

The Story Catcher

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society
Celebrating 50-Years 1971-2021



Mari Sandoz: A Closer Look at Her Life and Work

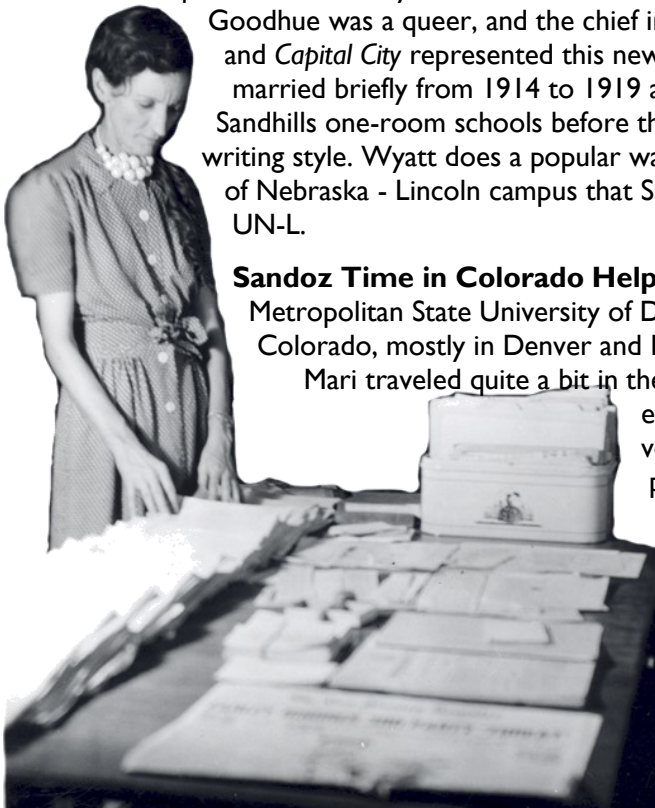
A Recap of the 2021 Pilster Great Plains Lecture and Mari Sandoz Symposium

The 2021 Pilster Lecture and Mari Sandoz Symposium was held at the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in September and livestreamed over the internet to viewers across the world. A variety of presenters explored various aspects of the author's life and the places she lived and about which she wrote. Recordings of each presentation are available online on the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society's YouTube page. A link to that page can be found on the Society's website at www.marisandoz.org.

Mari's Time in Lincoln Shaped Her Writing

In what she referred to as her Greenwich Village time, 1919 and 1920 in Lincoln, Mari Sandoz forged a new identity to her writing. That's the word from Sandoz Board member Jameson Wyatt who addressed symposium participants about Mari and her cities. She surrounded herself with poets, artists and musicians who she entertained at her apartment just blocks from the State Capitol and at popular hangouts such as the Cornhusker Hotel and a little bakery called Tasty Pastry. There were radical conversations about gender and sexuality. Those discussions helped her forge her independence as she wrote about queer societies. Wyatt referred to the Capitol building as a queer one and noted that architect Bertram

Goodhue was a queer, and the chief interior designer was a French lesbian artist. Books like *Slogum House* and *Capital City* represented this new underbelly in her writing. Wyatt explained that Sandoz had been married briefly from 1914 to 1919 and had earned a teaching certificate and worked in some small Sandhills one-room schools before the move to Lincoln. These were also contributing factors to her writing style. Wyatt does a popular walking tour around the parts of downtown Lincoln and the University of Nebraska - Lincoln campus that Sandoz knew and enjoyed. Wyatt is a graduate student in history at UN-L.



Sandoz Time in Colorado Helped Her Hear the Audience

Metropolitan State University of Denver history professor Meg Frisbee outlined Mari's time in Colorado, mostly in Denver and Estes Park. Using a map to show points of interest it appears that Mari traveled quite a bit in the name of research for accurate descriptions in her books. She enjoyed these trips, Frisbee said, because it allowed her to hear the voices of the people to whom she writes. She said it was a point of pride to have Mari Sandoz as a Colorado resident. From her Denver base she also visited the Pueblo villages and cliff dwellings in New Mexico. She spent considerable time in Colorado at the Van Vleet Arabian Horse ranch. It was all background for her writing about horses and natives, Frisbee said.

Sandoz Battles the Power of the East

Sandoz Board member Dr. Elaine Nelson took symposium participants to New York City where Mari moved in 1943. Much of Nelson's material was affirmation of Shannon Smith's excerpts from the Pilster lecture. But there was new discussion of missing letters and disagreements with publishers.

Photo from the Caroline Sandoz Pifer Collection, Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center Archives

(continued on page 2)

Pilster and Symposium continued...

Sandoz recognized the power of the East with most of her publishers in New York City and with the seat of government in Washington, DC. Many of the documents she needed for research were in government storage in the nation's capital and she wanted to be close. She wanted heavy control of her work and most of the people she was dealing with didn't have a grasp of the West. She understood that the wealth of the East frustrated the people of the West. She flourished in that environment and was fond of taking walks and meeting people in her beloved Greenwich Village. Much as she had done years earlier in Lincoln, she'd often hold forth at cafés where people of like interest would gather to discuss. Nelson is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Kansas and Executive Director of the Western History Association.

