



the Story Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

McDonald Receives In The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award

Judy McDonald, retired dean of the College of Arts and Letters at Bemidji State University in Minnesota, was presented the "In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award" during the dinner that concluded the combined 2008 Annual Conference of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum at Chadron State College. Presentation of the award was made by Lynn Roper of Lincoln, president of the society.

Judy McDonald was an assistant librarian and an instructor of library science at Chadron State for six years in the late 1960s and early '70s, when the society was organized. She was the society's first executive secretary.

"Judy was the founder of the society, nurtured it, built the first early interest in such an enterprise, and brought me and many others to constitute the board in the early 1970s," said Dr. Ron Hull of Lincoln, long-time president of the society.

McDonald stated, "In a way, the Sandoz Society had its origins in the late 1950s when I saw Mari in action at the Lincoln (NE) City Library. After her death, Caroline Sandoz Pifer (Mari's youngest sister) generously shared biographical information about her for students when I was a librarian at Milford (NE) High School.

"Later, when I was at Chadron State, the Sandoz family gave me

permission for us to start the society in her name," McDonald added.

McDonald recalled that the first activities of the society included publishing a quarterly newsletter and having convocations on May 11, Mari's birthday.

The new organization also sponsored a couple of "Sandoz Country" tours that included visits to the "River Place" south of Hay Springs where much of Mari's first book, "Old Jules," occurs and going east through the Sandhills to the place where Old Jules relocated and planted orchards. Mari Sandoz's grave is at the latter location.

Hull said McDonald also did the research and wrote the script for "Song of the Plains: The Story of Mari Sandoz," a documentary produced in 1976 that featured interviews with all of Mari's siblings who were still living and had Dick Cavett as host and Dorothy McGuire as narrator. Hull said the documentary is still a popular item.

McDonald also interviewed many of Mari's acquaintances, wrote numerous articles about the author and was instrumental in opening a Mari Sandoz Heritage Room on the main floor of the Chadron State College Library. In addition, she helped organize a week-long workshop on



Lynn Roper, president of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society presents the "Spirit" award to Judy McDonald.

the author that was taught by Roger Welsch at Chadron State Park and took the lead in nominating Mari Sandoz for the Nebraska Hall of Fame. Sandoz was inducted into the hall of fame in 1976.

This was McDonald's first visit to western Nebraska since the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center opened at Chadron State College in 2002. Creating interest in such a facility was another of her endeavors while she was the society's executive director. McDonald also used the author as the topic for her doctoral dissertation.

See McDonald's remarks on Page 4.

The StoryCatcher

The "Story Catcher" is the title of a book by Mari Sandoz and it is the title of Helen Winter Stauffer's autobiography 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 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

The Sandoz Society seeks to build an appreciation of Mari Sandoz's body of work, to preserve the literary works and legacy of this premier historian, and to raise funds to support these efforts.

Each year, the Society hosts a conference that celebrates and studies the works of the author.

Additionally, the Society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College. These materials and financial support from the Society's endowments support the College's academic, archival, research, and outreach programs.

Address changes should be mailed to 2301 NW 50th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524.

Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society, fill out and mail the form on the back of this newsletter. For more information, e-mail marisandoz_society@windstream.net, or www.marisandoz.

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*, she was a tireless researcher, a true storyteller, and an artist passionately dedicated to the land.

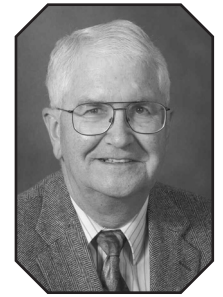
As a historian and as a novelist, Sandoz was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in 1976 and posthumously received the coveted Wrangler Award from the Hall of Great Westerners.

With her vivid stories of the last days of the American frontier she has achieved a secure place as one of the finest authors in American literature and one of Nebraska's most important writers.

