

# The Story Catcher

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society  
Celebrating 50-Years 1971-2021



## Looking Back, the 2022 Pilster Lecture & Sandoz Symposium

As we look ahead to the 2023 Lecture & Symposium in September

The annual Pilster Lecture and Fall Symposium of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society last September explored a new facet of the writing of the noted author which spurred discussion of historic and contemporary views of health and wellness on the Great Plains. The free event was hosted live and in-person at the Center for Great Plains Studies on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and live on-line.

Creighton University professor Taylor Keen, a member of the Omaha Tribe, delivered the Pilster Lecture and outlined the chronology of his people getting their native corn seeds restored. With the help of his students and Native friends at other locations, Keen was able to plant a garden that helped him produce Indian Corn. But this wasn't just an agronomy lesson. Keen drew on his ancestors who advised that people "eat what the Mother (earth) provides. "If human beings put themselves in dominion over the earth, we will destroy ourselves," he said. His wide-ranging talk discussed mental and physical health of the Natives as well as racism and the trauma of Indian industrial and ag schools that often interfered with the questions of "who we are and where we came from."

Topics at Friday's symposium covered physical and mental health which have been and remain a core concern of the indigenous societies living on the Great Plains of which Sandoz often wrote. Courtney Kouba of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center at Chadron State College discussed Sandoz book *Miss Morissa* which was the Sandoz book about women as doctors. Sandoz Board member Broc Anderson of Kearney discussed the plight of Natives who joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Revue and traveled the world in sometimes difficult situations with often inadequate healthcare.

Melodie Edwards of Wyoming Public Radio interviewed Siobhan Wescott MD at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha about on-going problems with the federal Indian Health Care System and the failed

promises versus overwhelming needs. "It's been a MacGyver approach (based on the popular TV show where the star often cobbles things together to save the day)", she said. "Trust must be earned."

Joe Starita gave a brief overview of Susan La Flesche Picotte who overcame racial and gender inequality to become America's first Indian doctor while the luncheon keynote featured Lincoln architect Dan Worth one of the preservationists who is active with the group working to rehabilitate Picotte's hospital in Walthill, Nebraska.

*Mari Sandoz Homeland, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A High Plains Symposium* is the theme of the 2023 Pilster Lecture and Sandoz Symposium taking place in Chadron September 28 and 29. The return to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Center and the Chadron State College Student Center are the first since the Covid pandemic forced the events into a live-stream and later a hybrid stream and limited live attendance hosted at the Center for Great Plains Studies on the University of Nebraska -Lincoln campus.

This year's Pilster lecturer is Dr. Andrew Graybill who is a member of the history faculty at Southern Methodist University where he directs the school's center for Southwest Studies. Graybill taught at UNL until 2011.

The theme addresses "change over time" on the landscape of the High Plains over the centuries including Mari's years, the present and the future. In addition to the landscape, those who live on the High Plains or share what they know about the region, from the Native Americans to yet to be born future generations are part of the subject of the 2023 Sandoz Symposium.

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**Video recordings of the 2022 lecture and symposium are available on our YouTube channel through the link on our website at [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org)**

# In Memorium...Ron Hull

Ron Hull, President Emeritus and one of the founders of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and a friend of Mari Sandoz died at home in his sleep at age 92. His son said his dad had some health issues, so this was not totally unexpected. Until his death, Hull was working as a senior adviser for Nebraska Public Media, the new name for Nebraska Educational Telecommunications which he helped establish as the eighth educational television station (KUON-TV at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln) in the United States and the first in Nebraska. That was in the late 1980s. Later on, he became the first professor from Nebraska who taught international broadcasting. He was able to do so with the help of the Fulbright Program, which took him to Taipei, Taiwan, to teach at Cheng Chi University.

Hull, whose career included teaching broadcasting classes, was honored last year with the Frank Blythe Award for Media Excellence, an honor marking his work to empower Native storytellers in public media. Hull had done several interviews with Sandoz who died in 1966.

He was in the military stationed at Fort Sill in Oklahoma in 1953 when his broadcast career started. He went to the base library and found a book that explained script writing. Once he figured out how to work a camera, he wound up hosting 93 half-hour shows for KSWO-TV in Lawton, Oklahoma, featuring the men and women of the base. "It combined everything that I was interested in," Hull said. "The music, drama, singers and working with interesting people. I just had a wonderful time, and I thought, well maybe I can do this for a living."

