



the Story Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Sandoz/Contemporaries Subject of Conference

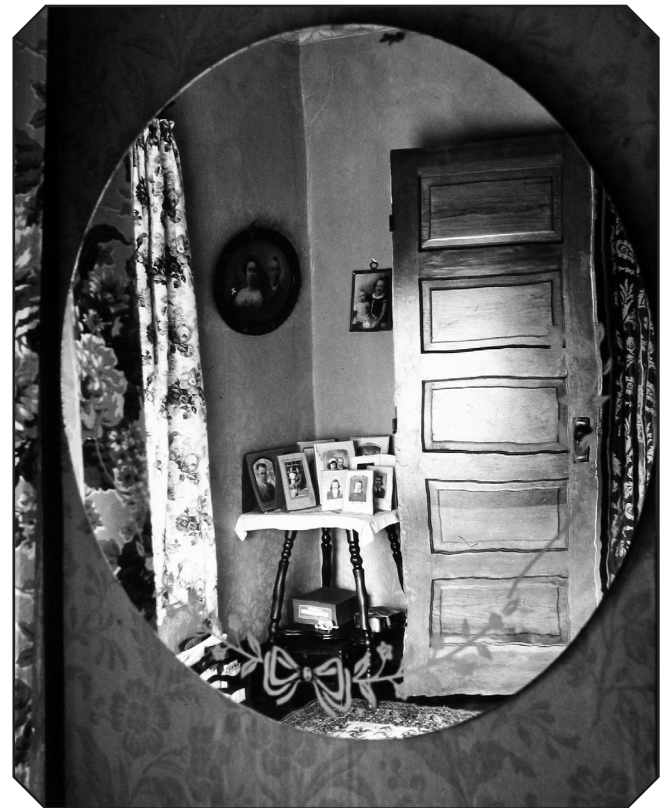
Throughout her professional life, Mari Sandoz was constantly asked by young writers and her literary peers for advice. She rarely turned down a manuscript she was given to read, and her lengthy, thoughtful suggestions to many would-be authors were legendary.

Sandoz was friends with many Nebraska writers, both young and old. In particular, she found John Neihardt of special inspiration. She also communicated with Willa Cather and Wright Morris, and attended celebratory evenings with Bess Streeter Aldrich, Weldon Kees, and Loren Eiseley.

It is to these writers that she, too, turned for advice and solace. To understand Sandoz is to understand her writing context and the exclusive group of persons with whom she had a unifying purpose.

The 2009 Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Annual Conference seeks to celebrate this coterie of Nebraska authors and others who inspired Mari Sandoz.

Please join us for this exceptional conference on the campus of Chadron State College in Chadron, Neb., March 26-28, 2009. The conference brochure and registration are enclosed.



"Front Room Reflected in Mirror," the Home Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska, 1947/1981. Photograph by Wright Morris Private collection, show curated by art2art Circulating Exhibitions.

Award-Winning Novelist/Photographer, Wright Morris, Featured at Conference

Wright Morris, who was born in 1910 in Central City, Neb., is best known for his portrayals of the people and artifacts of the Great Plains in words and pictures, as well as for experiments with various narrative forms.

A photographic display of Morris' works will be featured at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center during the 2009 annual conference.

For more than half a century, beginning in the late 1930s, Morris was a chronicler of American experience in literary narratives and photographs.

Long regarded as one of the most gifted American

writers, Morris received three Guggenheim Fellowships for his work and won the American Book Award for two of his novels. His works include 20 novels, several photo-texts (a form he more or less invented, creating both the photographs and the texts which accompany them), literary and photography criticism, and social commentary.

Frequently writing about the Midwest—particularly Nebraska—Morris explored the faulty processes of memory and the complicated meanings of the past.

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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.

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.com.

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.

Wright Morris Featured cont.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, Morris's inspiration to combine words and photographs resulted in several unique works he dubbed "photo-texts."

For Morris, words and photographs were very much interconnected, in which one medium enhanced the understanding of the other. He viewed his pictures not as literal illustrations of his writing, but as equal expressions of meaning, relishing "the unexpected resonance and play" between the two media.