New Board Members Join the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

CON MARSHALL

Con Marshall has a long association with Chadron State College. He graduated from the college in 1963. After working as a news reporter for the Chadron Record and Scottsbluff Star-Herald a total of six years, he became the college's director of information and sports information director on July 1, 1969.



He left the college for two years in the mid-1970s to become editor of the Sidney Telegraph and then the Chadron Record, but returned to his former position at CSC in 1978. He began a phased retirement in July 2007, but remains on the staff to help with special assignments and historical projects.

While Marshall is perhaps best known as a sportswriter and sports historian, he has a deep appreciation for the history and legacy of western Nebraska, where he has lived all of his life. One of his earliest memories is of his father and a great uncle discussing the incident in Old Jules in which Sandoz shot off a part of his hand after it was bitten by a rattlesnake. They thought that must have taken a lot of courage and wondered if it was true. They concluded it must have been or it wouldn't have been printed.

Marshall has attended a majority of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society conferences at CSC the past two decades. His archives contain a couple of thick files pertaining to Mari Sandoz, the society's endeavors and the interest they have sparked in the High Plains and its people.

In 2002, he wrote numerous stories about the long-awaited development and opening of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center on the CSC campus. The opening was definitely "a dream come true."

Marshall's wife Peggy helps prepare elementary education teachers at Chadron State. They have three adult children and seven grandchildren.

KATHERINE BAHR

Kathy Bahr serves as a full professor of English at Chadron State College where she teaches English literature, composition and ethics. Both her Ph.D. and bachelor's degrees are from the University of Georgia in Athens and her master's degree is from Valdosta State University with an emphasis in American literature.



After moving to Chadron, Bahr wanted to know more about Mari Sandoz, so she attended some of the Sandoz Society meetings and made a presentation at the 2006 conference entitled "Collateral Damage: Domestic Violence in The Tom-Walker." So Bahr was pleased and honored when she was approached about serving on the board this spring.

"I know relatively little about the workings of the Society, and I am no expert on the author herself, but the members of the group are thoroughly engaging and diverse, and I look forward to getting to know them as well as the business of the board," she said.

She finds Mari Sandoz's works quite interesting in themselves.

"The literary quality is uneven, but her grasp of this country and its diverse peoples is impressive, as is her sense of how regional events reflect the state of the nation," she said.

At present, Bahr is building on a discussion of veterans and their troubles in *The Tom-Walker* and she is hoping to expand into a more comprehensive study of Mari's pacifism. She finds the knowledge of various society members on these subjects amazing, and she is grateful to have their help to supplement the Sandoz archives.

Mari Should be Remembered and Cherished

On Saturday following the Mari Sandoz Heirtage Society Conference, a few carloads of hardy souls trekked to Mari's grave about 30 miles south of Gordon, Neb.

"Mari Sandoz was buried, as she requested, on the family ranch in the Sandhills, the place she always considered home, no matter where she lived...Halfway up on a hill north of the ranch, her grave faces the southeast, overlooking the orchard, the hay meadows, the farm buildings, and the 'constantly changing tans and mauves of the strange rhythmical hills that crowd away into the hazy horizon.' There one can stop for a little while, admire the prairie flowers, the grasses, and the yuccas, and think of this friend, as the Indians paid respects to their buried chiefs long ago."

Helen Winter Stauffer, Mari Sandoz, Story Catcher of the Plains

You want it to mean something. You want it all to mean something. I am here in the Sandhills at Mari Sandoz's gravesite. The wind is blowing. Yes, there is a little snow in the air, a chill at the fingertips."

I would speak of the immense silence, yet there is a steer nearby sounding a mewling sort of beller. There is the rustle of wind among the grasses and dry prairie plants. There is the schrrr-schrrr-schrrr of my own imagination. And there is the essential silence of the grave.

We are like the wind, here but for the moment, then we are gone. Like a rabbit taken by the hawk. Like the hawk taken by time. Like Old Jules, Mari's father, and the other homesteaders who settled these Sandhills - gone. So soon gone.