He wound up in Nebraska after leaving the military for what many thought would be a temporary stay. But he got busy building his career in Lincoln. He had many chances to leave but didn't take one until 1966, when he decided to go into the U.S. Foreign Service. He was supposed to go to Tokyo as a cultural affairs officer but ended up going to Vietnam after the U.S. government decided to introduce television there. Hull built a TV network from the ground up, training the production crew members and helping them get started with everything they needed to produce their shows.

He then worked in Washington DC for nearly seven years from 1981 to 1988 as the program fund director for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. But he returned to Nebraska, where he's responsible for many firsts in broadcasting and teaching.

The list of accolades and accomplishments is long. Hull served as a Television Programming Advisor to the Government of South Vietnam in 1966 and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to teach International Broadcasting at Cheng Chi University in Taipei, Taiwan in 1999.

At one point in his celebrated career, he served as Director of the Program Fund for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in Washington D.C., where he pushed for more history programming. There, he initiated the long-running PBS history series, "The American Experience," brought Bill Moyers back to public television, and gave Ken Burns his first seed money for his documentary series on the Civil War. He is the recipient of the "Sower Award" from Humanities Nebraska, the "Distinguished Nebraskan Award" from the Nebraska Society of Washington D.C., and a member of the Nebraska Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

"Everybody has a great story — everybody," Hull told a reporter for the Lincoln Journal Star in 2022. "Well, that's the business we're in. Tell stories to inspire people, to educate people and to help people."

"Although Ron was 92 years old, news of his passing has us all in shock," Mark Leonard, CEO and General Manager of Nebraska Public Media said. "The impact that Ron had on public media locally and nationally has been profound. So many memorable programs and program producers were the recipient of Ron's passion, wisdom and guidance." Hull and his late wife Naomi had four children: Kevin, Brian, Brandon and Kathryn. A service for Hull was held on Saturday, April 29 at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Lincoln.

**Read the tributes from friends, colleagues, and fellow Sandoz Society board members on page 7.**

## 2023 Story Catcher Workshop Heads to the Black Hills

"*We Are All Related: Words Inspired by People, Place and Spirit*" is the theme of this year's popular Story Catcher writer's workshop to be held June 6-9 at the Creekside Resort at the State Game Lodge in the Black Hills of South Dakota. To stay up to date on the workshop, follow the workshop's website at [www.storycatcherworkshop.org](http://www.storycatcherworkshop.org) This year's workshop features noted writers Beth Piatote, Jake Skeets, Anna Lee Walters & Gerry Robinson. Registration deadline is June 2, 2023 and can be found on our website at [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org).

# Red Shirt Winter Count Re-discovered in Rushville Museum

By Broc Anderson

On October 14, 2022, Delphine Red Shirt, Lecturer for Native American Studies at Stanford University, visited northwest Nebraska to reclaim a family winter count from the Sheridan County Historical Society in Rushville. Red Shirt presented a program about winter counts and her family's history to the Gordon – Rushville High School student body and general public. Following the high school convocation, Red Shirt and her two daughters, Megan and Kirsten, continued the rest of their time in Rushville where the Red Shirt winter count was repatriated to the family. Leading up to Red Shirt's visit, Jerry Wellnitz and Phyllis Krotz rediscovered a small ledger book from the 1880s. SCHS records indicate that the book was originally donated by Winnie Red Shirt, Delphine's mother, to the newly established museum in the 1960s through Sheridan County Judge Clarence Benschoter. In the early establishment of the museum, Benschoter not only wanted to honor the non-native settlers in Sheridan County but also the Native peoples who first lived on the land. Among other important records and collections, the museum continued gathering information, documents, and other artifacts pertaining to the Lakota's history in northwest Nebraska.

Inside the ledger, there are various Native American drawings followed with a corresponding year. Between 1700 and 1924, each drawing represented an important event that year. A significant event then became that year in traditional Lakota culture. Additionally, a traditional winter count is drawn on a hide, tapestry, or cloth material and could vary from one year to another. Most Lakota winter counts are based on the first snow of one year to the first snow to the next, so the actual calendar year could vary by a month or two. In this case, the Red Shirt winter count is far more spelled out by a corresponding year or additional information about numbers of crops or warriors killed in a battle.