Advocating for Those with No Voice

Mari Sandoz worked to tell the stories of the people who had no voice, said Board member Dr. Jillian Wenburg. She had an agenda and wrote about what she believed in, what she was passionate about. She was as much an advocate as she was an author. With an estimated 45,000 note cards at her disposal, Sandoz was a stickler for accuracy and clarity. She used maps, transcripts of interviews, letters and official documents to support her belief that you have no right to falsify the truth, Wenburg said. She approached her writing and research with the zeal of a detective. She liked to argue, and she did it with gusto. She once noted that she was as angry as a "gut-shot panther." She once told an opponent that "your face must burn with pain." Wenburg concluded that Sandoz was strong-willed, highly obsessive, and slightly paranoid. Wenburg was the inaugural Sandoz Scholar and is currently an instructional designer at Park University and an Adjunct Professor in the English department at Johnson County Community College. She lives in Kansas City, MO.

Hollywood Wanted Her Titles, Not Her Stories

Longtime Board member and friend of Sandoz, Ron Hull of Lincoln, introduced fellow Board member Dr. David Nesheim of Chadron State College for a discussion of Mari and her dealings with Hollywood. It turns out that the interest expressed by the motion picture studios in Sandoz popular work, *Cheyenne Autumn*, was in the title and not the content of the book she wrote in 1953. Hull said that she turned them down twice but finally settled on \$1,000 in 1963. The movie is terrible and has little to do with the story Sandoz told in her novel. Nesheim said studios also expressed interest in *Old Jules*, *Slogum House* and *Crazy Horse*. Other than providing the content for some very heated exchanges between Sandoz and the studios and their agents and publicists – much of it documented in

letters – there was never anything serious. The letters, in the archives at Love Library at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, do make for some entertaining reading. Nesheim specializes in environmental history with an emphasis on the Great Plains and Native Americans. Hull led a storied career with Nebraska Educational Television in Lincoln and with the National Corporation for Public Broadcasting in Washington, D.C.

This year's Pilster Lecture & Sandoz Symposium program was funded in part by Humanities Nebraska and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. We are grateful for their financial support. We would also like to thank our co-host, the Center for Great Plains Studies and UNL Communications for livestreaming services.

Save the Date!

The 2022 Pilster Great Plains Lecture and Mari Sandoz Symposium will be held **September 22-23, 2022** at the Center for Great Plains Studies in Lincoln.

"Health and Wellness on the Great Plains: Historic and Contemporary Views"

Featuring the Writings of Mari Sandoz, 1896-1966

The 2022 Pilster Lecture will be delivered on Thursday, September 22nd at 3:30 PM (central). A variety of speakers and panelists will give presentations during the symposium on Friday, September 23rd. The 2021 Sandoz Scholar, Cathryn Halverson will also present her research.

More detailed information about the lecture and symposium will be available in the summer newsletter.

Sandoz Scholar Presents Research on Development of Sandoz Country

The development of Sandoz Country in the northwest Nebraska Panhandle was marked by stolen land, broken treaties, and impoverished living during the struggle for native sovereignty. That's the gist of 2020 Sandoz Scholar Broc Anderson's research. Anderson, a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, presented his findings to attendees at the 2021 Sandoz Symposium at the Center for Great Plains studies in Lincoln. It's a familiar story featuring Red Cloud and Spotted Tail and the Missouri and Elkhorn Valley Railroad and allotments of beef cattle. The government and the railroad were quick to blame the Indians and overlook others who were known to rustle cattle and create mayhem in the developing non-reservation areas of the state, Anderson said. Efforts to keep non-natives out of the area were

Sandoz Scholar continued...

often futile, a fact that Sandoz noted and wrote about. Several tribes were forced out of the area, a move that added to the unrest and heightened the distrust of the government. Alcohol sales further complicated things and lingered until recently when the sale of beer was banned in White Clay, a Sheridan County community close to the Pine Ridge Reservation, were finally banned. Social services agencies are currently working to establish health clinics and change the image of the area. Anderson also outlined the development of the Nebraska communities of Hay Springs, Rushville and Gordon that grew from the tumultuous times and revolved around the development of railroads and commerce. He also spoke of Buffalo Bill recruiting Indians for his world famous "Wild West Shows." Finally, his research touched on the two battles of Wounded Knee. The first, in December 1890, was actually a massacre of 150 to 300 Lakota by Army Troops in the area of Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota. Historians claim it marked the end of the Indian Wars and broke any organized resistance to reservation life and assimilation to white American culture. The second "battle" was a commemorative 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee by 300 members of the American Indian Movement in 1973. The group protested and brought attention to conditions on the reservation.

