

Mari Sandoz

HERITAGE

Chadron, Nebraska

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SANDOZ COUNTRY TOUR

Mari Sandoz' quarrels with editors and publishers are fairly common knowledge, but the details are not as widely known. The source of much of this antagonism on Mari's part arose from the fact that her craftsmanship and, on occasion, what she regarded as her literary integrity, were questioned. *Old Jules*, her first published full-length book, was issued in 1935, but as early as 1928 she was dubious about the judgment of editors. During her pre-book publication days, Mari focused most of her creative effort on short stories and articles that could be sold for general periodical publication. Almost without exception she used the Nebraska Sandhills as the setting for her writings, but in 1928 she informed an editor at *Harper's Magazine* that she was abandoning the fascinations of the Sandhills because, as one editor had put it, the locale sounded "made." Acknowledging the fact that she had spent twenty of her thirty-two years in the Sandhills, Mari went on to say that "perhaps one can write more convincingly of the less familiar, and less loved." ¹ Later she was to refute this latter statement in the advice she gave to novices, as she told them she believed "that the creative worker must not wander too far from the earth of his emotional identity". ²

The Sandhills of Nebraska were very much a part of Mari Sandoz, and by 1928 she had had considerable experience in defending her description of them. Dorothy Nott Switzer vividly remembers a time in 1927 when she and Mari were enrolled in a magazine writing class together at the University of Nebraska under Professor Sherlock Gass. Mrs. Switzer recalls that Mari's writing was consistently singled out by Professor Gass and ruthlessly criticized. Mari endured the criticism, Mrs. Switzer says, because she was willing to admit that she had alot to learn for she realized that she had to catch up for many lost years, but toward the end of the semester Mari could no longer tolerate Professor Gass' charge that her description of the Sandhills was unrealistic. Mari rose from her seat and emotionally protested that he was mistaken:

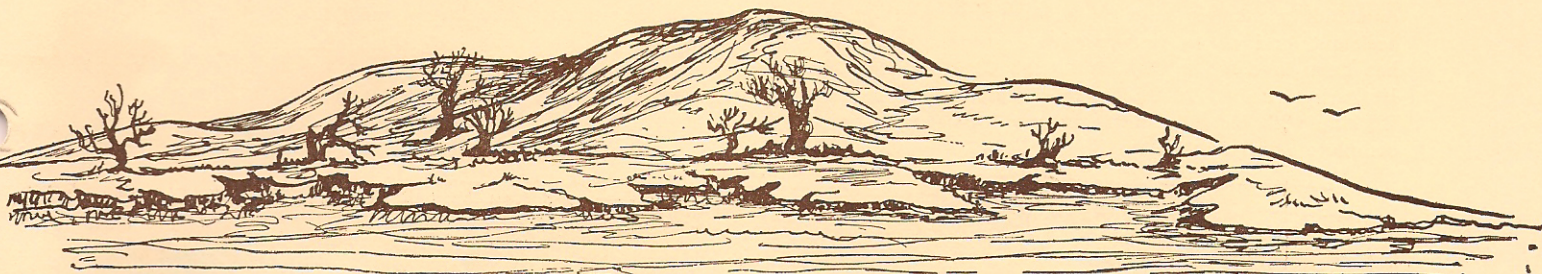
I grew up in the Sand Hills. I know them at every hour of the day and night, and at every season of the year. I have hunted for lost cattle when the Sand Hills were drifted and encrusted with winter snows. I have seen those same hills carpeted with bright flowers after spring rains. I know them when the first soft breeze whispers through them at summer daybreak and I know them lashed by hail and the whistle of cyclonic winds. I know the Sand Hills under the searing midday sun; I know them as intimately as I know the fingers of my hands. ³

The first soft breeze of summer daybreak will be whispering through the Nebraska Sandhills when the Sandoz Country Tour begins on June 29, 1974.

