

The Story Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Display Brings Mari Sandoz's Closet Alive

Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center Director Sarah Polak and Intern Rachael Roath have been sifting through Mari Sandoz's proverbial closet to create an exhibit entitled, "7th Avenue: The Designer Clothing of Mari Sandoz." The exhibit opens May 1, 2010.

Mari Sandoz often walked New York City's 7th Avenue, also known as Fashion Avenue, from her nearby apartment in the West Village to some of her favorite stores such as Macy's and Lord & Taylor.

Perhaps as her success grew, Mari became interested in high fashion as a way to distance herself from the impoverishment of the past.

In his article, "The Enduring Mari Sandoz," David L. Bristow said, "For over a decade while Sandoz was living in Lincoln, she filled a scrapbook with rejection letters from magazines and book publishers. She was poor, staying just above starvation—and not always by much. She looked painfully thin and unhealthy. She wore old clothes, mismatched and threadbare. Her friends suspected that she lived on the tea, sugar and crackers that were freely available in the university dining

hall."

To begin the project, Roath, a Chadron State College senior, selected 10 different looks from Mari's collection of clothing in the archives at the center, measuring the garments and then beginning the search for Mari's size double. After two months, Tammi Schoepner of Chadron was selected as someone with measurements similar to Sandoz.

"I have always been very petite," Schoepner said. "I knew that Mari Sandoz was as well. I just didn't know that we were the same size."

After casting Schoepner in plaster, Dr. Kevin Miller, Industrial Technology instructor at Chadron State and Brianna Leesch, a student volunteer, created the stands and armatures, refined the mold and physically created mannequins for the show.

While the mannequins were under construction, Roath looked through the center's archives for documents pertaining to the clothes and



Intern Rachael Roath plaster casts body double Tammi Schoepner for the display of Mari Sandoz's designer clothes at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

photographs of Sandoz to support the exhibit.

The thing she enjoyed the most, Roath, said was looking through the letters because she got a sense of the real Sandoz and the type of character she embodied.

This exhibit of Sandoz's clothing from the center's Pifer Collection includes documents and photographs that will give visitors a look inside the wardrobe and Sandoz's life during her years in New York City. *Continued on Page 5*

The StoryCatcher

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 StoryCatcher is published four times a year by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit 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 and related topics.

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.

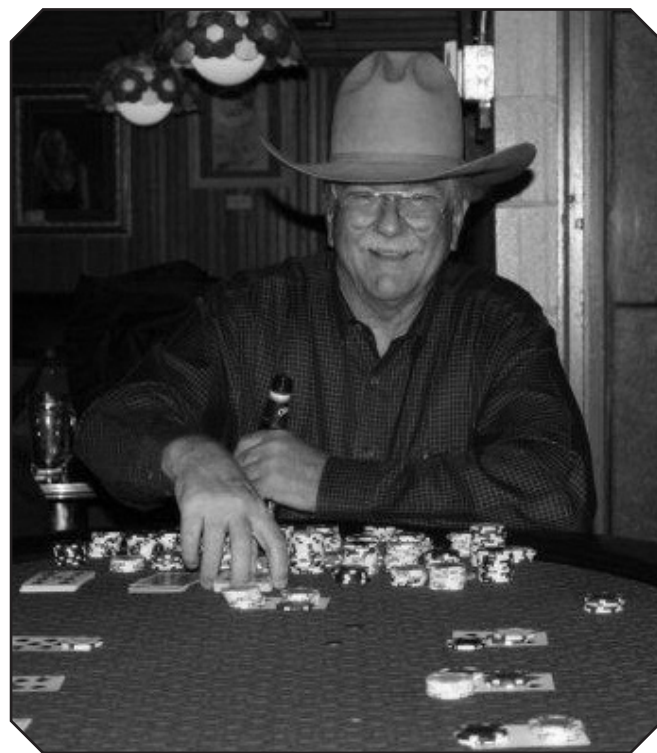
With her vivid stories of the last days of the American frontier she has achieved a secure place as one of the finest authors in American literature and one of Nebraska's most important writers.

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.

2010 Sandoz Society Conference



An etching of artist Robert Henri was displayed during the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society's conference. It belongs to the Henri Museum in Cozad. Holding the artwork, (from left) are Jan Patterson, the museum director; Jane Rohman, a museum benefactor and board member, her husband Ky and Ron Hull, president emeritus of the Sandoz Society. Both Patterson and Jane Rohman spoke on Henri and the museum.



