks. An hour later she came back with two bags of loot she had swiped from the room of a couple who were at the pool.

It’s that kind of twist Doolittle likes. He talks about Donna who was born in the back seat of a getaway car. He talks about people who aren’t from the place where they are. There’s a need for romanticism that drove him to set his first story in Los Angeles because he didn’t think Nebraska fit the bill. “I feel like a tourist out here in the Panhandle,” he said. “Even though I am from Nebraska.” That attitude is what brought him back to setting stories in Nebraska. “You take a right turn at Ogallala and you’re on another planet, in a far corner of the globe,” he said. Each book got closer to my home. “I realized that you have to apply what you know to what you write. “I tell the stories that are closer to me, good, fun pulp fiction,” he said.

Doolittle said he is often asked what a well - educated white dude living in a house with a lawnmower knows about crime. How can you write crime? You take what you know and distill it. Small towns have gossip but no tangible evidence, he said. There’s more stimuli in larger places, “but I think everything happens everywhere.” You would lose the anonymity in a smaller place. Proximity is best for attraction and also for crime.

He has written six novels and has four more under contract. He says he fell into screenwriting and has a book agent and a film agent. I struggle with discipline, structure and creative (ideas) crop rotation, he said.

“My characters aren’t from the place where the plot takes place, just as I am not from that place,” he said. “I call myself out that way.”

Graduate Student from Colorado Is First Sandoz Scholar

Jillian L. Wenburg of Durango, CO, has been named the first Sandoz Scholar and the recipient of a \$1,000 research grant from the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. She is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Missouri – Kansas City working in an interdisciplinary program in English and History. Her topic, Mari Sandoz. Wenburg will discuss her work at the 2015 Sandoz Conference in Chadron. She said Sandoz’s dedication to her research topics, personality, candor, and work ethic allowed her an intimate place alongside those she chose to write about. This yielded a moving written product. In the same way that Sandoz was able to infiltrate the groups she researched, they permeated Sandoz’s consciousness. As she developed story ideas and noted observations about Plains life, Sandoz encountered factions that she saw were unjustly treated. She utilized her platform as a writer to attempt to redress these injustices. Her work with Native Americans, women, and farmers and laborers greatly touched the people she wrote about and, ultimately, herself. Her acerbic writing, in both her literary texts and letters, was remarkable in a time and place when and where women typically did not provide such pointed commentary, Wenberg said. She hopes to explore how Sandoz’s texts and letters also promoted her advocacy.



Photo credit: Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College.

In Memorium...



Esther Pilster 1916-2014

The late Esther Pilster gave a gift of northwest Nebraska ranch land near Whitney to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society in 2006. The gift was a tribute to her late husband, Raleigh, who grew up on the land and to his parents, John and Grace Pilster. The gift established an endowment with the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. Pilster started her teaching career in one-room schools in rural Gage County. She also taught in schools in Neligh, Seward and Chadron. She and her husband moved to Omaha, where she taught elementary school and worked as principal at Yates and Saunders elementary schools. Raleigh started agriculture judging teams that won state and national competitions. She became the first principal of Boyd Elementary, where she led the school for 21 years until retirement in 1982 and she became deeply involved with Omaha's Keystone community where a park now stands with her name and in her honor. She was once honored at the Queen of Keystone in recognition of her development of the neighborhood. Family members said she often dressed in costumes — the Statue of Liberty, Betsy Ross, or whatever the presentation called for — and she gave hundreds of talks about education, history and politics to whomever invited her. She also served a six week stint in Washington as a congressional senior intern in then-Congressman Hal Daub's office in 1984. She and Raleigh traveled to more than 50 countries, spending time on every continent. They visited family and friends, attended educational conferences and were very active in Friendship Force. They also hosted many international guests at their Omaha home. After her husband died in 2002, she donated the family's 6,000 – acre Pilster Ranch near Whitney, to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The Dawson County property in northwest Nebraska once housed the state's largest flock of ewes. The proceeds from the sale of the ranch were earmarked for the Pilster Great Plains Lecture and to support programs at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Center at Chadron State College. Her generous gift honors the tenacity and courage of Raleigh's parents and others who live on the Great Plains. Esther E. Pilster died July 20, 2014, at the age of 97.

