

# Mari Sandoz

## HERITAGE

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### GENESIS OF A DREAM

Caroline Pifer

Perhaps members and prospective members of the Mari Sandoz Foundation would be interested in knowing what has led our family to give permission for the use of our sister's name in connection with this project.

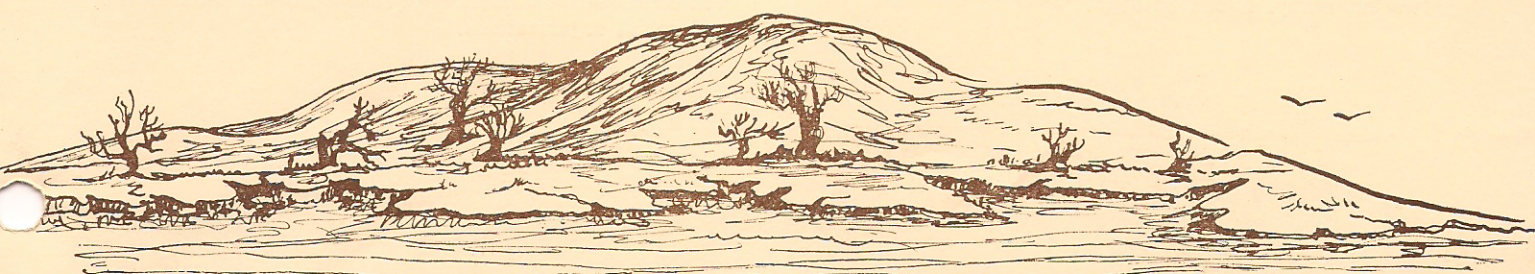
In a letter to Dean Breckenridge of the University of Nebraska in 1961 she wrote, "I have no interest in any personal connection with a college faculty but the last fifteen years there has been a rising interest in the preservation of the material of writers, particularly by University libraries. During these years several eastern and southern libraries have approached me with the suggestion that I deposit my material and collections with them. The time has come when it seemed I must make some reply. Because too much western material has gravitated to the east, and I do owe my education, such as it is, and my start in writing, to Nebraska, I inquired as quietly and tactfully as I could, whether the University Library or the State Historical Society might be interested in my collection."<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that Mari would have wanted no finer monument than to have known that somehow she might become a rallying point for possible local creative writers and artists through a research center which is one of the primary aims of this organization. Later, in 1963 in a letter to our sister, Flora Sandoz, Mari indicated that she definitely wanted such an undertaking and that at the time she was earmarking \$30,000 for the purpose.

The proposal did not meet with any success in our family and in 1964 when a favorite cousin, Allie Sandoz, offered to house her research material in his care at Merriman, Nebraska, Mari indicated that it would have to be in conjunction with a University or a family foundation.<sup>2</sup>

In another letter she wrote that she had hoped to make a Sandoz Foundation in America as a research and cultural center as was done in Switzerland. I remember hearing her and Ziolkowski, the sculptor, discussing their individual projects they hoped for, hers on the West and his on the Indian.

Mari seemed convinced that Western Nebraska would one day have a great college or University and since Chadron has become one of the outstanding educational colleges of the nation, I feel gratified that it is becoming involved in research of this area. That it is a college I attended and enjoyed makes me doubly pleased and I feel they are coming very close to Mari's dream.



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

I hope this can become a going concern, a means of bringing out our history and significance. That the established research material went to Lincoln is no insurmountable handicap. Newer and cheaper methods of copying are constantly available and there are no restrictions on the copying, only on the publishing. Perhaps the most serious loss is the fund she had earmarked, as that was never legally done and it reverted to the estate and was divided.

By collecting the originals of Mari's letters, and we already have some and promises of more, we can assemble an important collection of our own, particularly since she often penned in corrections and additions that do not show on the original carbons. Also, there are many duplicates of clippings, pictures and letters that I am sorting out for Chadron.

I am reminded of an article that appeared in 1937 in the Sunday *Lincoln Journal and Star* in which Dr. Lowry Wimberly and Mari squared off on the subject of the importance of regional writing. Wimberly stated before the Nebraska Writer's Guild according to the article, that regionalism is passe. He said, "Since regional differences are fast disappearing, I, for one, should hesitate to encourage writers to look for authentic literary inspiration in life as it may be lived in this or that cultural region." 3

Wimberly and Mari were good friends but she did not hesitate to declare before the same audience that, "There are a dozen short stories in every village, material for one or two important novels in every community, perhaps a dozen in larger cities, all free for your typewriter, ready for the use of anyone with the insight and discernment and the patience and talent to make the material a living and vital unit." The author added that, "One of the complaints the New Republic made of the modern novel is that those writers who can see what should be written have no emotional identity with the people, and not of them. That surely, is not our handicap here. Everyone of us is of the people." 4