His mother, Grace Osborn Morris, died within days of his birth, leaving Morris "half an orphan," a term he explored in several works of fiction and autobiography. His father, Will Morris, was a traveler and wanderer who often left Morris in the care of neighbors. During Morris's childhood the family lived in several Nebraskan towns, finally settling in Omaha from 1919 to 1924, before departing for Chicago.

Accidents of birth, genealogy, and place may be why, in the early 1930s, Morris suddenly became obsessed with recovering his boyhood, and his works took on the theme of coming home that later often dominated his writings.

Visits to Nebraska in 1942 and 1947 awakened a desire to explore his past, and led to the experimental photo-text book, *The Home Place* (1948), including such famous photographs as "Uncle Harry" that focused on the broken-down farm of his Uncle Harry and Aunt Clara near Norfolk, Neb. In 1968, he revisited the Midwest through photo-texts in *God's Country and My People*.

"I am not a regional writer, but the characteristics of this region have conditioned what I see, what I look for, and what I find in the world to write about."

His photo-texts all focused on Nebraska—the novel *The Works of Love* (based loosely on the life of his father, 1952); the paired experimental novels *The Field of Vision* (1956) and *Ceremony in Lone Tree* (1960); and his final photo-text, *Plains Song* (1980), a work that employed one of his finest photographs, "Front Room Reflected in Mirror."

It was the theme of loss and gain that he would continuously apply to his work. Not a popular writer, Morris's style and characteristic humor are sometimes an acquired taste, and his detailed commentaries on photographs picturing human artifacts sometimes compete with the simple nostalgia they evoke in readers and observers.

"I am not a regional writer, but the characteristics of this region have conditioned what I see, what I look for, and what I find in the world to write about," Morris said.

Everyday Images—That Which is Used

His youthful memories of Nebraska and the Midwest became the subject matter of his everyday images—that which is used, broken-down, abandoned, and objects and places that show the wear and tear of daily life.

Continued on Page 3

Wright Morris cont.

He sought objects and scenes similar to those he remembered: screens, tubs, tools, utensils of daily living, fences and gates, and the patterns formed by light and shadows, verticals and horizontals.

“Doors and windows, gates, stoops, samples of litter, assorted junk, anything that appeared to have served its purpose...they spoke to me, or did not speak,” he said.

Afterwards he wrote several essays on meanings in photography and the importance of photography in capturing the complexities of American life; these were later collected in *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (1989), an important work of criticism in photography.

Later, *Plains Song: For Female Voices* (1981), a novel examining the lives of three generations of Nebraskan women, garnered Morris his second National Book Award. In this book, the females of the Atkins family display varying levels of acceptance to life in the Great Plains.

Morris published his memoirs in three volumes, the first *Will's Boy* in 1981, followed by *Solo* and *A Cloak of Light: Writing My Life* in 1985. During the last years of his life, Morris devoted himself entirely to writing, but was steadfast in his thinking that words could not be applied to some visual experiences.

He died in 1998.

“Doors and windows, gates, stoops, samples of litter, assorted junk, anything that appeared to have served its purpose...they spoke to me, or did not speak,”