Northern Cheyenne Author Leads Discussion on *Cheyenne Autumn*

The first hybrid in-person/virtual Mari Sandoz Heritage Society sponsored book discussion drew more than 30 people to hear Gerry Robinson, a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana, talk about Mari Sandoz book *Cheyenne Autumn*. The August event was also recorded and can be viewed on the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society's YouTube page. In addition to leading the discussion, Robinson signed copies of his new book, *The Cheyenne Story: An Interpretation of Courage*, during the event. In the autumn of 1878, a band of Cheyenne Indians set out from Indian Territory, where they had been sent by the U.S. government, to return to their homeland in Montana. This saga of their heart-breaking fifteen-hundred-mile journey is the 1953 non-fiction book, *Cheyenne Autumn*, by Mari Sandoz. The Northern Cheyenne struggled to repatriate themselves to the land in and around present-day Yellowstone National Park. Robinson was born and raised on the reservation in Lame Deer in southeastern Montana. Prior to the publication of his book, he had written short stories and articles for publication and blog posts. His appearance in Lincoln was made possible by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, celebrating its 50th year. The Society also provided partial funding for Robinson's research at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Center in Chadron, Love Library at UNL, and the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. Robinson is working on two companion books. He was one of 10 kids raised in a two-room shack with electricity but no running water. Three generations of boarding school stole the history of the Northern Cheyenne culture before he was born, he said. That has fueled his passion for researching the journey of his ancestors and his love of Sandoz' writing. He first learned the "Cheyenne Autumn" story from aunts and uncles. Then he saw the Hollywood version in the movie named *Cheyenne Autumn*. It was the first movie he ever saw in a theater. It took him a few years to realize it was a bad movie. Sandoz didn't like it either because it didn't follow her book. The studio only bought the title from her. Robinson read her book and saw the movie again and realized why it was bad. He did some of his own research and the third time he watched the movie, he was angry. Reading Sandoz helped him understand his culture. "We were discouraged from speaking the Cheyenne language at home," he said. "I read her book and understood why." He noted that Sandoz phrasing of the language was different than

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



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.

Book Discussion continued...

what he knew, but she did write it from a Cheyenne perspective. "I write in the spirit of Sandoz out of respect for the work that she did," he said. Robinson said his book is an attempt to unpack Sandoz Cheyenne history and expand on it by giving characters room to breathe. When asked by his publisher if he needed so many characters, he replied that he was writing about a tribe, families, relatives and generations. "No matter which side of the story you're on, there are heroes and fools," he said. "I still appreciate what she did for the Northern Cheyenne." He said research takes time. Sandoz started researching the book in 1939, but it wasn't published until 1953. He started his research in 2002 and published in 2019. Robinson asked how *Cheyenne Autumn* has aged. How would it be received if it was just published today. "The Cheyenne would recognize her heart was in the right place. It was a landmark book that presented the native perspective as never before. Mari talked to the elders and immersed herself in the culture," he said. Today, some would call a non-native writing about natives "cultural appropriation." But Robinson said he'd be in her corner. There are parts she got absolutely right. Others could be fleshed out today with new research. Does her collection of interviews and maps still have relevance? Robinson said her material and research is relevant and very helpful. She had primary resources that are very relevant. It's also important because "we're losing a generation of storytellers."

Dr. Cathryn Halverson Announced as 2021-2022 Sandoz Scholar

The Mari Sandoz Research Award committee including Dr. Holly Boomer, Dr. Renee Laegreid, and Dr. Jillian Wenburg, are pleased to announce Dr. Cathryn Halverson, as the 2021-2022 Sandoz Scholar. Halverson's stated research questions involves a close reading of Mari Sandoz's *The Battle of Little Bighorn*. Her work will "compar[e] its portrayal of Armstrong Custer to that offered by his widow Elizabeth Bacon Custer in her hugely popular memoir *Boots and Saddles*." Halverson's work will be published in the forthcoming *Mari Sandoz and The Battle of the Little Bighorn* (forthcoming from University of Nebraska Press). She will present her research at the 2022 Sandoz Symposium. Halverson currently serves as an Associate Professor of World Cultures and Languages at Minot State University in Minot, North Dakota. Most recently, she was awarded a Fulbright Foundation Distinguished Chair of American Studies at Uppsala University where she will serve from September 2021-May 2022.

Introducing New Board Member, Nicole Gray

Nicole Gray is a project specialist in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, where she works on the Genoa Indian School Digital Reconciliation Project. She has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas at Austin and a M.A. in Library and Information Science from the University of Arizona. She has published several essays and book chapters on media, archives, and American literature. She has also served as a project manager and a contributing editor on the digital editorial project The Walt Whitman Archive. She was introduced to the writings of Mari Sandoz shortly after moving to Nebraska in 2014 and was quickly captivated by the spirit and the archive of this extraordinary writer.

Current Sandoz Center Exhibit Features Earth Science

A new traveling exhibit is on display at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron through mid-May. "Sun, Earth, Universe" is funded through the National Informal STEM Education Network (NISE Net). Sponsored by the Chadron State College Math & Science Department, the exhibition is a hands-on opportunity for children and their families to learn about Earth and space science. It includes multiple interactive panels that focus on different topics within space science, such as tools used to measure data, changes in the sun, and the vastness of space. There is also a table where children can learn about engineering by building spacecrafts out of foam and tinker-toys before testing their durability in spin and shake stations, a board game, a reading center, and a Mars play table. The exhibit is geared towards elementary-aged children but is interesting for anyone who wants a hands-on opportunity to learn more about space. To learn more about the exhibit, visit <https://www.nisenet.org/sunearthuniverse>.