Naomi Kaye Hull 1930-2014

Naomi Kaye Hull, the wife of Mari Sandoz Heritage Society President Emeritus Ron Hull, passed away July 5, 2014, in Lincoln. She was born November 19, 1930 to Albert and Bennie Bee Kaye in Highmore, South Dakota. She graduated from Dakota Wesleyan University in 1952 and was married in 1953 to Ron Hull in the United Methodist Church in Highmore, South Dakota, with her brother Philip Kaye officiating. They moved to Lincoln in 1955 when Ron accepted an appointment at the University of Nebraska's educational television station. After receiving her Masters degree in Gerontology through the Human Development Department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln she continued her education with 15 months at Bryan Hospital studying Clinical Pastoral Education. For a few months she served as the acting Chaplain at Bryan hospital. After taking Seminary courses in Washington, D.C., she was ordained a Deacon and served for over 20 years as a Pastoral Care Minister at St. Paul United Methodist Church. Naomi and five friends had a vision for a welcoming place in Lincoln for those who are lonely, disenfranchised and racially, or ethnically maligned. They called this dream "The Gathering Place" and it is a successful vibrant enterprise today. Travel was also a priority in her life and with Ron they shared a trip abroad every year with adventures in 21 countries. She is survived by her husband, Ron; her sons, Kevin (Becky) Hull, Denver; Brian Hull, Lincoln; Brandon (Linda) Hull, Denver; her daughter, Kathryn Hull, Lincoln; and by her brother, Dr. Philip A. Kaye (Zodie); and 8 grandchildren. A memorial service was held Saturday, July 12, 2014, at St. Paul Methodist Church in Lincoln.

Sandoz Society Awarded a Grant from Humanities Nebraska

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society will produce a display to be used by libraries, museums, book festivals and history events statewide thanks to a grant from the Nebraska Humanities Council. The display will reflect the image and spirit of the author and her work as well as the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The exhibit will include photos of Mari Sandoz (1896-1966), Great Plains landscape, text about the author, her 27 books, her history and quotes from her books. Two retractable floor banners, a table cover and runner, two rotating cubes of information and a digital photo frame will portray the author's many images and book covers. Printed materials for viewers to take from the table display will also be available.

2014 Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award Given to Family

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society honored the late sister of the popular Sandhills author during the annual conference. The Spirit of Sandoz Award was presented posthumously to Caroline Sandoz Pifer. Her daughters, Eleanor Hamilton of Minneapolis and Mary Ann Anderson of Boulder, CO, will receive the awards on their mother's behalf. Pifer, the last surviving sibling of the Sandoz family, died at a Gordon nursing home in 2012. She was 101. She was the youngest daughter of homesteader



The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award given to the family of Caroline Sandoz Pifer with flowers from Beth Ann Brandt of Grand Island, on display at the conference luncheon in Chadron in September

Jules Sandoz and worked tirelessly to continue the family legacy by preserving its history after her famous older sister, Mari Sandoz, died of cancer in 1966, said Ron Hull of Lincoln, past president of the Society and a friend of Caroline and Mari. Friends said Caroline told them she was spiritually connected to Mari after her death and worked tirelessly to establish the Sandoz Center at Chadron State College. Friends said sisters Mari, Flora and Caroline were much like their father, "Old Jules" Sandoz, immortalized in the 1935 book by Mari. Jules and Mary Sandoz also had three boys, Jules, James and Fritz. Caroline ran the ranch after her husband died and reluctantly moved to town where she lived another decade at a nursing home in Gordon. Hull, a longtime friend and one of the founders of the Mari Sandoz Society said he met the sisters in the 1950s and worked on a number of TV shows

with Mari, who was living in both New York City and Lincoln. At the time of Caroline's death, Hull told the Scottsbluff Star-Herald that "Caroline was really the person who was so anxious to preserve Mari's legacy and heritage. They were both deeply tied to the land, trappers, Native Americans, and keeping the history of the Plains alive." Among items that Caroline donated to the Mari Sandoz Center were the thousands of index cards on which Mari kept meticulous records of the Plains. Those cards and other memorabilia, including hats, clothing and furniture, were saved by Pifer and later donated. Hull said that Pifer was very proud of her heritage and saw herself as the guardian of her sister's legend.

The StoryCatcher

The "StoryCatcher" is the title of a book by Mari Sandoz and it is the title of Helen Winter Stauffer's biography of Mari, *Mari Sandoz: The Story Catcher of the Plains*. The StoryCatcher is published four times a year by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, a 501©(3) non-profit organization. The vision of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is to perpetuate and foster an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz and to honor the land and the people about which she wrote; Native Americans, ranchers, farmers, and the people who settled the High Plains country. The Society hosts an annual conference, the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, and a writer's workshop. Additionally, the Society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska.

Address Changes

Address changes should be mailed to:
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Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at www.marisandoz.org

Mari Sandoz

The feats, the passions, and the distinctive speech of the West come alive in the writings of Mari Sandoz (1896-1966). As the author of 23 books, including *Old Jules*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, and *Crazy Horse*, *the Strange Man of the Oglalas*, Sandoz was a tireless researcher, a true storyteller and artist passionately dedicated to the land. With her vivid stories of the last days of the American frontier, Mari Sandoz has achieved a secure place as one of the finest authors in American literature and one of Nebraska's most important writers. As a historian and as a novelist, Sandoz was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in 1976 and posthumously received the coveted Wrangler Award from the Hall of Great Westerners.



Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is on Facebook!

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society has joined the social media revolution and now has a Facebook page. Keep up to date with Sandoz Society news and activities by "liking" our page!

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