



# the Story Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

## Robert Henri is the Son of a Gambler's Man

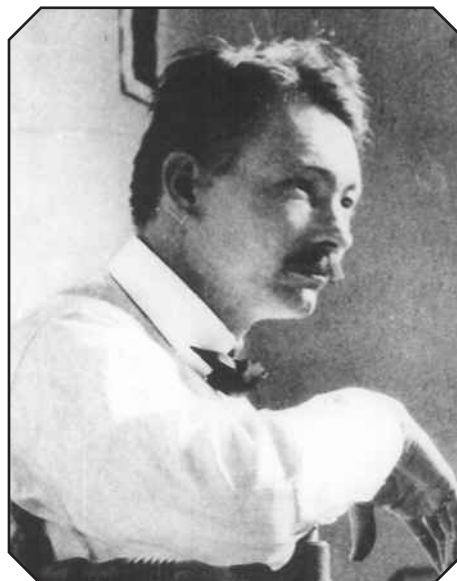
In June, the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society board of directors toured the Robert Henri Museum in Cozad, Neb. The museum building was the childhood home of Robert Henri, one of America's greatest artists, whose Nebraska connection remained unknown for more than 74 years.

In the 1950s, many people knew about Robert Henri (pronounced HEN-rye), the leader of the Ashcan School of American painters, but few people knew him as the son of Cozad's founder.

In 1956, Dr. Robert Gatewood, nephew of John Jackson Cozad, came forward with a tale hardly anyone knew. It was, according to The Cozad Local newspaper, the "true story of John J. Cozad (founder of Cozad) and his family in a thrilling narrative of the old west."

A few years later in 1960, a Western historical novel, *Son of the Gambler's Man: The Youth of an Artist* by Mari Sandoz was published. Essentially, it is the tale of Robert Cozad, a sensitive, talented boy growing up in the midst of frontier violence. Portraying the fascinating and true story of a family's struggle to stay together after tragedy, it also explores the exploits of John J. Cozad, a professional gambler, a wheeler dealer and an ambitious promoter.

Other standard Sandoz themes such as frontier people fighting hunger, cold, blizzards, droughts, grasshoppers, prairie fires, and ruthless cattlemen play out here as well.



Robert Henri was also Robert Henry Cozad, son of the founder of Cozad, Neb.

### An Artist's Early Years

In 1871, John Jackson Cozad, founded the town of Cozadale, Ohio, and in 1873, the family moved west to Nebraska, where he established the town of Cozad.

But in October 1882, John J. Cozad became embroiled in a dispute with a rancher, Alfred Pearson, over the right to pasture cattle on land claimed by the Cozad family. When the dispute turned physical, Cozad fatally shot Pearson.

The mood of the town turned against Cozad. Fearing he would be hanged, he fled to Denver, Colo. The rest of the soon family followed.

In order to disassociate themselves from the scandal, the family members changed their names. The father

became known as Richard Henry Lee, and his sons posed as adopted children (or foster children or as nephews) under the names Frank Southern and Robert Earl Henri.

In 1883, the newly-named family moved to New York City, then to Atlantic City, NJ, where the young artist, who was 19, completed his first paintings.

Years later, his father was cleared of wrongdoing.

### The Greatest Portrait Painter

In 1886, Robert Henri enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Two years later, he traveled to Paris where he embraced Impressionism.

*Continued on Page 3*

Mark your calendar  
for the 2009 Annual  
Conference

March 26-28,  
2009

at  
Chadron State  
College,  
Chadron, Nebr.

See article on page 3.

## 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](mailto:marisandoz_society@windstream.net), or [www.marisandoz.com](http://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.

## Son of a Gambler' Man continued

In 1894, he began teaching at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. There he began to attract a group of followers who met in his studio to discuss art and culture, including several men who were illustrators for the Philadelphia Press newspaper. Along with Henri, they were known as the "Philadelphia Four."

Henri began reconsidering Impressionism as he was becoming a strong advocate of adventurous styles in painting, particularly boldly slashed scenes of urban life and portraits of the urban poor.

In 1902, Henri was teaching at the New York School of Art and he was elected to the National Academy of Design. When painters in his circle were rejected for the Academy's exhibition, he walked off the jury, resolving to organize a show of his own.

True to his word, in 1908, he organized a landmark show of the rejected work, along with paintings of his own. Titled simply "The Eight," the exhibition created a sensation, was flooded with visitors and was even a commercial success. The event is often considered the opening salvo of modern art in the United States.

These painters and this exhibition became known as the "Ashcan School" of art. The term was coined for the group who pioneered realistic paintings and believed that artists should have freedom of expression in art.