One must make his mark. One must claw his message onto the pages of history. This moment should not be forgotten. These people should not be forgotten. Mari should be remembered and cherished. This place, the smell of it, the wind in it, the sense of loss here. This should not be forgotten.

The poet's task is to sing lauds each morning, to sing praise again and again. To hold the small common things of life up for notice, to make them objects of astonishment, to cherish them and commit them to memory, and finally - yes - perhaps to say good-bye.

If I didn't have loss and longing, what would I have to write about? I don't know. I have driven down six miles of dirt track to sit here at Mari's grave and listen to the wind, and I ask myself: why do I do it? What is to be gained? What do I want to take?



This sign marks the turn off from Highway 27 30 miles south of Gordon.



The Mari Sandoz Memorial Drive leads to Mari's grave and the remnants of the Sandoz orchards described in her books.

There is nothing I need. Rather, I feel that this should not be lost, this local moment, the history of this place, our memory of the writer who recorded it, Mari Sandoz. I can only hope that someday some poet will sit at my grave site thanking me for recording my local moments, and that at some day beyond that another poet will sit at his grave site to honor him, and that this line will stretch forever, the line of us grateful for the poets of our local moments.

Wind claws the grey sky. The sun breaks through and then is gone. The least flutter of snow appears and disappears. The sound of the grasses and the immense silence. The emptiness and fullness of everything.

I sit here writing. Wind shakes the car. All I really want to say is: Thank you, Mari.

Copyright (c) 2006, Tom Montag, author of *Curlew: Home and The Idea of the Local*.

In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz

Acceptance speech delivered by Judy McDonald on March 28, 2008.

“The place called the Great Plains spreads southward from the upper Saskatchewan River down to the Rio Grande—a high country, a big country of vast reaches, tremendous streams, and stories of death on the ridges, derring-do in the valleys, and the sweetness and heartbreak of springtime on the prairies.” Read from Love Song to the Plains, p.1. (Second Bison Book printing October, 1967)

“Mari always gets the first word with me.

“In this springtime of the sweetness and heartbreak on the prairies, I accept this award in honor of Mari Sandoz and for the dozens of people who helped start the Sandoz Society, especially the Sandoz

family (Jules, Fritz, Flora, James and particularly Caroline Sandoz Pifer), Lloy Chamberlin, Sybil Berndt, Ron Hull and Kay McCune. I am please to see at least two of the Sandoz family here tonight: Celia Ostrander and David Sandoz.

“I want to acknowledge my cheering section: my sister, Marilyn Palu from Scotia, Neb; Colleen Harvey, a good friend from my CSC (Chadron State College) days; Karen Johnston, a friend and near family member from Cortland, Neb; and my partner, Kay McCune from Bemidji, Minn.

“I am often asked if I knew Mari. In a way I did, from a distance. Our story begins in Lincoln.

“Think back with me to 1958 if you will.

“We are in the old Lincoln city main library. I am 19, working at the circulation desk because I have flunked out of UN-L (University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

“A woman in a pillbox hat with a bun and dressed in a rust-colored suit sails into the library. The women in the reference department, who are ordinarily quite sedate, see her too and rush to meet her.

“It is MARI SANDOZ, I am told, back from New York to do research in Lincoln. Later that day, I sneaked down the back stairs of the library to hear this mysterious woman tell stories to children. I am mesmerized

“Gradually, I used Mari’s teachings, or her writings if you prefer, as a pattern for comprehending changes going on during my lifetime.”

and so are the children.

“Before I go home that night, I check out a copy of Old Jules. But the little black marks on the page, as Mari would say, did not speak to me as Mari the storyteller did in person. Eventually, I am able to grasp the rhythm of her writing and I finish Old Jules as well as the rest of her books, many times over, especially her Great Plains series.