Bob Reich, husband of Sandoz Board member, Christy Chamberlin, was the Faro dealer for the Gaming Contest held following the conference banquet.

Faro, one of the oldest gambling games played with cards, was invented in Europe in the 1700's. It was the game at which the young Count Rostov, in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, lost a fortune and at which John J. Cozad made most of his. Introduced to America in 1803, by all accounts, faro was the most popular and celebrated saloon game in the Old West from 1825 through 1915. By 1925, it had all but vanished, in favor of craps and roulette.

Sandoz Society Honors Diane Quantic

Diane D. Quantic, Ph.D., a long-time admirer of Mari Sandoz and an active participant in the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society received the In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award during the society's annual conference banquet at Chadron State College on March 26.

"Diane is a most worthy recipient of this award," said Lynn Roper, president of the Sandoz Society. "She's a Sandoz scholar, is devoted to Mari's books and is a great admirer of the people who settled in the High Plains. She also has given great support to the Sandoz Society with both her time and money. It is a pleasure to recognize her."

Quantic was working on her doctorate at Kansas State University in the mid-1960s when she was introduced to Mari Sandoz's work.

"I was helping Dr. Wayne Rohrer, who was a sociologist, with a study he was conducting on life in the Great Plains," Quantic said. "He had read *Old Jules*, and was enthralled with it because he thought it told a lot about the homesteaders' lives. He urged me to read it and I did. I became a Mari Sandoz fan immediately. I have been reading and using her work ever since."

Quantic recalls becoming involved in the Sandoz Society in the early 1970s while she was attending a Western literature conference in Lincoln and Ron Hull, long-time leader in the Sandoz Society, invited her to attend a meeting of those with a special interest in the author's work. She has been

a member of the society ever since and was the vice president for several years.

In 2001, Quantic helped the Sandoz Society with a writer's workshop, the annual conference and the building campaign for the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.



Diane Quantic holds the crystal trophy she received as the recipient of the In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award during the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society conference at Chadron State College. With her are her husband, Bruce Quantic, and Lynn Roper of Lincoln, the society president.

At the same time, she happened to be taking a leave of absence from Wichita State in 2001 spending the spring semester at Chadron State College to "soak up" the area and the legacy of Mari Sandoz.

"I love this part of the country," Quantic said. "It is so open and refreshing. I had a great time at Chadron State. They gave me an office, a computer and a place to stay. I did lots of studying and learned much about that area."

The Sandoz Young Writer's conferences began in the late 1990s under the direction of Andrew Elkins. When Elkins moved to Peru State in 2001, Quantic helped

arrange the writing workshop with then high school teacher Susan Vastine and consultants Deb Carpenter and Lyn DeNayer who were area writers and workshop leaders. Quantic had previously planned summer workshops for high school writers and English teachers at Wichita State.

She organized the 2001 Sandoz Heritage Society conference. Following the conference, Highway 27 between Gordon and Ellsworth was dedicated the "Mari Sandoz Sandhills Trail." The highway runs through the area where Jules Sandoz moved in 1910 and where he started his orchards and Mari is buried. Quantic also coordinated the conference in 2002.

That was an exciting time for the society because a \$2 million fund-raising campaign had just been

completed and construction was beginning on the Mari Sandoz Center at Chadron State.

Quantic served on the joint committee of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and Chadron State College representatives who drew up the agreement between the society and the college for the center, which opened in September 2002.

"I have especially enjoyed working with members of the Sandoz Society board of directors and getting to know so many other great people who share a love for the region and for Mari Sandoz, she said.

Continued on Page 4

Diane Quantic (cont.)

“These are people I admire immensely.”

Quantic said she was honored to be in the same company with previous award recipients like T.R. Hughes.

Professor, Writer and Speaker

Most recently, Quantic was an English professor teaching American Literature with emphasis on Great Plains and Western America literature and history at Wichita State University from 1973 until retiring in 2007.

During her tenure, she was the writing program director and director of graduate studies for the English Department at the university. Before going to Wichita State, she had taught at Alameda High School in Lakewood, Colo., and at the University of Northern Colorado.

