

Mari Sandoz

HERITAGE

Chadron, Nebraska

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WILLA CATHER AND MARI SANDOZ

Robert Overing

Two of the most articulate proponents of Nebraska's Early West are women: Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz. But their viewpoints differ. Perhaps it is unfair to compare too closely their literary achievements, for Miss Cather is primarily a novelist fascinated by history, while Miss Sandoz is primarily a historian who often presents her material through the medium of the novel. Miss Cather won the Pulitzer Prize for **One of Ours**. Miss Sandoz is the only writer who has as many as four books listed in "The One Hundred Best Books of the West."

The two authors did not see eye to eye principally because of differences in their backgrounds. Miss Cather was Virginia born, transplanted to the bleak prairie at the impressionable age of nine. Miss Sandoz was born and raised in the still bleaker sandhills of northwest Nebraska, enduring hardships that scarcely touched Miss Cather's life. Willa's father was a soft-spoken Southern gentleman, quietly efficient. Mari's father was a rough-hewn Swiss emigrant, domineering, often ruthless, always courageous.

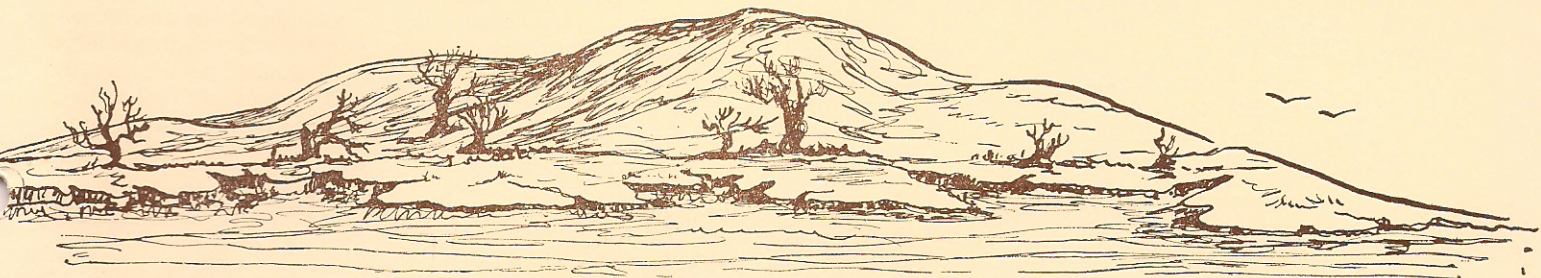
Webster County, especially the town of Red Cloud, had passed the frontier stage when Willa Cather was growing up there, but Sheridan County was frontier land during all of Mari Sandoz' younger years. Miss Cather saw the need for people to put down roots to be acutely tied to the past. The daughter and granddaughter of "Old Mrs. Harris" "had still to go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed and unforeseeable." It is as if Miss Cather were looking at life through a telescope. Her selective outlook and creative imagination magnified what she saw.

Miss Sandoz, on the other hand, looked through a microscope at all the little things making up the lives of the impoverished settlers which would be monotonous were it not for the vagaries of the weather and the quarrels, murders, lynchings, suicides, snake-bites, and accidents of every kind which beset them. Miss Sandoz emphasized and repeated such occurrences throughout her writings.

Both writers had a great fondness for the land. Miss Cather saw it as a living being, controlling and shaping man's destiny. Miss Sandoz saw it as man's opportunity, to be controlled and tamed. Better than most of his contemporaries Old Jules conquered his environment. It has been noted that most of his defeats were caused by personal insufficiencies, and not by any power of the land.

Miss Cather saw the West as a place to escape **from**. Only the super-strong (and consequently artistically insensitive), such as Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda, can live a full and fruitful life on the untamed prairie. Miss Sandoz, however, saw locators like Old Jules help others in building the frontier into an attractive region to escape **to**.

Miss Cather sought a purpose in life in the West. What happened between incidents was of great concern to her. She found little evidence of the value of ancestry in Nebraska, little concern with self-identity. "Of all the bewildering things about a new country," she writes in **O Pioneers**, "the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening." The settled East gave her comfort in this respect, and her European visits probably more. The ancient settlements in the American Southwest lured her because of their attitude of per-



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

manency and antiquity. Miss Sandoz, on the other hand, crowded incident after incident in her writings because to her the incidents were life itself. What happened between was of little interest. In several of her works Miss Sandoz says that in the early West one did not ask a stranger to identify himself. "It was customary and safer not to ask a man his name but to say, 'What name you travelling under?'"