Having prior contact with Broc Anderson for his research at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Krotz reached out to Anderson in June 2021 for additional

guidance on the ledger book. Over the next year and a half, Anderson assumed much of the research on the winter count and potential relocation of the winter count. Because of the winter count's overall significance to the Lakota and historians, Anderson knew how important it was to find and gather as much information to help SCHS decide on what to do with the precious artifact. After consulting Dr. Candace Greene, an ethnologist at the Smithsonian Anthropology Collection and



Dr. Delphine Red Shirt visits Gordon-Rushville High School.  
Left to Right: Phyllis Krotz, Jerry Wellnitz, Dr. Delphine Red Shirt, Broc Anderson, Nathan Livingston, Megan Red Shirt-Shaw Little, and Kirsten Shaw  
(Photo credit Broc Anderson)

Archives, Anderson determined that the Red Shirt winter count is a continuation of the 'Battiste Good' winter count and adds twenty more years of Lakota history than originally known by experts. As Anderson continued researching, he came across another source that pointed to a direct ancestor of the last winter count keeper, Delphine Red Shirt. After contacting Red Shirt, Anderson met Delphine and her two daughters to show them the winter count in person. After this first meeting in Omaha, it was then decided by SCHS to repatriate the Red Shirt winter count to the Red Shirt family. Since then, Delphine donated the winter count to the Cecil H Green Library at Stanford University for further research, preservation, and digitization.

## The Story Catcher

The "Story Catcher" 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 Story Catcher 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:  
**P.O. Box 6808, Lincoln, NE 68506**

Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at [www.marisandoz.org](http://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.

# Lynn Roper Reflects on Her 18-Years of Leadership

“Change is the only constant in life,” Mari Sandoz Society outgoing President Lynn Roper told her board in September as she passed the leadership baton to new President Shannon Smith of Gordon. Roper, a Rushville native, has been at the helm for 18 years. She’ll remain on the Board as it enters its second 50 years. “As the Society celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2021, we entered our next 50 years with momentum and making changes as we continue our mission to perpetuate and foster an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz and the land and people about which she wrote.” said Roper. “We held our 11<sup>th</sup> summer writing workshop, The Story Catcher, out of state for the first time ever in Gunnison, Colorado, at Western Colorado University with 25 participants under the leadership of board members Steve Coughlin – a WCU faculty member -- and Matt Evertson of Chadron State College. The Sandoz board met in Chadron at the Sandoz Center in June 2022 and adopted a revised name for our group removing the word “heritage” and simplifying our name to Mari Sandoz Society. We are moving forward with the digitization project of Mari’s archive at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Love Library with a dedicated committee to work on this long-term project. Our Pilster Lecture and Symposium noted in this newsletter was successfully held live and simultaneously streamed and all talks are now available on our website bringing the quality presentations to folks at their desktop. “Change is the only constant in life” is my farewell. I am thrilled that Shannon Smith of Gordon has agreed to lead our dedicated board of which I will continue to be a member. Our board members have so many skills ranging from fixing historical markers and signs to seeking new Sandoz Scholars to navigating archival projects and putting on terrific programs for all to enjoy. Our endowment donors have given us resources to provide these well into the future....and that is one thing that will not change.”



## Smith Shares Her Vision for the Society

I have some very big shoes to fill, following in the steps of some of Nebraska’s wisest and most experienced cultural and philanthropic leaders, including Ron Hull, John Wunder, and Lynn Roper.



The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society has grown from a small, dedicated team of people based in Chadron with a dream to preserve Mari’s legacy to a leading Nebraska-based cultural non-profit with solid financial resources responsible for major conferences, public

lectures, and a spectacular museum and archives on the Chadron State College Campus.

My predecessors ensured financial stability, established a long-term plan of programs and publications, and doubled the size of our board to include respected scholars from Nebraska, Kansas, Wyoming, Colorado, and South Dakota.

As we celebrate almost 52-years of promoting the writing and ideas of Western Nebraska’s most famous author and historian we are proud of our many accomplishments. But it is time to turn our attention to the future. We plan to collaborate with the University of Nebraska Love Library and Archives to digitize Mari’s priceless, and extensive, collection of letters and research materials to make available free for all researchers to renew interest in Mari’s work.

We are also planning to create a new online interactive map and various tours that will guide people to historical locations all through Sandoz Country. We’ll continue funding scholars and publications and putting on public programs all around the region.