Quantic’s book, *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction*, won the Society of Midland Author’s Award for Nonfiction in 1995. She also edited *A Great Plains Reader* while working with P. Jane Hafen of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, an authority on Plains Indians. Both books were published by the University of Nebraska Press.

She has been a member of the Kansas Humanities Council Speakers Bureau since 1988, leading discussions in many communities across the state on books that pertain to the Great Plains. Also, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Bulgaria in 1986-87 and was president of the Western Literature Association in 1993.

Her husband, Bruce, was an education professor at Friends University in Wichita, and has accompanied her to many Sandoz events as well. *From an article by Con Marshall.* ✨

Bad Heart Bull’s Art Influenced Sandoz

By Con Marshall

Fort Robinson and Crawford played a role in a fascinating pictorial history of Native American life, according to Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference speaker, Kimberli Lee.

Lee, a history professor at Michigan State University and member of Mari Sandoz Society Board, discussed how the art work of Amos Bad Heart Bull was finally printed in 1967 as a result of lobbying by author Mari Sandoz.

Bad Heart Bull was a Lakota youth, 8 or 9 years old, when he witnessed the 1876 Battle of the Little Big Horn in southeastern Montana. He was an enlisted scout for the Army at Fort Robinson in the 1890s and, during that time, purchased a used ledger from a clothing dealer in Crawford.

Using the ledger, Bad Heart Bull made 415 drawings over the next two decades, illustrating the civic, religious, social and military life of the Oglala people. He did the work with red and black ink, indelible pencils and a few crayons.

Lee said that Sandoz and Helen Blish became friends while both were students at the University of Nebraska in the 1920s. Blish, whose father had worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs when she was young, wrote her master’s thesis on Bad Heart Bull’s art.

It wasn’t easy for Blish to obtain Bad Heart Bull’s original work. After he had died in 1913, the ledger became the property of his sister, Dolly Pretty Cloud, who lived on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Pretty Cloud allowed Blish to lease the material from time to time. That was when Sandoz first saw the drawings and Blish’s professor, Hartley Burr Alexander, had the work photographed.

In 1934, she submitted a three-volume report that included photographic copies of the art work to the Carnegie Institution.

Blish died in 1941. When Pretty Cloud died in 1947, her brother’s work was buried with her. However, Sandoz did not forget what she had seen.

Lee’s research indicates that beginning in the late 1940s, Sandoz wrote to several publishers that a book of Bad Heart Bull’s work should be printed. Finally, in 1960, the University of Nebraska Press agreed to publish Blish’s book. Sandoz applauded the action and wrote the introduction.

Sandoz died in 1966, a year before Blish’s work, titled, *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*, came off the presses.

It is surmised that Sandoz used Bad Heart Bull’s life and artwork to build the main character for her 1963 novel, *The Story Catcher*, about a young Indian boy who painted the history of his people.

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Display Brings Sandoz's Closet Alive (cont.)

The exhibit focuses on Sandoz's high fashion collection – mostly suits, party dresses, shoes and hats, which came from Macys, Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord & Taylor.

Many of the designer outfits have alterations Sandoz made to make them fit the way she wanted. In the center of this display is a strapless gown that Mari made herself.

Her accessories show the complete thought that went into her outfits, Roath said.

"I love her hats and envy how many gloves, scarves, and shoes she had," she said. "I think she was more feminine than portrayed and that women, especially western novelists, were stereotyped. Her fashion sense is an aspect of Mari that most people would not have guessed. People think of her as an author, not a fashionista."

The exhibit features an old chair and side table from Mari's New York apartment with her green sewing box atop the table.

Also on display is her treadle sewing machine. There is a text panel with a quote from *The Beavermen*, where Mari remembers first using the machine.

Roath's internship is paid through the Lindeken Internship Fund endowment held by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. She said she has learned how much work it is to put together an exhibit. It is not just installing, it is designing, measuring, creating, researching and typing.