Mari felt that two things have deterred others from basing the works on our local scene. One is the inaccessibility of research material, and the other is our distrust and inherent unkindness to authors. She concluded her statements thus, "All this makes me very unhappy for the literary future of our state. Because I am convinced that the creative worker must not wander too far or too long from (the place of his origin). We must learn to tolerate them, (authors), as we do other people who do not destroy our lilacs, or kidnap our children, (and) make it possible for them to remain, not in the case of one or two but many. It can be done." 5

## NOTES

1. Breckenridge letter, 1961, University of Nebraska, Sandoz Collection.
2. Allie Sandoz letter, 1964, University of Nebraska, Sandoz Collection.
3. *Lincoln Journal and Star*, 1937, University of Nebraska, Sandoz Collection.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

## MARI SANDOZ DAY



J. James Exon (right), Governor of the State of Nebraska, proclaims May 11, 1971, as "Mari Sandoz Day in Nebraska, in recognition of this famous Nebraskan who epitomizes the spirit and courage of Nebraskans past, present, and future." Vance Nelson, (from left) and Caroline Pifer accept the proclamation during a student convocation at Chadron State College. (CSC Photo)

State Senator Leslie Stull of Alliance has agreed to introduce a resolution in the upcoming session of the Nebraska legislature making Mari Sandoz Day an annual observance.

## HERITAGE NOTES

Plans are underway to seek federal grant or private foundation support to document the life of Mari Sandoz in motion picture form. The Sandoz film is being proposed as the first in a series of films to be produced on historical and literary subjects in Nebraska. If support is received, the film about Mari will interpret her life and writing in context with her strong emotional identity with and cerebral understanding of the Nebraska Sandhills.

Given the dearth of recorded material about Nebraska and its people, it is hoped that this film series will contribute to the needs of schools, historical societies, and social organizations.



Members of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund will want to watch for future announcements concerning the tour of Sandoz Country. Tentative plans are to conduct the tour in late June of 1972 in cooperation with the Heritage Center at Hay Springs and Caroline Pifer.

The charter membership period has been extended to January 1, 1972. Charter certificates will be mailed after this date.

### BY AND ABOUT MARI

**Cheyenne Autumn** has been ranked among the top ten paperbacks available on the literature of the American Indian. Indian educators consider the recommended titles in their order of preference to be:

1. **House Made of Dawn**, N. Scott Momaday
2. **Custer Died For Your Sins**, Vine Deloria, Jr.
3. **Indians of the Americas**, Edwin R. Embree
4. **Indian Heritage of America**, Alvin M. Josephy, Jr.
5. **American Epic**, Alice Marriot and Carol K. Rachlin
6. **The Disinherited**, Dale Van Every
7. **Cheyenne Autumn**, Mari Sandoz
8. **Last Frontier**, Howard Fast
9. **Masked Gods**, Frank Waters
10. **Book of the Hopi**, Frank Waters <sup>1</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ward Damio, "Twilight in the House of Dawn," **Media and Methods**, 7 (April 1971): 64-65

The Summer 1971 issue of **Prairie Schooner** contains an excellent article on Mari by Dorothy Nott Switzer. Mrs. Switzer, who came to know Mari as a student on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and through Mari's association with the Nebraska State Historical Society, has related an episode which occurred in a magazine writing class at the University which gives marvelous expression to Mari's identification with and love of the Sandhills of Nebraska.

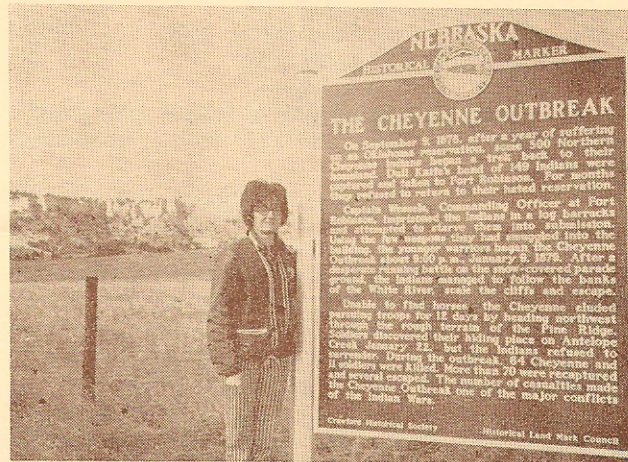
The Nebraska State Historical Society has an extensive and partially restricted collection of primary source material on both Mari and her father, Old Jules Sandoz.

Nebraska's Poet Laureate, John G. Neihardt, has been selected as the first recipient of the Mari Sandoz Award given by the Nebraska Library Association. The award was presented at the Association's citation dinner on October 21, 1971, during its State Convention in Omaha. The award is "presented to a person who, because of his writings, film production, book reviews, or similar activities in and about Nebraska is deemed worthy of the award."

KDUH-TV of Hay Springs, Nebraska, presented a 30 minute special on Sandoz Country featuring Caroline Sandoz Pifer on October 17 and 18, 1971.