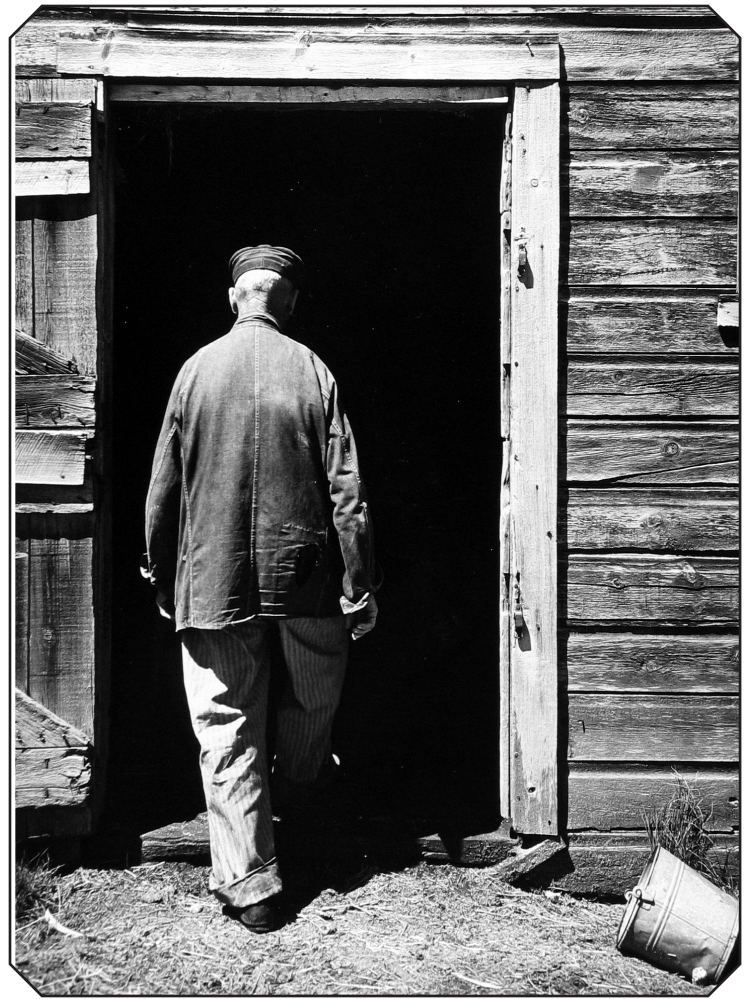
Distinguished Career

Morris was the recipient of numerous honors and awards for his books and photographs such as a Life Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mark Twain Award, and the Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association.

In 1975, he won the Nebraska Library Commission's Mari Sandoz Award recognizing “significant, enduring contribution to the Nebraska book world.”

Mixed Reviews

Despite his many books and awards, widespread popularity eluded him during his lifetime. Stephen Goodwin, in *The Washington Post Book World*, said, “No writer in America is more honored and less read than Wright Morris.”



Uncle Harry, the Home Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska, 1947/1981. Photography by Wright Morris Private collection, show curated by art2art Circulating Exhibitions.

Reviews of Morris' books at the time of publication often were mixed. With the exception of *The Field of Vision* and *Love Among the Cannibals*, his books have enjoyed little popular success.

Geoffrey Wolff, writing in *The New York Times Book Review* July 25, 1976), explains Morris's reputation this way: “Perhaps [the lack of] response to his work is less mysterious than it is regrettable.”

Walter Allen, writing in *The Modern Novel* (EP Dutton, 1964), said, “Wright Morris is one of the liveliest talents in the American novel today, and of his dozen or so novels one could scarcely pick out any single one as absolutely typical of his work. But he is always a formidable technician, able to bring past and present together in a single moment of time, and a writer in whom the bizarre, the pathetic and the comic exist cheek by jowl...”

Despite all of this, Morris continues to be studied as one of the major American writers and photographers of the twentieth century. ✨

Mari Sandoz Conference to Feature Acclaimed Speakers Who Revere Nebraska Writers

Keynote Focus on Wright Morris

Joseph J. Wydeven was first drawn to Wright Morris when he was working on his masters at DePaul University in Chicago. It was there he read, *The Home Place*, with its quirky text and wonderful photographs.

“I remember wondering what Morris hoped to achieve by combining photos and texts in a novel, and being convinced that the experiment didn’t work,” Wydeven said.

While working on his Ph.D. at Purdue, he read *The Works of Love*—and was immediately hooked. Wydeven completed his dissertation on Morris in 1979 and met the man that same year—giving a paper on Wright Morris, in his presence, in San Francisco.

Following this, Wydeven wrote and presented widely on Morris’s novels, photography and photo-texts and short stories before completing the book, *Wright Morris Revisited*. (Twayne, 1998)

As the keynote speaker for the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Annual Conference, he will discuss Wright Morris’ photographs and explore the times in which the photographs were made and Morris’s motives and emotions in producing them. On Thursday evening, March 26, he will also make some comparisons between the writers Sandoz and Morris during the session: “History and Mystery: Mari Sandoz and Wright Morris Imagine the Plains”

“Morris comes out of a literary tradition that includes Henry James and Willa Cather on one hand and a photographic tradition that includes Walker Evans on the other,” Wydeven said. “His emphasis is on the emotional meanings of personal experience, while his photographic eye sought the meanings lying within historical or humanly-used objects.”

Wydeven’s current research interests are focused on Midwestern literature and culture, including architecture and the fine arts. His 13,000 word survey of the history of Nebraska literature is forthcoming in *Volume Two of The Dictionary of Midwestern Literature* (2010), to be published by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.