The Pifer Collection at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center includes many of Sandoz's personal items that demonstrate both her personality and her



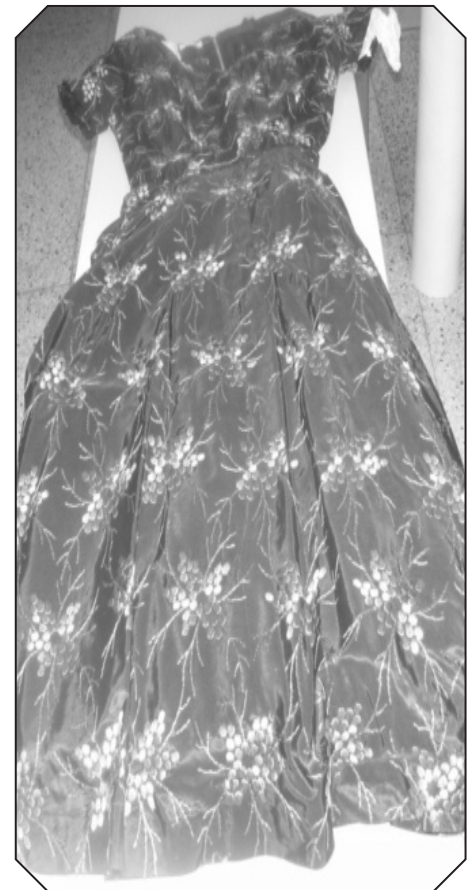
A check to Lord & Taylor from Mari Sandoz. The notation says "dresses for autographing."

Excerpt from a March 1956 letter Mari wrote: *I have always been interested in high fashion with a creative tinge. At twelve I was cutting out dresses for myself and my mother, shirts and trousers for the boys and even father without a pattern. If I must leave the home community, mother thought, then I should take up dress designing. This is not unnatural from our west. After all, our cowboy and our Indians are the finest figures of real originality and style. I grew up around the cowboy and the very style-conscious Sioux.*

Excerpt from a June 1956 letter to Mari from her sister, Flora: *I was reminded of the year I spent in Lincoln and how every few evenings you'd get out the sewing kit and make "something nice" out of that meager wardrobe. The garment always looked nice when you finished tho (sic) still showing its poverty stricken beginning.*

passion.

Besides manuscripts, short stories, essays and correspondence, there is also furniture from Mari's New York apartment, personal effects, Native American artwork, dishes, collectibles, books and photos.



A party dress that belonged to Mari Sandoz will be displayed on a mannequin.

The exhibit, 7th Avenue: The Designer Clothing of Mari Sandoz runs from May 1 to August 31 at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron, Neb. For more information, contact Sarah Polak: 1-800-CHADRON or spolak@csc.edu.✂

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Michael Linton

Mari Sandoz has been a member of my family longer than I have, or at least her books have. Split by divided loyalties in the Civil War, my mother's people left Tennessee for Illinois, then Oklahoma and eventually South Dakota around Oelrichs and the high county of western Nebraska.

There my grandparents raised my mother and her four older sisters on a series of farms homesteaded, bought or rented.

Although one generation removed from the life Mari described up in Sheridan County, the physical realities of my mother's youth was in many ways like hers: the droughts, the floods, the squinted looks at the clouds hoping for rain but getting hail, a wind that begins down in Estes and rolls northeast up across the plains, and the deaths that come fast and unexpected.

Mom and my aunts read *Old Jules* soon after it was published and in the late 1930's Mom taught in a school in Banner County with one of Mari's cousins and learned that not all the Sandoz family shared my family's enthusiasm for her literature.

Ambition took my mother to California where she married my father, an Ohio farm boy back from fighting in Japan.

They started their family there and although my dad's business relocated us across the country, as many summers as we could we came back to Nebraska and the

Sioux County ranch where my cousins remained.

Those prairies and the mountains that marked the western horizon became my home.

My brother and I fought—we were brothers, of course.

To maintain discipline, with the hope of peace, mom would read to us after dinner. The *Bible*, of course, but also *Pilgrim's Progress* and *To Kill A Mocking Bird* and *My Antonia*, but *Old Jules* was my favorite.

Mom would interrupt Mari's story with ones of her own: my grandma's ride through Upton Wyoming chasing rustlers who had made off with my grandpa's horses, the Fourth of July she spent with her South Dakota relatives at a Sun Dance with the Sioux at Pine Ridge.

And when she returned 10 years later to search for them after a flash flood had ripped through Oelrichs (she found their bodies in the cottonwoods), the summer they existed on lettuce—stories that wove a counterpoint to Mari's and made both more vivid.

Cheyne Autumn followed, and *Old Jules*, this time I could read it on my own. Then *Crazy Horse*. In college, when I was homesick for those open skies, I would pick up *Love*



Music professor Mike Linton thinks of himself as a Western artist and sees the High Plains as home.