You are invited to join in the car caravan tour of Sandoz Country that will have *Old Jules* as its' central theme. Caroline Sandoz Pifer will serve as the tour narrator. Most of the sites visited during the first day of the 1972 tour will be repeated this year. The main differences between this year's tour and the one held in 1972 are that it will be limited to one day and at least two additional sites will be added on Mirage Flats.

The tour is scheduled to begin with registration and coffee at the Gordon Methodist Church from 8:00-9:00 a.m. on June 29. Sandoz books will also be available for purchase during the one hour of registration. A 9:00 a.m. departure from Gordon will lead to a 10:00 a.m. arrival at the Mari Sandoz historical marker, erected by the Nebraska State Historical Society. The car caravan will arrive at Mari's grave at 11:00 a.m., and from there will move to the Sandoz Fruit Farm (also called the Hill Place) which is owned and operated by Flora Sandoz, for a bring your own lunch stop. The Sandoz family will provide cold drinks for the lunch break. The Smith Lake 4-H Club will also have souvenir items on sale during this stop.

A 12:30 p.m. departure from the fruit farm will lead to an afternoon of visits to sites



"By understanding this one drop of water, I hope to discover something of the nature of the ocean."

in the Pine Creek and Mirage Flats areas. This will include stops at the Swiss Beguin Cemetery, the River Place, and the site where Jules broke his ankle in the well incident. The River Place, now owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Letcher, is where the six children of Jules and Mary Sandoz were born. The Sandoz Society is also attempting to make arrangements for stops at Alkali Lake, home of the mythical sea monster; Box Butte; and the site of the first Mirage Flats irrigation project, on land owned by William E. Colwell.

Tentative plans are to arrive at Camp Norwesca, near Chadron State Park, for a 6:30 p.m. western style cookout prepared by Don Berlie of Chadron. Reservations will be needed for the cookout. Ron Hull, program manager of the Nebraska Educational Television Network, will give the after-dinner address. Dr. Hull came to know Mari during the time she was giving television lectures on creative writing. He corresponded with Mari over a period of years and the friendship that developed has enabled Dr. Hull to view Mari Sandoz both as an individual personality and as a writer. He has been selected to present a paper on Mari at the annual Western Writers conference which will be held concurrently with the Western History Association meeting in Rapid City in October.

Participants will also have an opportunity to purchase hand crafted God's eyes, an ancient folk art, made by the United Students Club at Chadron State College during this final stop on the Sandoz Country Tour. Send your reservations for the cookout to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society before Thursday, June 27. The cost of this very full day, including one meal, and a registration fee is five dollars per person. **MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS FOR THE COOKOUT EARLY.**

NOTES

- 1 Letter from Mari Sandoz to Frederic Allen, October 1, 1928, in Mari Sandoz Corporation Papers, Gordon, Nebraska.
- 2 Mari Sandoz, "Keeping Posted," *The Saturday Evening Post* 211 (March 4, 1939), p. 88.
- 3 Dorothy Nott Switzer, "Mari Sandoz's Lincoln Years," *Prairie Schooner* XLV (Summer 1971), p. 110.

MARI SANDOZ SCHOLARSHIP

Each year the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society awards a \$100 scholarship to a Chadron State College student who has demonstrated competence in the academic disciplines or arts; who has manifested a timely appreciation for and understanding of the prehistory, history, and cultural heritage of the High Plains and the Sandhills; and who plans to continue his/her education at Chadron State College the year following the granting of the award. Financial need is not a factor in the selection of the winner. CSC professors Larry Agenbroad, Everett Larson, and Richard Loosbrock serve as the selection committee from the Sandoz Society council. The money for this year's award was donated by Mari's brothers and sisters — Jules, James, Fritz, Flora, and Caroline — who are the directors of the Mari Sandoz Corporation.

The recipient of this year's scholarship is David Ellison Spires of Cheyenne, Wyoming. David is a junior majoring in biology and a member of Beta, Beta, Beta, national biology fraternity. He has distinguished himself in an outstanding manner both as a laboratory and greenhouse assistant, and as an undergraduate student researcher. He has been involved in developing the Chadron State College Herbarium as an instructional resource, and is currently working with his wife and a botany professor to prepare a complete flora distribution of the Pine Ridge and adjacent

areas.