For his work on Nebraska literature, Wydeven received the Mari Sandoz Award from the Nebraska Library Commission in 2005.

Wydeven, a former professor of English and Humanities, retired from Bellevue University in Nebraska in 2007. He is married and has two children.

Petersen: The Dreams are Real

Dr. Carol Miles Petersen is the author of *Bess Streeter Aldrich: The Dreams Are All Real*, the biography of the well-known Nebraska writer of books, magazine stories, radio programs and a movie.

Petersen, who will present a conference session on Friday, March 27, has thoroughly researched Aldrich by consulting with Aldrich’s family, neighbors and friends; poring over letters and newspapers, and reading Aldrich’s work again and again. In the biography, Petersen reveals a woman as strong and substantial as Aldrich’s fictional heroines.

With a major scholarly emphasis is on Great Plains writers, Petersen has specifically studied Nebraska writers such as Willa Cather, Bess Streeter Aldrich and Mari Sandoz, as well as Wright Morris and John Neihardt.

She is also the editor of two volumes of Aldrich’s short stories, *The Collected Short Works, 1909-1919* and *Collected Short Works of Bess Streeter Aldrich* (Nebraska 1995), 1920-1954, as well as editor of Joyce Kilmer’s *Affectionately Yours*.

After years of teaching English and writing at Fremont Midland College as well as University of Nebraska at Omaha and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Petersen is now retired and lives near Omaha with her husband, Alfred. They have three children and six grandchildren.

Biographer’s Interest in Neihardt Began 36 Years Ago

John G. Neihardt biographer, Tim Anderson was born in Oakland, Neb., and has a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s degree in history from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



Nebraska Writers cont.

“I have been interested in John G. Neihardt since briefly meeting him in September, 1972, as he autographed copies of his then just-released *All Is But a Beginning*, Anderson said. “Like most college students of the time, I had read *Black Elk Speaks*, but beyond that I knew little of the 90-year-old poet.”

Twenty-five years later, during a vacation to Stockholm, Sweden, Anderson re-read *Black Elk Speaks*, and remembers thinking, “who was the guy who wrote this?”

As soon as he returned home, Anderson began to explore the man for his master’s thesis that examined the first 20 years of Neihardt’s life. He is currently under contract with the University of Nebraska Press to finish a book-length biography of the one-time Nebraska poet laureate.

For the book, Anderson has conducted research in New York, West Virginia, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, Kansas and South Dakota.

Regarding Mari Sandoz and John Neihardt, two things have especially interested Anderson about the two authors. One is the impact their fathers had on their lives. Neihardt’s father, Nicholas, abandoned the family when Neihardt was barely 10 years old. And Sandoz’ father was, in some ways, all too present in her life. Writing about her father was one of the first signs of Sandoz’s great talent, and Neihardt spent much of his adult life searching for a replacement for his father before finding Nicholas Black Elk.

“The second thing that has interested me is the different ways in which these two Nebraska writers chose to deal with what they both believed was an East Coast bias against Midwestern writers,” he said. “Sandoz and Neihardt had similar opinions of New York publishers and critics, but Sandoz eventually chose to move to New York and confront the issue head-on, while Neihardt, though he occasionally considered moving to New York, chose instead to keep his distance.”

Anderson’s first newspaper job was at the Oakland Independent and he worked for several weekly and daily newspapers during college. After college, he worked at the Fort Myers (Fla.) News-Press, the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat & Chronicle and as a copy editor at the Omaha World-Herald, where he eventually became the editor of the newspaper’s Sunday magazine, *The Magazine of the Midlands*.



Later, Anderson worked at New York Newsday, on Long Island, New York, eventually serving as executive news editor. Later, he became the news design editor at The New York Times.

In 2005, he left the newspaper business to begin teaching at UNL’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications where he is currently an associate professor, primarily teaching editing and design, and serving as the head of the journalism sequence.

Anderson’s session on Neihardt will be presented on Friday, March 27 during the conference. ✨

Bess Streeter Aldrich Lived a Life of Joy

Beloved by readers for decades, Bess Streeter Aldrich earned a national reputation with a long list of best-selling novels and stories. Her most famous novel, *A Lantern in Her Hand*, has remained a favorite since it was first published in 1928.