Henri was particularly fond of painting portraits, often of different ethnic types—Irish, African-American, Native American, Chinese, Hispanics, Gypsies and, especially, Dutch children.

Up to 1927, Henri was a popular and influential teacher at the Art Students League of New York. His ideas on art were collected in *The Art Spirit* published in 1923 and edited by former pupil Margery Ryerson. The book about Henri and his style is well-known to today's art students and art lovers and it is still used in college art classes throughout the United States.

In the spring of 1929, Henri was chosen as one of the top three living American artists by the Arts Council of New York. Although he died shortly thereafter, he is considered by some to be America's greatest portrait painter.

There are many inconsistencies of the accounts of the lives of the Cozads and Robert Henri because of the number of years that passed before Robert Gatewood brought the story to the public's attention.

Mari Sandoz would quite agree with Robert Henri when he said, "Art cannot be separated from life. It is the expression of the greatest need of which life is capable, and we value art not because of the skilled product, but because of its revelation of a life's experience." ❀



Portrait of Miss Eulabee Dix (Becker) in Wedding Gown.

## "Son" Book Reviews

In reviewing *Son of a Gambler' Man*, Hal Borland, Saturday Review said: "The book's characters are all drawn from life and given their actual names; the events can be documented. The factual framework makes this unusual fiction and gives the tale a pattern most novelists would have altered to their purposes. But Miss Sandoz had her own purpose and she has achieved it splendidly by telling the story the way it happened."

According to Victor P. Haas, New York Times Book Review, "Excellent historical fiction. . . . Deeply interesting and decidedly worth while. Moreover, it adds another cubit to our understanding of the flowering of America's heartland, a story of never-ending fascination." ❀

## Research/Books Available at Robert Henri Museum

The childhood home of Henri, which houses the Robert Henri Museum in Cozad, was designed by his father, John J. Cozad, as a combination home and hotel to accommodate settlers that arrived on the train. The building is listed in the National Historical Register.

A comprehensive file of Robert Henri paintings and many reference books are maintained for research at the museum, together with more than 200 slides of his paintings.

Some of those books include:

*Painters of the Ashcan School: The Immortal Eight* by Bennard B. Perlman, *My People - The Portraits of Robert Henri* by Valerie Leeds, and *Painters of a New Country: The Eight & American Art* by Elizabeth Milroy

A Historical Walkway, adjacent to the museum, consists of an original Pony Express station, the Little Church in the Park, and a pioneer schoolhouse.

The book, *The Art Spirit* is available for purchase in the Henri Museum Gift Shop along with other Henri memorabilia such as DVDs on the life of Robert Henri, and the *Son of the Gambler's Man*.

The Robert Henri Museum and Historical Walkway is located at 218 East 8th Street, Cozad, Neb. (1 mile north of Interstate 80 - Exit 222).

For more information, contact the museum staff at (308) 784-4154, e-mail: [rhenri@cozadtel.net](mailto:rhenri@cozadtel.net), or <http://roberthenrimuseum.org>. ❧

## Story Rooted in Sandoz Childhood

Form *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains*, by Helen Winter Stauffer, 1982, pp 231-232.

"Some time after the publication of the book that year, the author (Mari Sandoz) wrote down her thoughts on the origins and writing of *Son of the Gambler's Man*. The story had its roots in her childhood; she recalled having heard parts of the Cozad legend from several men in her own neighborhood who had been involved with the Olive gang. The outfit was headquartered in Cozad's neighboring town of Lexington but had moved up to northwestern Nebraska when the law came to close to them.

"Some of the men talked at length about John J. Cozad, who, they said, had opposed the Olives and their illegal use of government land, just as Old Jules had stood up against the ranchers . . . their domination made them antagonists to community builder Cozad.

"Cozad had written her father Mari noted, suggesting they cooperate in building a new town in the Niobrara River region, perhaps with his son Robert coming to start a colony for artists. Nothing came of the proposal, but she recognized the many similarities between Cozad and her own father.

"Both were determined community builders, both had raging tempers, both alienated others with their absolute certainty of their own importance—'violent visionaries,' someone had called them.

"She recalled that the story had been on her mind since Dr. Robert Gatewood, a younger cousin of Robert Henri, had approached her in 1939 and offered the family materials. She hoped to combine in one story descriptions of the formation of a region, a community, and a youth, "the young painter up to the time when his course as an artist and a fighter for artists was established." ❧

## Sandoz and Her Contemporaries Topic of Annual Meeting and Conference

The topic for the 2009 annual Mari Sandoz Heritage Society meeting and conference is "Mari Sandoz and Her Literary Contemporaries." A highlight of the event will be the exhibition of photographic works by Wright Morris at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center. Morris who is a Nebraska writer as well as a photographer, will be featured as a Sandoz contemporary.