“Flash forward eight years. We are in Milford, Neb. And Mari’s Winter Thunder, Story Catcher and These Were the Sioux are in high demand by junior high students. They need biographical information about her for their book reports, AND THEY NEED IT NOW.

“At that time, not much information was available about Mari. In desper-

tion, or was it a serendipity move, I wrote to Caroline Sandoz Pifer. For some reason, I remembered she was handling Mari’s estate.

“Not very long after that, a big box arrives from Caroline and the kids and I nearly faint at the sight of all the material she has sent.

“By the time I arrive at CSC in 1968, Caroline and I have become pen pals and I am carrying a seed that has been unknowingly planted by Sybil Berndt and Lloy Chamberlin for what has become the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society.

“My thinking about establishing something to honor Mari was influenced by them, Mildred Bennett at the Cather Foundation at Red Cloud, Neb., and, to a lesser extent, the John G. Neihardt Center at Bancroft.

“Clearly, it seemed to me, Mari’s legacy needed to be celebrated in a lively and living way in western Nebraska and what better place than Chadron State College. Thankfully, her family agreed and I made the proposal to Ed Nelson, then CSC president. The Society was born in December 1970 as a part of the CSC Foundation. The first official meeting of what was initially called a committee was in April 1971.

“You may recognize some of the committee members: Ron Hull, Lloy Chamberlin, Wayne Britt, Vance Nelson (the first president of the Nebraska State Historical Society at Fort Robinson), Fritz Wefso, and H. Albert Dale. Caroline was on honorary member as was Wallace Stegner, James Carr and Caroline Bancroft.

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Ron Hull, original member of the Sandoz "committee," interviews Mari Sandoz in 1964.

"Others who deserve mention from those early years are Kay McCune, Ellen and Everett Larson, Dick Loosbrock, Rita King, Ron Weedon, Larry Agenbroad, Larry Tangeman, all from CSC.

"The late Governor J. James Exon and State Senator Leslie Stull showed their support in many ways through the proclamations and their frequent presence at events sponsored by the Society. Margaret Hassebrock and the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission supported our 1972 proposal for an \$893,000 Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man. That sounds pompous and dated now, but, hey, we were enthused.

"One of the events we sponsored in the early days was a public lecture by Loren Eisely, another creative Nebraskan who along with Wright Morris deserves a society, too. I am please to see that you are featuring Wright Morris at next year's conference.

"Students and serious readers often ask me why I have been a Sandoz student for most of my adult life.

I became her student when I realized how much she was teaching me about the ways of life my parents and grandparents and the ones be-

"Clearly, it seemed to me, Mari's legacy needed to be celebrated in a lively and living way in western Nebraska."

fore them had lived on the Plains.

"Reading her inspired me to become more curious about the Middle Loup River that ran through our farm, about the Pawnee who lived near there as early as 1300, and about what was happening on the Plains between then and the 20th century. Above all, I wanted to know about the ongoing causes and consequences of the fierce attachment to the land that is so prevalent in Plains people, myself included.

"More simplistically, I wondered

what historical and long-term dynamics were giving rise to such personal matters as the closing of my high school. How could it be that there was no stopping the loss of the family farms?

"Gradually, I used Mari's teachings, or her writings if you prefer, as a pattern for comprehending changes going on during my lifetime. I came to appreciate more fully the quotation we used of hers in the early days and it pleases me it is still being used today. I continue to learn about the essence of what she meant when she wrote about her own work, 'By understanding this one drop of water, I hope to discover something of the nature of the ocean.'

"Mari Sandoz wrote for a literate, mature public who had a general knowledge or interest in the sciences, music, history and the visual arts. We still need writers like her and the public she wrote for, in spite of the current emphasis on technical specialization. My hope for the Sandoz Society is that it will give rise to public historians like Mari. The Plains hold so many ongoing and challenging stories about the people, the land, and the myths we create.