To do that we will be finding new funding strategies and overseeing the growth of our endowments and creating a new vision for our organization. I look forward to sharing this progress with our supporters and am eager to hear from anyone interested in our work.

# In The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award Winner: His Own Words

In addition to expressing my gratitude to the In The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award Committee and the rest of the Sandoz Society Board for being so supportive of my involvement over the years, and for naming me to this great honor and the illustrious company of previous recipients, I want to thank Mari Sandoz (or perhaps her “spirit”) for giving me my career.

I arrived at Chadron State College in 2001 on a one-year contract to teach writing. I finished my dissertation project that year and, by coincidence, the college suddenly needed someone to teach American Literature. I started my permanent position in the Fall of 2002—the same semester that the Sandoz Center was dedicated on our campus—the same year that I became involved with the Sandoz Society.

Although I grew up in Western Nebraska, I never imagined spending most of my life in this state (let alone 30 miles from where I was born in Rushville!). I also “knew of” Old Jules and Mari Sandoz but had never really spent much time with her writing.

Through my association with the Sandoz Society, however, I wanted to learn more. I began reading Sandoz, and then assigning her works in my classes. I created a class called “Nebraskaland Authors,” where we read Sandoz and Cather and Neihardt and Wright Morris and many others. I began presenting at conferences on Sandoz and these others and publishing some pieces here and there in scholarly journals and books as my scholarship and research interests evolved from American Literary Naturalism, the focus of my graduate studies.

Through Sandoz I began to rediscover this remarkable region and started spending more time in the Sandhills and thinking about my own relationship with the Great Plains,

and with agriculture and ranching and history (along with my students). I became interested in the flora and fauna of the high plains and began co-teaching classes with my colleagues over in Rangeland and Wildlife Management. This led to my explorations in ecology and nature writing, and the literature of the west and of the indigenous voices in our region.

Of the 22 book-length works by Sandoz listed on the Society Website, I can count fourteen that have been incorporated into my classes over the last twenty years. In 2021 our program introduced our new “English Studies”

Major, and for the first time we have included a “regional studies” component. To my mind, these are amazing resources from our own backyard that have been incorporated into the curriculum of CSC, which have impacted hundreds of students at this point, and made our studies here all the richer—thanks to the spirit of Mari Sandoz taking hold on our campus (and being supported by the Society and the Center).

The spirit of Sandoz will be with us again at our 12th Story Catcher Writing Workshop this coming June in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Resources from the Society and the Pilster Endowment have made this annual event—the most fulfilling and satisfying work of my career—possible and sustainable.

This is truly the legacy of Sandoz and the Society—because she was first and foremost a dogged writer who devoted countless hours to helping other writers struggling to find their voices. Because of her, and the events that the society supports in her name, that spirit truly lives on, and that is why I owe my career to Sandoz, and my home in the pines not too far from where her own journey began.

– Matt Evertson



The “In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz” award honors individuals and organizations who have given significant service to the Society; who have contributed to the mission of the Society; who have through a variety of means, demonstrated appreciation for Mari Sandoz’ work; and who have significantly contributed to promoting the understanding of Nebraska history and literature, through writing, teaching, elected office and other means of public advocacy. Anyone may submit nominees to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society for this honor. For more information or to nominate a candidate for this honor, please contact the Society at [info@marisandoz.org](mailto:info@marisandoz.org)

## 2022 Sandoz Symposium continued...

The Pilster Lecture will be held at the Student Center on Thursday night, September 28. The symposium begins Friday September 29 at 8:30 a.m. Mountain Time at the Sandoz Center. A Saturday morning session may also be held at the Bean Broker Café in downtown Chadron. Details on that will be available later.

Discussions begin with opening remarks by current Sandoz Board chair Shannon Smith of Gordon. Three morning sessions will follow with Donovan Sprague of Sheridan, Wyoming, talking on Native Americans cultural and history preservation. Board member Broc Anderson of Kearney will chair a panel discussion on Preserving Local History in Sandoz Country. A panel discussion led by Chadron State

College English faculty members will deal with literature and writing on the High Plains will round out the morning.

Tony Malmberg of Union, Oregon, will discuss his personal ranching history and advocacy of holistic grassland management during a luncheon at the Student Center. Afternoon sessions at the High Plains Center will investigate the climate, land, water, flora and fauna of the past, present and future on the High Plains.