The conference, which runs from Thursday, March 26 through Saturday, March 29, 2009, will include a keynote by Joseph Wydevan, dean of Arts and Sciences at Bellevue University on Wright Morris; several invited speakers on Sandoz's literary contemporaries; and presentations resulting from a call for papers.

### Papers on Sandoz' Work Sought

Paper proposals on Mari Sandoz's works are invited for presentation at the conference on Friday, March 27, 2009. We are especially interested in papers dealing with Sandoz and her literary contemporaries from the High Plains, such as John Neihardt, Bess Streeter Aldrich, Weldon Kees, Angie Debo, Wright Morris, and Willa Cather. However, other presentations on Sandoz will be considered. We also welcome submissions dealing with Wright Morris's literary works and photography to complement the exhibit.

Please e-mail inquiries or an abstract for proposed papers to Dr. Katherine Bahr, Dept. of English and Humanities, Chadron State College at: [kbahr@csc.edu](mailto:kbahr@csc.edu). ❧

# Burned Hat Reminder of “Another Country, People”

By Ann Greenia, Archivist, Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center

Many hats have been made famous by the people who wore them.

Who can forget the poignant photographs of Abraham Lincoln, wearing his black stovepipe hat, taken by the Civil War photographer Mathew Brady?

Or Minnie Pearl’s straw hat with the price tag waving off to the side of the brim, or Napoleon’s bicorne seized in the battle of Belle-Alliance (Waterloo) in 1815, or John Wayne’s favorite cowboy hat?

Working as the archivist at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, I noticed repeated references to a particular cowboy hat in two of Mari Sandoz’s writings. The reference in the foreword of her anthology, *Love Song to the Plains*, published in 1961 was:

*“On my wall, wherever I am to be for some weeks, hangs an old cowboy hat, stained and plainly no John B. Stetson. Years ago, far from home and preoccupied with an old Indian site, I was trapped in a sudden shift of wind by a prairie fire sweeping in too fast to escape on my borrowed horse. I tied my jacket over his eyes and set a backfire for a bare spot for us, using my hat to control the flames.”*

Again in her short work *Outpost in New York* published in 1962, in another anthology entitled, *Sandhill Sundays and Other Recollections*, Mari wrote:

*“The first thing I hung on my wall in Greenwich Village was my cowboy hat. It had been a cheap one in the first place and now it was old and burn-stained from the time it helped save me and my horse*

*from a prairie fire, years ago, but hanging it seemed a sort of commitment to stay in New York for a few months, and a reminder, in moments of anger and disgust with the east, that there was another country and another people.”*

I began searching through our manuscript collection, for Mari’s *Outpost in New York* and found it. It is one thing to have a copy of a manuscript, but it is quite another to have the original.

I then searched for the manuscript of *Sandhill Sundays*.

Next, I tried to find any photographs of Mari wearing her famous hat. Again, I was in luck, finding no less than 17 images of Mari and her cowboy hat.

When I read these passages, I pondered the existence of Mari’s cowboy hat and wondered whether we were fortunate enough to have the exact hat she wrote about or either of the original works in our collection.

I walked asked Sarah Polak, director of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, about the hat. She replied that, yes, we have the cowboy hat among the Center’s collection of at least 50 hats belonging to Mari Sandoz.

Sarah took me to the collections room to locate the archival container protecting the famous hat, took the lid off of the box, and with white-gloved hands lifted the hat from its resting place.

With my white-gloved hands, I



The picture is of Mari Sandoz (left) and Betty Van Vleet, at Caribou Creek, Colo., August 1942. Her illustrious “cheap” cowboy hat is laying next to her on the ground. The Lazy VV Ranch, near Boulder, Colo., became a summer writing retreat for Mari. The Van Vleet’s raised champion Hereford cattle and Arabian horses. Mari’s novellette *Foal of Heaven* was based on people she had known at the ranch.

carefully took the hat and gently turned it over and studied all of its characteristics and then breathed in its smell. Both Sarah and I agreed that it still carried the faint aroma of a story, of a moment in time when a dangerous prairie fire trapped the author on her horse.

It may seem like a small victory to some; however, for this archivist it was a major adventure and thrill to find Mari’s cowboy hat, her original manuscripts and photographs, linking all three pieces together.