The History and Future of the Mari Sandoz Research Collection

by Shannon D. Smith

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

2021 Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series

The 2021 Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Annual conference theme, “The Life and Places of Mari Sandoz,” was the first to focus exclusively on Mari’s life. Over the last five decades our conferences have explored Sandoz’s books and the themes that shaped her writing, but now, 55 years after her death, we have enough distance to start looking at her life from different perspectives and adding context to what we know through new information and sources. Those of us who are passionate about the legacy of this great author agree that is now time to learn more about Mari as a person.

As part of the 2021 conference, I was honored to deliver the Pilster Great Plains lecture on “the Untapped Potential of the Mari Sandoz Collection.” I told the story of Mari Sandoz and her most prized possession— her research materials— and the people behind the efforts to preserve her heritage and promote her legacy, including this collection, since she passed. As part of our celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, my talk was also a proposal for promoting Mari’s legacy over the next fifty years. This paper is an overview of the presentation which can be viewed online at www.marisandoz.org.

When Mari moved to Lincoln in the 1920s and began her writing career in earnest, she was already thinking about the historical importance of her work and began to accumulate research materials as well as keeping copies of her own letters and incoming correspondence. In 1923 she took a history course at the University of Nebraska with Dr. Fred Morrow Fling. Both the class and professor left a lasting impression. Fling, who was described as nearly obsessive for detail on validating primary sources, taught her how to store her documentation in a way to facilitate future access. She would later refer to this as the “Fling system,” and used it for the rest of her life to categorize, index, cross-reference, and file her correspondence and growing library of western history research materials.

Her growing collection required Mari to rent storage units as she moved from Lincoln to Denver to New York City. Even with boxes in storage, her apartments in those cities resembled more of an office than a home as she kept an extensive working library of books at her disposal as well as boxes of manuscripts, notes, maps, index cards, and incoming and outgoing letters. In December 1940, as she planned to move from Denver to New York City, she began the process of formally organizing and integrating her entire collection, evaluating, sorting, and updating all her index cards—a project that took over a year. When she moved to 23 Barrow Street in Greenwich Village, she wrote that she had left boxes in storage in both Lincoln and Denver that she wanted to eventually retrieve, but several letters indicated she knew exactly what material was in storage.

On January 3, 1956, thirteen years after she moved to her apartment on Barrow Street in New York City, there was a fire in the apartment above hers. In a letter she wrote:

I got back from the west in time for the event I fear most of all, a fire. At I am this morning a man burst from one of the little apartments upstairs 5th floor, with a great roaring blaze following him. I hear him, looked out into the horror, threw on a robe and began to pile the more irreplaceable files of my material on the window sills that open upon the fire escape. The firemen thundered up the stairs with a great pressure hose and water began to stream down the stair well and run along the ceiling. I rustled up all the tin wastebaskets and pans I could to catch most of the water but much ran on through the house so there were ponds all over, but I saved my material from damage.

Later I discovered that other people had sensibly dressed, pocketed their valuables and documents and retreated mostly to safe positions. If the firemen had been less swift I would have been left with nothing but a robe and slippers but, I trust, the most valuable of my files.

After the fire, Sandoz determined to find a new and safer home, looking first and foremost for protection and ample room for her files. It took several years, but in 1958 she moved to another Greenwich Village apartment at 422 Hudson, a fire-proof, four-story brick townhouse where the owners, Wesley and Mary Towner, were good friends and would be the only other residents. It had the additional benefit of having basement storage for her files. Photos from her 422 Hudson apartment give a sense of her extensive library and stacks and shelves of research materials including dozens of bound volumes of correspondence. Several of her letters describe her pleasure with her new apartment—it would end up being her last home.

On October 3, 1962, Mari wrote a “should anything happen to me” letter to her sisters Caroline and Flora. This letter was likely motivated by health concerns; Mari was battling breast cancer that had metastasized. Her initial focus was on what she saw as a strong market for her letters. She referenced the Mark Twain estate earning a lot of income from his letters and wrote, “I have tremendous files of letters (carbons) which serve as the originals, for the recipient cannot be compelled to give up the originals, only prevented from publishing them. These letters of mine contain a great deal of western and other historical information not elsewhere available... These letters of mine will someday be edited into books, several books, and can bring in an income, in addition to my books, for many years.”

Her research materials seemed to be an afterthought, near the end of the letter she wrote they should go to a Sandoz Foundation or some library that agrees to keep the collection together for future researchers and writers. But Mari was well aware of the research value of her collection. As early as the 1950s, a number of major universities, recognizing her stature and the place she occupied in Western American History, began to solicit her papers for their institutions including the Universities of Wyoming, Colorado, Texas, Virginia, Syracuse, and Boston University. But for over a decade, Mari did not make a decision about where she wanted her collection to be housed.