"I applaud the work the Sandoz Society is doing. It has been a thrill to see accomplishments such as Mari's Prairie created by Lucinda (Mays at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center) and her crew; the archives managed by Ann (Greenia); and the awesome museum facility led by Sara (Polak). "Having this conference in conjunction with horticulturists is something Old Jules and Flora would have enjoyed. You are making the dreams of many of us a reality during our lifetimes.

Thank you."

Northeast Nebraska was First Home to Jules Sandoz

Located in Knox County in Northeast Nebraska, Verdigre was established by Bohemian settlers in the beautiful Verdigris Valley. Verdigre was platted on July 12, 1887 by George Quimby. Some of the first establishments included two saloons, a post office, and a hotel or restaurant.

Among the early settlers was “Old Jules” Sandoz, father of the famous author Mari Sandoz. From her writing, we know before Jules Ami Sandoz came to the United States in 1881, he had been a medical student in Switzerland. At age 22, for various reasons, he decided to emigrate.

He came from a prosperous family in Switzerland, however, because of an argument with his father, he left his native Switzerland and his sweetheart, Rosalie, behind promising to send for her when he settled.

According to C. Barron McIntosh in “One Man’s Sequential Land Alienation on the Great Plains,” the activities of Sandoz described in a slightly fictionalized biography written by his daughter, Mari, gives no information about her father’s route from the east coast to Nebraska.

Barron surmises that his journey by rail probably ended at the terminus of Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad at Running Water, Dakota Territory. Jules would have then ferried across the Missouri River to Niobrara, Nebraska and traveled by road some 12 miles farther south to the Verdigris Creek community where he selected his first homestead.

According to Mari’s account, Sandoz went “as far west as his money permitted, to northeastern Nebraska.” The description implied that the young emigrant was left penniless and far from home, but similar family names in the area and



Old Jules Sandoz’s original cabin is still standing in Northeast Nebraska

even on adjoining claims suggest he was not without family.

McIntosh said Mari’s portrayal of the penniless stranger catches the imagination of the reader to a greater degree than a tale of a Swiss immigrant who arrived at the door of a settler bearing his family name to ask for shelter and advice locating.

“...his beard, and general unkept appearance made him resemble a tramp, many of the children of the early settlers recall being frightened when he approached.”

He filed for his first homestead on the Verdigre Creek in Knox County in northeast Nebraska in June of that year.

A geographical framework shows that the 160-acre homestead filed by Jules shared a common boundary with a homestead filed three months earlier by Camille Sandoz and that Tell H. Sandoz filed on a homestead in an adjacent section in 1883.

Family connections played an important role in the settlement of most central grassland states. Family members clustered in groups or otherwise cooperated in the settlement of a community.

Although there is very little level land in Knox County, Sandoz apparently selected some of the roughest. His decision may have been influenced by the topography of his native land. He established a farm in what was known as Rose Valley, south of the present-day town site.

Early in his third year in Knox County, Sandoz, still unable to convince his Swiss sweetheart to emigrate, married a local woman, Estelle or Stella Thompson.

However, Sandoz’s cultural background made it difficult for him to tolerate a woman who could barely read or write.

Paradoxically, there were many doubts about Jules’s character among the towns people in Verdigre.

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Endowment Donors Support Conference