You can experience an exciting escapade of viewing Mari’s personal possessions and works on your next visit to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center. ✨

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Center is located at Chadron State College, 1000 Main Street, Chadron, NE 69337. Phone: 308-432-6401. Web site: [www.csc.edu/sandoz](http://www.csc.edu/sandoz)

## Eighty Men Reexamines the Fetterman Myth

Shannon Smith teaches history at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and is a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She is also a long-time member of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society’s board of directors.

In *Give Me Eighty Men: Women and the Myth of the Fetterman Fight*, Shannon D. Smith re-explores the reputation of William J. Fetterman to whom was attributed this infamous declaration, “With 80 men I could ride through the entire Sioux nation.”

Historical accounts cite this statement in support of the premise that bravado, vainglory and contempt for the fort’s commander, Col. Henry B. Carrington, compelled Fetterman to disobey direct orders from Carrington and lead his men into a perfectly executed ambush by an alliance of Plains Indians. What has become popularly known as the Fetterman Fight occurred near Fort Phil Kearney in present-day Wyoming in 1866.

In the aftermath of the incident, Carrington, a book-learned militarist who had never seen combat, was positioned as solely accountable.

Unable to defend himself against such formidable opponents, Col. Carrington’s first and second wives contrived Fetterman’s supposed boast to support the assertion that Fetterman disobeyed orders. They came to Carrington’s rescue by publishing books presenting his version of the deadly encounter.

Subsequently, the Carrington publications led historians to focus on Fetterman’s arrogance and ineptitude as the sole cause of the tragedy rather than the post-Civil War political and military chaos that is the real story behind the Fetterman Massacre.

Although several of Fetterman’s soldiers and fellow officers disagreed with the women’s accounts, their chivalrous deference to women’s moral authority during the age of Victorian sensibilities enabled the wives to present their story without challenge.

The near universal acceptance of this thesis in the more than 140 years since the battle is striking. Like “Custer’s Last Stand,” the so-called Fetterman Massacre has become mythologized in popular culture. Hundreds of books, novels, and articles have launched the story of the “fire-eating,” boastful, and cocksure Fetterman and his military debacle into the forefront of America’s western heritage.

Most historians point to Fetterman’s arrogance and the strained relationships between Col. Carrington and his officers to explain Fetterman’s fatal decision to lead his men into ambush.

Dee Brown’s *The Fetterman Massacre*, originally published as *Fort Phil Kearny: An American Saga* in 1962, portrays

Fetterman as so contemptuous of the Plains Indians’ military skills that he was oblivious to the overwhelming evidence of their battle superiority.

Even Mari Sandoz portrayed the Fetterman fight in *Crazy Horse: Strange Man of the Oglalas*.

“With Crazy Horse to bring them in, and the warriors waiting for his signal, this would be a bloody moon for the soldiers on the Piney. It is known that the little soldier chief called Fetterman down there says with fifty men he can ride through the Lakota nation!”

In the introduction to *Crazy Horse*, Vine Deloria said, “How many times does Sandoz discuss the complex and clever strategies the chiefs designed to give the soldiers a sound thrashing? The old men understood the psychology of war—that the arrogance of the inexperienced officers, such as Fetterman, could be used to lead the U.S. Army into neatly laid traps.”

### About the Book

In *Give Me Eighty Men*, Smith reexamines the works of the two Mrs. Carringtons in the context of contemporary evidence. The book demonstrates the powerful influence of female writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—an era when women are typically portrayed as having little agency and almost no impact upon the development of historical narrative.

Smith’s book vividly portrays, with substantial documentation, a completely different interpretation of this immensely popular story.

By eliminating the bias of the Carringtons’ accounts, a different image of Fetterman emerges. Universally regarded as a chivalrous gentleman and outstanding military leader, he clearly respected the Plains Indians’ superiority in numbers, weaponry and battle skills over his untested soldiers. Even more compelling is the evidence that he was probably killed in a heroic attempt to support the rash actions of his subordinates.

“Shortly after I began this adventure, I combed every primary source I could find that described Fetterman,” Smith said. “Other than Carrington’s reports months after his death, every record or description of the man was positive.”

Trying to find when Fetterman’s reputation took such a sharp turn, it became clear that women did indeed shape the story we know, as well as 140 year of “history.”

“It is a history that I believe was revised and controlled through the efforts of women defending their man with the might of their pen,” Smith said.

*Give Me Eighty Men: Women and the Myth of the Fetterman Fight* is available through the University of Nebraska Press, 800-755-1105 or e-mail: [pressmail@unl.edu](mailto:pressmail@unl.edu). ❀

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