During the next two years, Mari’s health deteriorated, and she was hospitalized several times. In March of 1965, her landlady, Mrs. Mary Towner, and her good friend and publisher Jim Carr, called Mari’s sister, Caroline Pifer, at her ranch in the Sandhills and said it was urgent that someone from the family come right away as Mari was in the hospital. Caroline flew to NYC with her daughter, Mary Ann, who it was agreed would stay and help Mari. Everyone believed it was necessary for Mary Ann to be as close to Mari as possible, but Mari’s apartment was too full and the only other space in the building was on the first floor and was not zoned for someone to stay there full-time. In May 1965, Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison wrote to the New York Housing Authority who granted a waiver for Mary Ann to stay in Sandoz’s building. For the next eight months, Mari was frail but able to go out occasionally, but by January of 1966, she clearly knew she was facing the end and some final decisions simply had to be made.

Caroline would later say it was the efforts of the Nebraska governor who made Mari’s mind up and on January 12, 1966, she wrote to University of Nebraska Chancellor Clifford M. Hardin, making her offer. Acknowledging he had stuck by his word to not pressure her since a conversation they had years earlier, she detailed her conditions saying she “must have hard and fast assurance that the collection will be kept together in a separate room, researchers to work inside, the material not to be scattered in any way. Although I have such assurance from other repositories, I prefer that my collection go to the University of Nebraska, but I must have the same firm guarantees that it will be kept together there.” Six days later, Hardin assured her that the university would respect her wishes saying “Our library staff, faculty, members of the Board of Regents, and all of the other responsible officers of the University are pleased to give you this assurance. We would not have it otherwise.” Mari took Chancellor Hardin’s word on the matter and on February 28, she signed her Last Will and Testament in which she wrote: “My collections described to Chancellor Clifford M. Hardin with my letter of January 12, 1966, are to go to the University of Nebraska as per agreement with Chancellor Clifford M. Hardin’s letter of January 18, 1966.” On the same day she wrote to Caroline explaining her will and asking her to be executrix.

Before the letter reached Caroline at her ranch, she was called back to New York. Mari had relapsed and was in great pain. Caroline raced to Alliance and boarded a plane for Denver and on to New York City. Weather delayed the plane for hours and by the time she landed, Towner and Carr had called an ambulance to take Mari to St. Luke’s hospital just off Central Park. She was immediately put under heavy sedation such that Caroline said that she never saw her sister again when she was really clear in her mind. On March 6, Caroline typed a quick letter to Chancellor Hardin enclosing Mari’s will and Mari’s description of her collection. Caroline also asked some legal questions and for some direction about logistics getting the collection to Lincoln.

Chancellor Hardin immediately responded on March 10, first voicing distress at hearing Mari was hospitalized and providing formal legal acceptance of the collection. But Mari died that very afternoon, March 10, 1966, at St. Luke's Hospital. Caroline went back to Mari's apartment, and stayed up until 2am with Jim, Mary, and another couple. This is when the significance of Mari's collection and being the executrix really hit her. Caroline spent the rest of the night, and for the first time in her life, going through the papers in Mari's home. In a file labeled "Sandoz" she found many pictures, letters, and documents that Caroline said were missing from the Sandoz homeplace: "Perhaps Mama had given her permission to take them to New York, perhaps not." Caroline laid out a huge suitcase and filled it completely with these family materials "to get them safely away." The next day she conferred with newspapers, embalmers, morticians, and reviewed the legal procedures for moving a body by train from New York City to Alliance, Nebraska. When the morticians had the casket and body prepared, she accompanied it to Penn Station where Caroline wrote of "hassling for hours" with train schedules, lockers, and bellboys in the dismantled station which was undergoing a huge remodeling project at that time. After many hours in the torn-apart train station, Caroline and Mari were finally boarded for their trip from Manhattan to Alliance where she arrived the next day and the coffin was unloaded and taken to Rushville. On Tuesday afternoon, March 15, Mari Sandoz was buried with little fanfare or service on a hill overlooking an orchard of the Sandoz fruit farm with just her family present.

The obituaries all mentioned Mari's extensive collection being donated to UNL, and a few days after the funeral, the university issued a press release stating they would be receiving the Mari Sandoz Collection. That same day Caroline wrote a letter to the chancellor's office describing the volume of contents of Mari's apartment, enclosing a couple of photos to give an idea of the space that would be needed. In an interesting aside, she wrote of the materials she had taken home, "The letters I purchased from her (the rights that is) and my own personal correspondence will not be available for some time, but ultimately, I will make the collection complete."