Born in Iowa in 1881, Bess Streeter grew up and attended college there. After becoming a teacher, she met and fell in love with Charles “Cap” Aldrich, formerly a Captain in the U.S. Army. Following their marriage in 1907, they moved to Elmwood, Neb., where she devoted herself to raising children while Cap became a banker.

Aldrich began to write and sell short stories, winning a national award and enjoying the celebrity of a famous author. From that time on, Aldrich wrote whenever she could find a moment between caring for her growing family and her household chores. Indeed, she commented that, in the early days, many a story was liberally sprinkled with dishwater as she jotted down words or ideas while she worked.

It appeared that the Aldriches would live happily ever after; however, in 1925, Captain Aldrich unexpectedly died and the responsibilities of raising the family and managing the bank as a partial owner fell upon her. With the stock market crash of 1929, the nation’s banking system spun into chaos—more than ever, her family, her bank and her town depended on Aldrich.

Her writing career spanned 40-some years, during which she published more than one hundred short stories and articles, nine novels, one novella, two books of short stories and one omnibus. In her work, she emphasized family values and recorded accurately Midwest pioneering history.

One of her books, “Miss Bishop,” was made into the movie, “Cheers for Miss Bishop;” and her short story, “The Silent Stars Go By,” became the television show, “The Gift of Love,” starring Lee Remick and Angela Lansbury. Aldrich also served as a writer and consultant in Hollywood for Paramount Pictures. ✨

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference Notes

Saturday Tour Features Famous High Plains Geology Collections

A tour of Chadron State College's (CSC) Eleanor Barbour Cook Museum of Geology will be offered Saturday, March 28, at 8 a.m. following coffee at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

The college's first museum was conceived in 1938 after discussions between college president Robert Elliott, celebrated vertebrate paleontologist E.H. Barbour of Lincoln, and Barbour's daughter, Eleanor Barbour Cook, who was CSC's first geology professor.

With help from her father and others, Eleanor Cook began endowing the museum collections with donated specimens from around the world.

The early museum was more of a "natural history" museum than one strictly devoted to geoscience.

Mrs. Cook and assistant Albert Potter donated parts of their own collections to the museum and also enlisted the help of their colleagues, including E.H. Barbour, Mrs. Cook's father-in-law Harold Cook and her sons-in-law.

Major donor institutions included the University of Nebraska Museum and Geology Department, Chicago's Field Museum, the University of Michigan, Colorado Natural History Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Mrs. Cook retired from Chadron State in 1941.

Other museum highlights include minerals and rocks from Black Hills pegmatite mines, meteorites, agates, and rock-forming minerals from around the world.

The museum is now supervised by Mike Leite, associate professor of geoscience, who will be leading the tour.

Leite also serves as a CSC representative on the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society's Center Committee that oversees collections, artifacts and displays at the Mari Sandoz Center and the Pilster High Plains lecture series.

For more information contact: Mike Leite
mleite@csc.edu, 308-432-6377

Pre-Conference Reading List Offered

Dr. Kathy Bahr, professor of English at Chadron State College and a conference committee member, has suggested a reading list for those interested in the topics that will be discussed at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference.

The Story Catcher and *Old Jules* by Mari Sandoz

All Is But a Beginning and *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt

Time pieces: Photographs, Writing and Memory, The Home Place, The World in the Attic, and The Works of Love by Wright Morris; (also Morris's essay, "Willa Cather")

A Lantern in Her Hand by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Not Under Forty and *Willa Cather on Writing* by Willa Cather

A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux by Amos Bad Heart Bull and Helen Blish

The Environmental Imagination by Lawrence Buell

Ecocriticism by Greg Garrard

Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps by Edward P. Casey

Mules and Men and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Use enclosed form to register for the Mari Sandoz Conference

Presented by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

with support from the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center and Chadron State College

- A list of Chadron lodging establishments is located at www.marisandoz.org.
- Refund policy: A full refund is available with notice prior to March 20. A letter or email requesting the refund should state the registrant's name and address. No refunds will be made after March 20 as we are contracted to pay for food and materials even if you do not attend. Weather-related refunds are made on an individual basis.
- Do not mail registration forms after March 20. You will need to register at the door after that date.