Mrs. Celia Ostrander of Rushville, Mari's niece and the daughter of Jules Sandoz, made the presentation during the program on native grasses given by Jim and Alice Wilson.



Celia Ostrander presents the Mari Sandoz scholarship to David Spires. Ellen Larson painted the original watercolor certificate.

DONORS TO THE SOCIETY

In the last issue of the newsletter your financial contributions were sought to match a \$5,000. grant from the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. It is gratifying to be able to come to you now with a hand extended and not with a hand out. Your generous and quick response to the need has made it possible for the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society to indicate to the Bicentennial Commission that its' grant can be matched. More importantly, you have once more demonstrated that our collective mission of perpetuating the memory of Mari Sandoz in a vital and meaningful way is worthwhile.

The contributions from individuals and organizations have been supplemented by two grants and a great deal of effort on the part of people who believe in what the Society is trying to accomplish. An example of this effort was very much in evidence in groups such as the Chadron Welcome Wagon Newcomers Club. This organization presented a spring style show "Touring the Panhandle" in honor of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The proceeds from the style show were donated to the Sandoz Society's fund raising drive. In presenting the style show, the Chadron Newcomers Club received willing cooperation from Chadron merchants, organizations, and townspeople. By pointing out area historical sites, the Chadron Newcomers Club contributed to an understanding and an appreciation of our past, and that is what the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is all about.

Donations from individuals for the matching money grant were received from: Anonymous, \$100; Herbert Brooks, Alexandria, Va., \$10; Mindy Brooks, Chadron, \$5; William E. Colwell, Chadron, \$100; Theresa Ramig, Gering, \$5; Flora



Sandoz, Ellsworth, \$100; Jules Sandoz, Gordon, \$100; and Allen Shepherd, Chadron, \$5. Donations from organizations were received from: Anonymous, \$65; Chadron branch, American Association of University Women, \$100; Chadron Chamber of Commerce, \$25; Chadron Culture Club, \$100; Chadron Welcome Wagon Newcomers Club, \$100; and Chadron State College Student Personnel Office, \$100. Grants totaling \$2,783.00 were received from the Research Institute and the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. Pledges amounting to \$1,025.00 have been made. As of this writing \$4,722.63 has been received and/or pledged. Although we are slightly under \$300. short of our goal of \$5,000., we expect to generate additional monies through some of the programs that will be sponsored by the Society with this grant.

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society council is pleased to acknowledge the receipt of these gifts.

The Board of Directors of the Mari Sandoz Corporation at Gordon donated \$100. to be used for the 1974 Mari Sandoz scholarship. The directors are Mari's surviving brothers and sisters: Jules and Caroline Pifer of Gordon, Flora and James of Ellsworth and Fritz of Lakeside.

It is proper and fitting to pay a special tribute to the Sandoz family for their cooperation and generous patronage of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. Their participation in events such as the 1972 Sandoz Country Tour and Mari Sandoz Day 1973 has contributed significantly to the public acceptance of the work of the Sandoz Society.

Recent donations of material concerned with Mari Sandoz and the western American environment and archaeology have been added to the growing and diversified collection of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Room. The collection is maintained by the Sandoz Society in cooperation with the Chadron State College library. Norma Carpenter of Lincoln has given the manuscript of an article that Mari wrote on the occasion of Lincoln's centennial observance in 1959, and a printed copy of the same article entitled "I Remember Lincoln — As Our Greenwich Village" which appeared in the May 8, 1959, **Lincoln Evening Journal**. Laverne Harrel Clark of Tucson has donated an autographed copy of an article she wrote "The View From Indian Hill" for the November-December 1972 issue of **Bits and Pieces**. The Carpenter and Clark gifts contain information that add new dimensions to Mari's Nebraska years. Della Eggleston of Scottsbluff has presented a framed literary map of Nebraska which is autographed by Mari. Miss Eggleston believes Nebraska's English teachers prepared the map during the early 1940's. Helen Bixby of Lincoln has donated her 1940-1947 correspondence from Mari, and a 1936 postcard from Dorothy Thomas. Also included in her donation is an autographed copy of a reprint archaeological article by George Metcalf "Additional Data From the Dodd and Phillips Ranch Sites, South Dakota." Metcalf, a Nebraskan, was formerly associated with the U. S. National Museum in Washington, D. C. Jim and Alice Wilson of Polk presented an autographed copy of their book **Grass Land** during their appearance on the Chadron State College campus in connection with Sandoz Society's distinguished person series.