It took until the middle of May for Caroline to settle the estate and get through calving season so she could return to New York City to pick up Mari's possessions. Arriving at 422 Hudson a day before the movers, she was struck by the daunting task ahead of her. With the difficulty of disposing of trash in the city and a telephone offer only \$250 for all of Mari's furnishings, Caroline decided to bring everything back to Nebraska, having Chadron-based Allied Van Lines unload what supposed to go the University at Lincoln on the way back to her ranch. At this time, she also decided to keep the letters that were to go to the university in her possession for a while, "The letters had to come to me first. Hard to tell what might be in them." The books, and what she called "the Indian things" including index cards and steel files filled with maps and other documents that were dropped off at the university added up to about 4,500 pounds. The furniture and remaining material, including the letters, was another 4,500 pounds. Four and a half tons of Mari's life's possessions were transported to Nebraska.

As she flew home, Caroline wrote to the chancellor that she kept the photographs so the family could make copies and label them before sending them to the university, in addition she wrote, "The correspondence is also coming here because the attorney will need to assign some sort of responsibility for and any royalty conditions incidental to their use, before I can deliver them. Some of the letters could become libelous if used out of context or they might have monetary value if published as literature."

When the moving van showed up in Gordon, it made front-page news. Caroline loaded everything up in the Pifer farm truck as well as their pickup, filling the cabs of both and strapping some of the boxes on the fenders. Caroline had figured out what to do with her sister's furniture and possessions as this same article said, "Visitors to a museum to be constructed at the grave site of Mari Sandoz, on the original Sandoz property south of Gordon, will be able to see an exact replica of the apartment in NYC which was Miss Sandoz's studio, working quarters, and home for many years." The article further stated that financial help was being sought from the state in establishing the museum and if so, it would be free to the public, but if the Sandoz family had to support it, it would be "semi-private."

Because there had been no public memorial service or way to pay tribute to the well-known author, Caroline began to get a lot of phone calls and visitors inquiring about Mari's life and places she wrote of. An article in the Lincoln Evening Journal on September 17, 1966, told how to get to the gravesite, describing it as Nebraska's "newest historical spot, as yet unmarked by anything more than a small sign and a mound of earth." To accommodate the visitors that kept coming, Caroline set up a temporary "Mari Sandoz Museum at the Double R Ranch" in her basement. By the end of the year,

in December 1966, a news story described a museum under construction on the Sandoz property—cement walls were up but no roof yet. The small building was not located at the gravesite, but at a roadside rest area 22 miles south of Gordon built and maintained by the Sunbeam Calyx Garden Club.

A little over a year after Mari died, in May 1967, the small museum off highway 27 was opened. It was set up to be viewed through the windows where visitors would see Mari's tools of the trade, including her typewriters, coffee cups, desk, table, and bookshelves in a cluttered space attempting to recreate her New York apartment. In October 1967, at a Gordon Chamber of Conference Luncheon focusing on tourism in the region, Caroline announced the opening of the Mari Sandoz Room on the third level of the local Gambles Store in Gordon that featured many scrapbooks and copies of Mari's letters, including an entire binder filled with publisher's rejection letters.

Meanwhile, Caroline ordered a 3M copy machine in Chadron and a service rep from Casper brought it out to her ranch 40 miles south of Gordon. She intended to copy all of Mari's correspondence. She wrote quite a bit about how hard it was to use and how little help was available to train her. After months of trial and error she was able to make some acceptable copies, but many just came out blank or half-printed. It turned out that the copy paper could not be exposed to light prior to use, and she was doing all her copying out on her sun porch. As Caroline copied the thousands and thousands of pages, she began to understand Mari's evaluation of their value and felt an urgency to get them into print. She pitched Reva Evans, publisher of the Gordon Journal weekly newspaper and long-time friend of Mari and Caroline, the idea of printing a letter a week, and Evans agreed. So, when Caroline saw an interesting letter, she would set it out for publication. Soon she had plenty and for 190 weeks—three and a half years—the Gordon Journal printed "Memoranda from Mari Sandoz' notes." Caroline later collected all these letters into three volumes of small books.

After two and a half years, Caroline had copied the 43 letter-file boxes that had come from Mari's New York apartment, and took them down to Love Library in late 1968. Finding someone at Love Library who knew where the material already dropped off was located proved to be a challenge, until finally, a library faculty member found the material piled to the ceiling in a large closet. There was no space for the truckload of letters she was preparing to deliver. She must have raised a fuss because she wrote that she returned the next day to find the closet unpacked and she and library staff were able to inventory the contents to ensure everything mentioned in the will was now there. Caroline wrote that she was disappointed the collection was in no condition for researchers. Love Library did not yet have a professional archivist or catalogued archives so it would be a while before Mari's dream of having her materials available for researchers would come to pass.

The Gordon Journal letters and museum and Sandoz Room exhibits were not all Caroline and friends were doing to preserve Mari's heritage. In 1968 the state erected a memorial marker south of Gordon near the turnoff to the Sandoz place and Mari's grave. People were clearly interested in touring the area and seeing the marker and grave site and other notable Sandoz locations. Furthermore, on May 12, 1971, the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund Committee, responsible for "perpetuating the memory and work of the late Mari Sandoz," was formed as a sub-agency of the Chadron State Foundation with an initial \$10,000 donation from Caroline. Over the next decade, the committee held symposia and attempted to raise funds for a permanent museum to honor Mari's legacy. And in 1974, the committee made a valiant, though unsuccessful, attempt to win a major grant from the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission to build a dramatic new Sandoz Cultural Center on Chadron State Campus for \$831,000. The proposed "Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man" was a plan to bring one of Mari's dreams to life; though they failed to win the grant, the project remained a dream among a group of people who would not give up on their vision to pay homage to Sandoz.