Mari Sandoz memorabilia may be seen at the Mari Sandoz Room at the Chamberlin family furniture store in Gordon and at the museum depicting her New York apartment which is located approximately 30 miles south of Gordon on Highway 27.

Visitors to Sandoz Country will not want to miss the opportunity of seeing the setting of a major portion of **Cheyenne Autumn** which occurred at nearby Fort Robinson, as well as the interpretative exhibits at the museum.



Kay McCune visits the Cheyenne Outbreak historical marker along the Cheyenne escape route from Fort Robinson to the buttes shown in the background. (Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.)

According to the 1971 **Books in Print and Paperbound Books in Print** the following of Mari's books are available for purchase:

- The Battle of the Little Big Horn.** Lippincott: \$5.95.
- The Beaver Men.** Hastings: \$5.95.
- The Cattlemen.** Hastings: \$6.50.
- Cheyenne Autumn.** Avon: \$1.25 pap.
- The Christmas of the Phonograph Records.** University of Nebraska Press: \$2.95.
- Crazy Horse.** University of Nebraska Press: \$1.95 pap.
- The Horsecatcher.** Westminster: \$3.95.
- Love Song to the Plains.** University of Nebraska Press: \$1.85 pap.; Harper & Row \$6.95.
- Old Jules.** University of Nebraska Press: \$1.75 pap.
- Old Jules Country.** Hastings: \$4.95.
- Sandhill Sundays.** University of Nebraska Press: \$5.00.
- Slogum House.** Avon: \$0.95 pap.
- The Story Catcher.** Grossett & Dunlap: \$0.50 pap.; Westminster: \$3.50.
- These Were The Sioux.** Dell: \$0.50 pap.; Hastings: \$3.50.
- Winter Thunder.** Scholastics: \$0.50 pap.; Westminster: \$3.25.



**The Battle of the Little Big Horn** is also available in paperback from Modern Literary Editions Publishing Co. for \$1.25. A privately printed pamphlet entitled **The Great Council** is available for \$1.00 from area book stores, or by writing Mrs. Caroline Pifer.

Titles currently out-of-print include:

**The Buffalo Hunters.** Hastings, 1954.

**Capital City.** Little, Brown, 1939.

**Hostiles and Friendlies.** University of Nebraska Press, 1959.

**Miss Morissa.** McGraw-Hill, 1955.

**Son of the Gambler Man.** Potter, 1960.

**The Tom Walker.** Dial, 1947.

For a complete bibliography of Mari's writing and a partial chronology of her life and writing see **Sandhill Sundays**.

### DONORS TO FUND

The Heritage Fund has been pleased to accept the donation of two sets of letters from former correspondents with Mari. One group, containing six letters from Mari, has been given by Wallace Stegner, Professor of English at Stanford University. Contents are a combination of professional and social commentary.

Arthur G. Vetter of Denver is the donor of the second set consisting of approximately 48 letters and an autographed photograph of Mari. Mr. Vetter, a retired postal worker, first met Mari through a mutual friend, Chauncey Thomas, during the summer of 1942, while she was in Denver doing a portion of the research on **Crazy Horse**. The Vetter collection serves to locate Mari during her nomadic years in her early publishing period. It also provides insight into Mari's personality and her attitude toward her books. The letters cover the period 1942-1965.

Both sets of letters are temporarily on file at the Chadron State College Library, and are available to qualified researchers upon request.

### COMMENT

Given the current trends of crisis and turmoil within our country, it is my belief that the writings of Mari Sandoz are a must for anyone devoted to the study of mankind. Although most of Mari's works are based on history, and particularly the history of one region, they record much more than "how it was". I feel that Mari's writings deal with a lot of "where it's at today".

Of course, this is the quality of Mari's writings which many recognized long before I made the scene. However, if my own work as curator of the Fort Robinson Museum had not necessitated my reading of **Crazy Horse**, **Cheyenne Autumn**, and **Old Jules**, I may never have taken the opportunity to become acquainted with Mari Sandoz. Although I am certain her books were in the school libraries, as a student I was never really aware of them. Yet Mari deals with not only what makes men and women great, but also with the pettiness of human beings. She deals with warfare not only on a large scale, but also in the conflicts and clashes of individual personalities. Her subjects of courtship, love, divorce, and hate are timeless. Today's ecologists and anti-pollutionists will find inspiration in books by Mari Sandoz. That is why the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund is important to all citizens of this country. Through the medium of the fund it is hoped that we can make more people aware of Mari's contribution to the literary world, and aware of the Nebraska Sandhills heritage. In my opinion, the Heritage Fund must be more than just a memorial to a great Nebraska authoress, it must continue the exploration of the "ocean" Mari described: ". . . by understanding this one drop of water, I hope to discover something of the nature of the ocean."

Vance Nelson, President

Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund Committee

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