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society council extends its grateful appreciation to these donors, and invites others who have material on Sandoz and/or the American West to make their collections available to the public by either depositing or donating them to the Sandoz Society. All donations are tax-deductible for income tax purposes.

BICENTENNIAL GRANT

Encouraged by the response given to our plea for \$5,000 to match a similar grant from the Bicentennial Commission, your council has moved to implement a three-pronged program that will stay within the limits of a \$10,000 budget. The plans for these programs were explained in the last issue of the newsletter. All are directed toward the preservation, appreciation and understanding of the cultural, historical, and scientific heritage of the High Plains and the Sandhills.

Jim and Alice Wilson of Polk, Nebraska, were the first to appear as part of the distinguished person series. The Wilsons' are authorities on the use of native grasses and have spent the last eighteen years on the Wilson Seed Farm experimenting with the grasses that once grew wild on the Great Plains. Some of the more familiar grasses that they have worked with are buffalo, Indian, big bluestem, switch, and side-oats grama. They believe that certain native grasses are more profitable as forage than the imports because they produce more during the hot months of summer. They point out that imports are popular because they require little patience, but, they claim, natives can produce a good stand within two years, if given the proper care. "Once you get the initial stand," they say, "they'll be there until the next ice age if you don't abuse them."

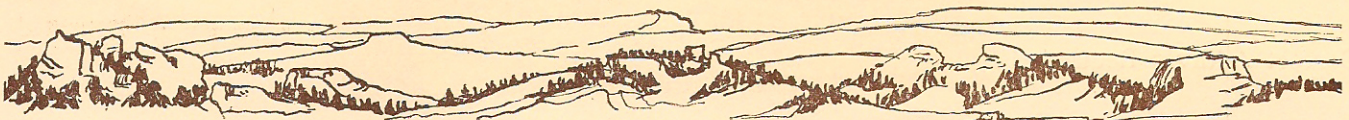
Mr. and Mrs. Wilson appeared on the Chadron State College campus on April 17. During the day they were available to students and faculty, and in the evening they presented their illustrated lecture "Grass, Man, and Beast in the Land of the Wide Skies" for the general public. Their lecture attracted several area ranchers and soil conservationists. They also sold and autographed copies of their book **Grass Land**, a visual "love song" to the virtue and beauty of the original prairie.



Jim Wilson in Indian grass seed production field.

Loren C. Eiseley, internationally known anthropologist and writer, will appear as part of the distinguished person series in late June 1975. Eiseley is currently the Benjamin Franklin Professor of anthropology and the history of science at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the curator of Early Man at the University's museum. Other persons who have agreed to participate in the series include Caroline Sandoz Pifer of Gordon, Lloyd Moore of Lincoln, and Bud Stenger of Imperial.

A high school mini-cultural weekend has been scheduled for July 19-21, 1974, as the second phase of the grant program. Approximately sixty students from seven schools are expected to participate. They will check into the campus dormitories during the late afternoon of the first day, and will spend the remainder of the day participating in art and craft sessions, hiking, and swimming. On the second day they will leave Chadron for visits to Toadstool Park, the Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site, and Fort Robinson. The



final day will feature a trip to that portion of the Sandhills known as Sandoz Country, with stops at the Museum of the Fur Trade and Gordon.