Back in Lincoln, the university had appointed a university archivist in 1968 who examined and arranged the materials most in demand by researchers, but it took until 1974 when the University of Nebraska Foundation appropriated \$17,000 for an in-depth analysis, arrangement, and description of the collection. The project sorted through more than 200 linear feet of shelving space in order to develop an index to the materials. Caroline later wrote that UNL's Love Library made up for their cavalier care at first and that the new archivist, Joe Svoboda, had organized things better than her expectations and that the library and he had been "very cooperative in handling late-coming material."

The second half of the 1970s saw Mari Sandoz Day, a governor-proclaimed commemoration designated while Mari was still alive in the 1950s, celebrated several times in Chadron with presentations and speakers. And Ron Hull brought

Dick Cavett to Nebraska to film a documentary series on Mari. Mari was installed in the Nebraska Hall of Fame at the Capitol on April 27, 1980. But other than a notable conference and exhibit held in Kearney in 1988 and a couple of appearances by Caroline, it appears that the momentum at the Sandoz Foundation was slowed during most of this decade. During the 1980s at UNL, however, research at the archives was utilized for two of the preeminent books telling the story of Mari's life. Kearney State College professor Helen Winter Stauffer used the collection to help write her 1982 biography, *Mari Sandoz Story Catcher of the Plains*, the only biography written so far. Stauffer stayed immersed in the collection, especially going through the tens of thousands of letters, to publish her 500-page *Letters of Mari Sandoz* ten years later in 1992.

The mid- to late-80s saw the closure of the Sandoz Museum and the Sandoz Room in Gordon, though the Ad Pad in Gordon had a very small display. Caroline decided she needed more expertise to manage Mari's estate and continue publishing letters and other content, so she began to take courses at Chadron State College and graduated with a degree in literature in 1981 at the age of 71. As her connection to Chadron State grew stronger, she and Flora and Sandoz' brother Fritz' widow, Blanche, began to donate artifacts and memorabilia to the nascent Sandoz Committee.

Perhaps one of the most significant events in the advancement of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society was the arrival in August of 1990 of Don Green, the appointed Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Chadron State College. Green taught Western History at Central State University, Oklahoma, and Oklahoma State University and he arrived in Chadron as a historian and writer with deep knowledge of how important Mari's work was to tell the story of the West. His background, passion, energy, and political courage was just what the society needed to reenergize and seriously pursue a formal Sandoz space. Very soon after he arrived, Don set about finding the Sandoz Society "collection" at the library, and soon had a small exhibit put together. He was surprised to find a revolver purported to be Old Jules' and when he called Caroline to inquire about its veracity, he was surprised that she told him she wanted it back. Undaunted, Don drove down to the heart of the Sandhills, brought her the gun, and had a good long talk. He clearly made a good impression on Caroline because she let him keep the gun and this appears to be the start of the great gifting of her materials to the society. It was then, with his leadership, the committee formed the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society as an independent 501c3 nonprofit in 1992.

In 1996, Chadron State College announced it had set aside its former campus library for creation of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center and a fund drive to raise a little over a \$1 million to renovate the building which had been placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. As plans became more and more serious and significant money was raised, Caroline gifted most of her materials to the society. Construction began in 2001 and the grand opening celebration for the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center was held in September 2002. What a proud moment this was for all the volunteers and scholars who had devoted decades to preserving Mari's legacy and bringing the long-dreamed-for Mari Sandoz 'Center for the Study of Man' to fruition. Caroline's gifts are the foundation of the permanent exhibit at the center that tells Mari's life.

In 1994, just a few years after Don Green launched his mission to reinvigorate the society, the University of Nebraska received a \$150,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to microfilm 80 linear feet of Mari's collection – a project that continued through the rest of the decade. Today, there are around 175 reels of microfilm for researchers to review, with a duplicate set of the microfilm housed at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron through an agreement between Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and UNL Archives & Special Collections. The physical collection at Love Library is currently described as 199 boxes in 186 linear feet at the archives, so it is clear there is a significant portion of her collection that has not been filmed.

Mari's research notes, hand-drawn maps, and index cards, are a national treasure. Her "Fling System" is also a masterful "key" to the resources in her collection. This remarkable resource has not been used enough by historians, a great many of whom dismiss her Indian work as "semi-fictionalized" without bothering to look at her first-hand primary sources including dozens of unique oral interviews with American Indians who participated in the Indian Wars of the Northern Great Plains. Her vast collection of letters, many of which have not been microfilmed, is even more neglected by scholars, mainly because of difficulty of access.