For more information, or for questions about current Mari Sandoz Heritage Society membership, contact Cindy Evert Christ at marisandoz_society@windstream.net or 402-304-8103.

Save with EARLY REGISTRATION before March 1

Eighth Annual Powwow held at Chadron State College

By Tabatha Murphy

Chadron State College's White Buffalo Club sponsored its annual powwow in November. This year's powwow celebration brought colorful attire, tradition, and skilled dancers and appreciative visitors to the campus.

While many spectators and participants celebrated at the event, it left bittersweet memories for some involved. Dean Good Buffalo, was honored for his work as arena director since the first powwow at the college eight years ago.

The powwow originated as simple gatherings by American Indians a long time ago, Good Buffalo said. The gatherings eventually turned into powwows, which continue to grow.

Good Buffalo said the powwow takes a lot of work for all involved. It is a process that involves year-round planning and a lot of fundraising for the White Buffalo Club.

This year's powwow had an estimated 500 in attendance with about 17 adult and 33 children dancers, said Tyler Murphy, who helped organize the powwow. Murphy is a graduate assistant for the social sciences department and Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

"The White Buffalo Club put an immense amount of work into this event and it showed," Murphy said.

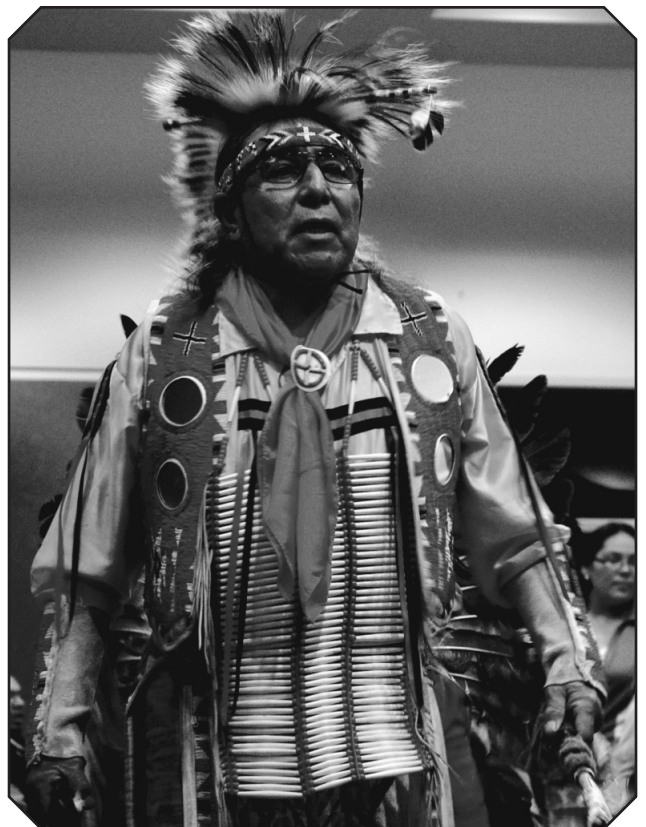
Tariah Price of Oglala, S.D. was crowned Miss Junior CSC Pow-Wow Princess and Angel Broken Nose from S.D. was crowned Miss CSC Pow-Wow Princess.

The young women will travel to different powwows over the course of the summer.

"I think that they will help the CSC powwow grow," Good Buffalo said. "It's been fun. I've enjoyed it. I've met a lot of college students and staff. I'm going to miss it."

The Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center celebrates the life and literature of Mari Sandoz and the culture of the High Plains. The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society has loaned its expansive collection of Sandoz materials—photos, documents, books, letters, and artifacts—for preservation and display at the Center.

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Center is located at Chadron State College, 1000 Main Street, Chadron, NE 69337. Web site: www.csc.edu/sandoz



Seymour Young Dog of Batesland, S.D. was one of the dancers at the Chadron State College powwow.



Angel Broken Nose from South Dakota was crowned Miss CSC Pow-Wow Princess.

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Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Membership Form

Yes! I would like to support the work of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. I have enclosed \$_____.

Your membership payment/gift is tax deductible according to IRS guidelines. We will provide a receipt for tax purposes. To join, mail this form with your check, payable to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, to Treasurer, Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, 1208 Laramie Avenue, Alliance, NE 69301.

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