Registrations are coming in now for the graduate level course "Pioneer and Plains Indian Folklore" to be taught by Roger Welsch at Camp Norwesca from August 12-16, 1974. This is the third prong of our Bicentennial grant program. A brochure on this course has been mailed to all Society members. If you are interested in enrolling for the course, please get your registration in early as the class will be limited to twenty-five members.

The Bicentennial grant program will run through August 1975. Watch for announcements on activities that will be sponsored by the Sandoz Society during the next fifteen months, and participate if you can.

HERITAGE NOTES

Death has claimed another loyal supporter of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society: Betty (Mrs. Jack) Knicely of Sidney. Mrs. Knicely was well known in western Nebraska for her articles that appeared in newspapers and magazines, including a weekly column in the **Sidney Telegraph**. She also owned and operated The Book Keepers book store in Sidney. The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society council is saddened to report this loss.

A selection from Mari's writing has been included in a critical anthology of prose and poetry to be published in 1974 by the Oxford University Press. **The American Landscape** contains over 130 selections of prose and poetry chronicling the changing American landscape. "They form both a historical and literary record of the physical and perceptual transformation of the land from a new world seen as a Paradise to a world deformed by modern technology."

Contributors to the volume include novelists, poets, explorers, tourists, settlers, natural scientists, and visionaries. Their writings span the continental United States and the Caribbean, and range from the perspectives of the European Renaissance to the mid-twentieth century. The Sandoz selection is a chapter from her book **Old Jules**, "Hail on the Panhandle." Another former Nebraskan, Loren Eiseley, is also included in the book. His selection entitled "The Flow of the River," recounts an experience of "extension" in the North Platte River. Other well known contributors include: Robert Frost, Thomas Jefferson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, John Wesley Powell, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, N. Scott Momaday, and Denise Levertov.

The book is to be illustrated by the works of artists who share the authors' perspectives on landscapes. Serving as the book's editor is John J. Conron, Professor of

English, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont.

The membership year of the Sandoz Society corresponds with Mari's birthday May 11 to May 11. Continue your investment and participation in ensuring a future for our past by renewing your membership today: individual annual, \$4; sustaining annual, \$10; life, \$75; and commercial annual, \$100.

Larger donations and bequests (delayed giving) are welcome. Consult your attorney for advice on your particular form of legacy.

ALL MEMBERSHIPS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND BEQUESTS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

MARI SANDOZ DAY

Mari Sandoz had a strong feeling for Nebraska and its people, and she especially believed that its future would be in good hands in the generations yet to come. "In their keeping," she wrote, "lies the heritage of a vision followed by their fathers the wide world across, a vision of a land free of intolerance and oppression and want." ("Memoranda from Mari Sandoz Notes," **Gordon Journal**, May 21, 1969.) Mari Sandoz Day in Nebraska is intended to be a remembrance and a celebration of that vision that is a part of our heritage today.

May 11 is Mari Sandoz Day. You can participate by renewing your efforts to pursue the visions of Mari Sandoz. You will discover that her concerns remain today, transcending both her time and her geographical area. Human justice, treatment of minority cultures, conservation, excellence vs. mediocrity, and education were all things that mattered to Mari Sandoz, and they matter still today.

Although Mari Sandoz' frontier is said to be the last in American history, a different sort of frontier remains today. Not a physical one to be sure, but a psychological one instead. No longer is it necessary to face the challenge of eking out a living as our ancestors did, but, despite the advantages of our technological society, the loneliness of the individual is still there. Mari Sandoz' own life spoke eloquently of the rewards of a disciplined and compassionate society, and her writing is testimony to the fact that any environment calls for exertion and the realization of the maximum potential within people.

On May 11, 1974, the Nebraska Educational Television Network will telecast an interview of Mari Sandoz conducted by Robert Cromie in 1964. The interview was taped in Chicago as part of the **Book Beat** series hosted by Cromie, a reviewer with the **Chicago Herald Tribune**. According to Ron Hull, NETV program manager, this interview has been shown the least of any of the video tapes that they have on Mari. It will be aired at 9:00 p.m. central time.

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CHADRON STATE COLLEGE

Chadron, Nebraska 69337



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