**Watch for registration and lodging information coming soon on our website [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org), in your email, and in the summer newsletter.**

## District Winners Picked in National History Day at Chadron State College, Two Prizes Awarded by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society



Two \$50 prizes were awarded by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society to winners in the annual Nebraska Western District National History Day contest at Chadron State College. Project Coordinator Kate Pope, said participating schools were Chadron Middle School, Chadron High School, Crawford Elementary School, and Crawford High School.

This year's theme was Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas. Categories include performance, exhibits, websites, documentary, and research paper. The students conduct research on historical events and their projects are entered into contests at the district level where top student entries advance to the State Contest. Top ranking state contestants' projects advance to the National Contest held at the University of Maryland at College Park, Pope said.



In the Senior Division in Chadron, the winner was Alexa Tollman for a documentary entitled: "The REA: An Innovative Frontier that Conquered the Darkness." Junior Division winners were Teague Edelman and Joe Lambert for a website -- "Agriculture: A New Frontier." The topic was cattle ranching.

These district winners advanced to the state History Day contest held in Lincoln at Nebraska Wesleyan University on April 1. For more information about Nebraska History Day visit: <https://www.nebraskanhd.org/>

*National History Day Nebraska Western District contest winners. Photo credit: Tena Cook, CSC*

## Sandoz Scholar Committee Accepting Proposals

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society encourages research on Mari Sandoz and her work by offering an annual research award of \$1,000 for proposals that emphasize new insights on Sandoz or new approaches to her life and work. Topics to consider include: feminism; American Indian topics; environmental issues; activism. The award recipient will present the research the following year at the Mari Sandoz Symposium held annually during the fall. Applications are accepted from August 1 of the current year to July 31 of the following year. The deadline for applications is by midnight on July 31. Applicants will be contacted by September 1 regarding the status of their applications. The award winner will be announced publicly current Mari Sandoz Symposium to be held this fall at Chadron State College in Chadron, NE.

Please share this information and opportunity with potential scholar candidates and if you have any questions, please contact the Mari Sandoz Research Award Committee Chair, Dr. Jillian Wenburg at [jl@jillianwenburg.com](mailto:jl@jillianwenburg.com)

## Heartfelt Tributes to Ron Hull

“We are a people with a long history of good and bad, of ups and down. Our history will not be like the wind on the



Buffalo grass because Ron Hull made it, shared it and he will continue to influence all of us. From Rapid City to Washington DC, from Nebraska to Saigon, to China, the Amazon and the Orient Express, and many worldly places, Ron shared his knowledge, his love, his Heart. Great job our friend and good and faithful servant. Naomi

has her man again and we all have wonderful memories and a mission to continue. Love and thanks to Ron’s family for sharing him with us.” - *Dan Kusek*

“I had the pleasure of getting to know Ron through the Society. Most people recognize him as a broadcaster and for his accomplishments in public television, but he was so much more. Ron was kind, generous, encouraging, gracious, energetic and thoughtful. I’ll miss hearing his stories and his encouraging words but am so grateful that I got to know him. He’ll be missed.” – *Courtney Kouba*

“Ron was the first “Nebraska” friend that I made when I arrived in 2006 and soon became one of my best friends. I would encourage anyone who has not read his autobiography, *Backstage*, to take it up. Ron was a good man. A true compliment in any age and especially today.” – *Mike Smith*

“He was unfailing in his kindness.” - *Deb Carpenter-Nolting*

“When we resurrected the Sandoz Society in the 80s, Ron was so kind and generous. A wonderful man, a gift to the state.” - *Emily Levine*

“Ron Hull was one of the greatest people I’ve ever known; our sincerest condolences to his family and all Society members.” - *Kathryn Keller*

“He was wonderful. A one-of-a-kind person who gave freely of his time, attention and stories.” - *Holly Boomer*

“Ron Hull left an incredible legacy for all who were fortunate to know him. Rest in peace, my friend.” -*Dan McGlynn*

“I’m so saddened by this news—been thinking about Ron all day and relishing the hug I got from him last time we met. But also, so inspired by his long and interesting life and legacy. He will be missed, and he will live on through his work.” - *Matt Evertson*

## Support the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society By Joining or Renewing Your Membership!

Thank you for your support! Your membership is important to the Society’s programs and activities. Each dollar helps us preserve and share the important work of Mari Sandoz.

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The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Membership is annual.

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