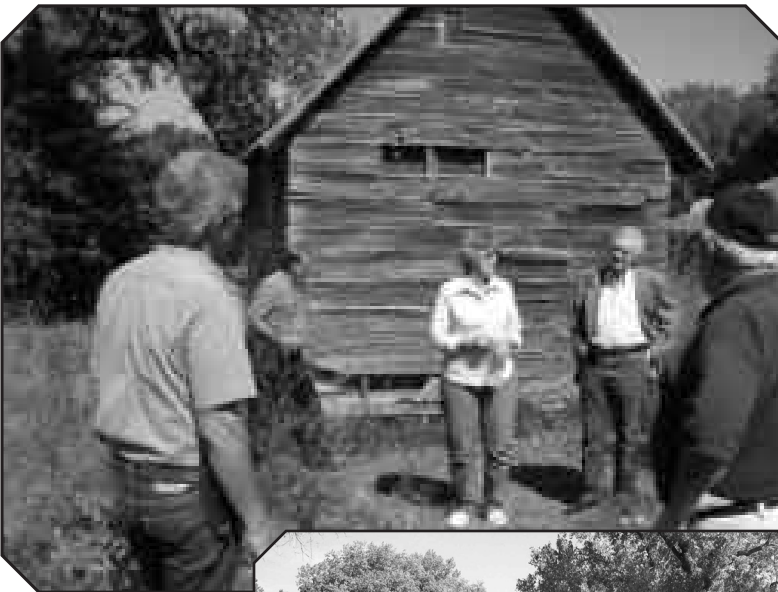
Two endowments provided critical financial assistance that enabled the Society to offer outstanding seminars and speakers at its 2008 Annual Conference.

More than \$6,000 in underwriting support came from The Esther & Raleigh Pilster Fund, established by Esther Pilster of Omaha, in memory of her late husband, Raleigh, and father-in-law, John. Sales proceeds from her gift of Dawes County ranch land in 2005 and 2006 created the fund principal, which is invested, with earnings to be used to provide perpetual support for Sandoz Center activities. Approximately \$30,000 has been available for distribution this year.

Since 1991, The DeMarco Conference Speaker Endowment has provided about \$1,000 per year to underwrite the event's keynote speaker. Dr. Peter and Loreta DeMarco of Springview, Neb. made their gift in memory of Dr. DeMarco's uncle, Romano O. DeMarco, an Italian immigrant who enjoyed reading books written by Mari Sandoz. Nearly \$1,300 from the endowment was used toward the honorarium for the 2008 Annual Conference keynote speaker, Roger Swain, who for 15 years served as host of the PBS program entitled "The Victory Garden."

Helen Winter Stauffer of Kearney, Neb., author of *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains*, recently established an endowment that will begin supporting the annual conference in 2009.

Philanthropy can provide a meaningful way to memorialize a loved one or perpetuate a family name while simultaneously enhancing the Sandoz Center experience for future visitors. For information about how to make a current or deferred endowed gift arrangement, please contact the Society's director of development, Jeanne Bishop, at 402-421-7736 or hjbishop@alltel.net.



Local Sheriff Dean Vavernik (top left) talks to the Sandoz Heritage Society Board about Old Jules' first cabin still stands on Ted Lapes's property in the Verdigre area.



It is said that, "Because his old straw hat with a shredded brim, his beard, and general unkept appearance made him resemble a tramp, many of the children of the early settlers recall being frightened when he approached."

Seven months after his marriage, Old Jules left Knox County for good. With his books, stamps, and Vetterli rifle in a wagon, Sandoz left his wife and headed westward to Valentine.

According to Helen Winter Stauffer in *Mari Sandoz Story Catcher of the Plains*, "One day in early spring of 1884, after throwing their sugar and flour to his pigs in a temper, he left the tiny cabin, taking the forty dollars he had received for the relinquishment of his claim. With two horses and a wagon he headed west once more, alone, following the Niobrara River..."

After obtaining maps of the newly surveyed Panhandle west of Valentine, Jules, pioneer, locator, and horticulturalist, came to western Nebraska making his way along the Running Water (Niobrara River) to Sheridan County. The picturesque valley attracted him, and the dark soil along the Niobrara promised to be good farmland. "The hills gave way and before him was the silver ribbon of the Niobrara, the wooded slopes barely tinged with the palest green, topped by the yellowish sandstone bluffs." (Mari Sandoz "Old Jules")

Estelle/Stella had a son shortly after Sandoz' departure that she claimed was his. Mother and son reportedly visited Sandoz at least once at his homestead in Sheridan County.

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