It is clear the research collection was kept intact and delivered by moving van directly from Mari's apartment to the UNL Library in May 1966. It's not so clear to trace the letters. One has to wonder about the 25,000 or more incoming and outgoing letters that spent two years in boxes on Caroline's sun porch being photocopied and read and selected for sharing in the Gordon Journal. The microfilm section on Correspondence and Personal Files is about 40 reels but it was not sufficiently indexed or cross-referenced for easy research and retrieval. In 1980, UNL Archives and Special Collections created an alphabetical correspondent list on index cards that includes dates and sometimes comments on the correspondence that was scanned into microfilm. In 1999, Dr. Kimberli Lee, then a Graduate Research Assistant at the university, indexed the microfilmed content into a useful finding aid for the microfilm. But it is still challenging to search the letters for content.

After spending years with the letters, Dr. Lee demonstrated for us all just how significant these letters can be for historians. In her book, *"I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter" The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965*, Lee selected and edited Sandoz' letters that discussed the tragic circumstances of her American Indian friends during the era of termination and relocation of tribes. As an expert on Sandoz's correspondence, Lee said the letters are a treasure trove covering an incredible range of topics, from WWII and Japanese Internment to the art of teaching to literary criticism and more.

Mari's biographer, Helen Winter Stauffer also commented many times about the breadth of topics covered in the letters. However, Stauffer also pointed out that anyone who started from the get-go knowing her communications were going to go into a permanent record, as Sandoz clearly showed by keeping meticulous copies of her own outgoing letters, would only disclose what she wants known – to carefully create and protect her public image. An image Helen wrote was not necessarily in sync with the private image Sandoz's close friends and family recalled. In addition to Mari's circumspection in her letters, it is extremely likely that the correspondence was curated by Caroline, a loving sister wanting to promote Mari's reputation and protect her family. Indeed, Caroline said as much when she told UNL she was going to pull out all letters between herself and Mari. Plus, when she was estimating the material that would go straight from NYC to Lincoln, she wrote to the chancellor that the letters had to go to her first because it was "Hard to tell what might be in them." After a summer of reading the letters down on her ranch the year after Mari died, Caroline wrote:

I could see that from the intimacy of the letters, the trust her correspondents had in her caution with their material, that this could not be trusted out of our hands without a copy to remain with us. There could be lawsuits, threats, and intimidation and we had to be sure of our stand.

And so I wonder: if Caroline pulled out letters, where did they go? Did she destroy them? We know that Helen Winter Stauffer saw them when she was writing her biography because she wrote:

Only in the letters to her sisters, particularly to Flora, did she let down her reserve. These letters, however, are not in the UNL collection, Mari's sisters graciously allowed me to read the letters but asked that Helen not quote directly from them. Although there is little in them pertaining to her writing or career not found elsewhere, she discussed her work more fully and frankly here. ...her letters continued throughout the years to discuss aspects of her own writing and revealed her feelings more openly than elsewhere.

There are letters in other archives and there are some letters in private collectors' hands as well. Are there letters that don't exist in Mari's collection? There has been no analysis as to whether they are duplicates of letters that exist in the UNL collection or letters that were somehow kept out of Mari's collection. It's time for a new effort to analyze and track down every available letter, and digitize them in an organized, searchable collection to make them more available for research so we can build a more complete picture of Mari and offer her letters to the world.

Other authors letters projects, including Mari's contemporaries, are:

- **The Mark Twain Project Online** plans to create the "ultimate critical edition, fully annotated," of every single thing Twain wrote including an estimated 50,000 letters currently residing in collections all over the world. Partial funding has come from the National Endowment for the Humanities via several Scholarly Editions grants for about a decade.

- **The Hemingway Letters Project** is producing a multi-volume comprehensive scholarly edition of the author's some 6,000 letters—approximately 85 percent of which have never been published. Also funded by NEH Scholarly Editions grants for over a decade, this project will be releasing the letters in book format.
- The University of Nebraska hosts the **Willa Cather Archive** – An ambitious endeavor to create a rich, useful, and widely accessible online site for the study of Willa Cather's life and writings. Part of the archive is **The Complete Letters of Willa Cather**, a digital collection of all her letters, currently over 2,200, in an ongoing project updated periodically until completed.
- The University of Nebraska also hosts **Across the Spectrum: The Interdisciplinary Life and Letters of John G. Neihardt**, a project that began in 2008 as a collaboration between many organizations including the Neihardt Center in Bancroft, NE, the Neihardt Trust, the University of Texas, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. There are 1,355 letters currently digitized.

As the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society celebrates 50 years of work commemorating the legacy of this incredible person and important author, we can proudly look back on a portfolio of amazing public humanities projects, including the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron. In the last decade we've invested in new studies of her work through research scholarships and publications and strengthening our board with scholars. Our board members are deeply passionate about Mari and hail from all over Nebraska as well as South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Kansas, with faculty from Chadron State College, the University of Nebraska-Kearney, Oglala Lakota College, University of Kansas, University of Wyoming, Colorado State University, and Western Colorado University. Looking forward to the next 50 years, the society will seek to fulfill Mari's dream by creating an online, fully searchable version of her research collection and letters—a digital **Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man**.

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