Song to the Plains, Slogum House, Miss Morissa, The Beaver Men.

There was a cadence in her writing that matched the sound of lovegrass crunching under your boot and the grit of dust in your teeth, the heat of the sun and the coolness of the air. Other writers wrote about the West, Sandoz wrote of the West.

Later, when I was working on my doctorate at New York University, I would walk by the brownstone where Sandoz wrote so many of those works and for a little while the prairies didn't seem so far.

I'm a composer, and all of us who think of ourselves as Western artists of any type do well to look to Sandoz as our model for an artist committed to telling the story of the deeply beautiful land and the people who love it. She is certainly mine.

Michael Linton is a member of the Mari Sandoz Society and a professor/coordinator of theory and composition at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Linton writes on issues of contemporary music and culture for The Wall Street Journal and he has twice been a fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities and was awarded MTSU's faculty award for excellence in creative work. He has several CDs of his work and some of Linton's shorter works can be heard on YouTube. ❀

Email your story about how you discovered Mari Sandoz, to marisandoz_society@windstream.net.

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Linda Hasselstrom

No doubt it was my father who introduced me to Mari Sandoz, maybe by handing me a copy of *Old Jules* without realizing his resemblance to the title character. I clearly recall shivering because I recognized her home place; I knew the hills and plants and coyotes and buzzards and people who were the subjects of her fiction and nonfiction because they so closely resembled the inhabitants of the western Dakota prairie ranch where I lived.

At 5 years of age, I'd gotten a library pass and begun reading books, but that was my first realization that someone like her – someone like me – might write them.

Studying Western history and literature in college, I asked why her work wasn't included and only then realized that almost no women appeared as authorities in those studies. The writing lords of the same era were always men: A. B. Guthrie, Walter Van Tilburg Clark and Stanley Vestal. I found their views narrower than Mari's, their writing competent but less stimulating.

Older, I learned to relish Sandoz' careful research and historical accuracy, even in her fiction. More important to me was her deeply personal knowledge of the grasslands, and her demonstration that in understanding a small community, one may learn and relate important universal truths. Likewise, she prepared me for being treated as several minorities – as a woman, a westerner, a

grasslands resident and a rancher – by publishers.

When I began writing about my own life on the prairie, my father ferociously objected, and even quoted Old Jules, insisting that writers and artists are the “maggots of society.” But Sandoz hadn't quit writing, so I didn't either.



Linda Hasselstrom is digging up horsetail from a pasture road to transplant in her garden at home. Her home is near Hermosa, S.D. along Battle Creek.

Additionally, Sandoz fought for respect as an expert in information unknown to many editors, publishers and readers. She was an authority on homesteading the Nebraska plains because she'd lived it.

So I've had to defend my knowledge as a working rancher to editors who have never set foot on prairie grass, never met a cow, never hefted a firearm. In both cases, editors felt free to contradict knowledge we gained from direct and sometimes painful experience.

When I read Mari's collected letters, I kept saying, “Yes!” in agreement with her answers to readers who disagreed with her, lectured her and asked her for help. When my

pile of mail threatens to bury me in a paper avalanche, I quote her: “I either answer letters or write books—never both.”

Yet Mari wrote hundreds of letters, offering friendship and encouragement to other writers and perhaps gaining validation of her work and relief from the solitude of writing. I've tried to emulate her generosity as well, helping other writers, especially those in the very minorities where Mari and I found our writing selves.

By the time I read *Crazy Horse*, I'd had my own strange experiences while researching the strange man of the Oglalas; and at the Custer battle site, I'd argued with authorities who at that time refused to stock her book *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*.

When Mari Sandoz died in 1966, I sat at a desk in a newspaper office and cried. I'd always fantasized that I might meet her, tell her directly that she was the only writer I'd found able to convey my feelings about the Great Plains and its people.

Still, though I never heard her voice, I have continued to learn from her, from her writing, her research, her letters, and most of all, her spirit.

Linda M. Hasselstrom is a writer who lives in Hermosa, S.D. On her ranch, she conducts writing retreats and hosts the Great Plains Native Plant Society's botanic garden. Her writing—thirteen books in print—reflects more than fifty years of ranching with concern for plains wildlife, plants, and people; her latest book is “No Place Like Home”. ❀

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