Miss Cather, then, saw symbolically and selectively; she saw what she wanted to see, what bolstered her viewpoint, what answered her questions. She looked at the prairie and its people wonderingly. She wanted to search and find out the why and wherefore. Miss Sandoz was not selective. She saw everything, she saw it all because it was there. She looked at life microscopically, seeing all problems as human problems without direct relationships to abstractions such as Art and Philosophy. She emphasized what people did, giving less attention to the reasons for their behavior. She was interested in the what, rather than the why.

Miss Cather saw the buffalo, that prominent feature of the early West, with a poet's eye: "... where the bison in their periodic migrations stopped to drink and bathe and wallow." Miss Sandoz' eye was more prosaic and more precise: "Then the buffaloes appeared on the northwest tableland, singly at first, then in twos and threes coming down the breaks, and in little strings along narrow trails.

As for nostalgia for Nebraska, Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz reacted somewhat alike. Miss Cather says, "There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country." Miss Sandoz echoes, "I always come back to the Middle West. There is a vigor here, and a broadness of horizon."

Willa Cather lived the part of her heroines. There is some of Willa Cather in Antonia Shimerda, in Alexandra Bergson, in Thea Kronberg. Mari Sandoz, on the other hand, is not Morissa Kirk nor anyone in **Slogum House** or **Son of the Gambler Man**. In the "non-fiction" **Old Jules**, she is, of course, the girl Marie, falling asleep behind the kitchen stove, knowing no more what kissing was the next morning than the night before. The girl who, after her mother snatches her from the arms of a blushing neighbor boy at a dance, spends the rest of the night staring dry-eyed at the ceiling. Old Jules just laughs. "Dancing is for hired hands and stable maids," he says.

Miss Cather, then, associates the hopes and disappointments of the early plains people with her own inner convictions, while Miss Sandoz observes that human injustice tends to prevail, irrespective of time or place. This is not to say that the viewpoints of the two authors are unrelated or in direct opposition to each other, but rather that they are complementary. Their combined literary output is a tremendous treasury of contrasting impressions of the Early West.

HERITAGE NOTES

Several changes have taken place in the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund since the last publication. Former committee members Duane Grimme, Jim McCafferty, and George Morgan resigned; and Wayne Britt, Chadron State College (CSC) student representative, was lost due to graduation. Taking their places

are: Larry Agenbroad, Professor of Earth Science at CSC; William Colwell, State College Board of Trustee member from Hay Springs; Everett Larson, Associate Professor of English at CSC; William Ptacek, President, Nebraska Western College at Scottsbluff; Mrs. Leslie Stull of Alliance; and Larry Tangeman, Vice President for Academic Affairs at CSC. These additions are an attempt to broaden the representation on the administrative board of the Fund.

A special thank you goes to these former committee members who were willing to serve during the founding period of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund. That same kind of cooperation now coming from the new committee members insures the continued growth and vitality of the organization. It is a pleasure to welcome the new committee members into our collective efforts of preserving and perpetuating the memory and work of Mari Sandoz.

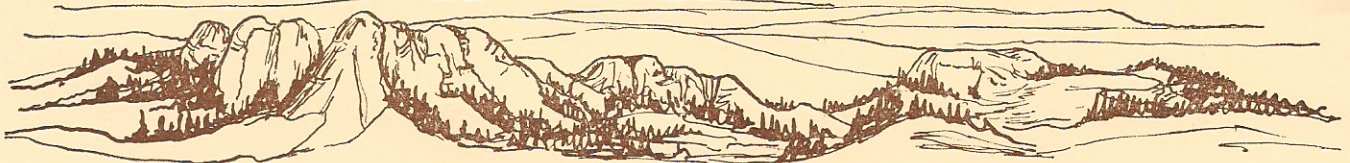
This will be the last time the word "Fund" will be used with the name of the organization. Feeling that the word "Fund" implies a concern only with money and that it does not convey the meaning that the organization is permanent, your administrative board has changed the name of the organization to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. At the same time the board changed its name from "Committee" to "Council" in an attempt to project a similar image of permanence.

Ellen Larson, whose art work has brought distinctive aesthetic qualities to the Society's publications, has been elected Vice Chairman of the Council. She joins Vance Nelson, Judy McDonald, and a member at large on the executive committee of the Council. Mr. Nelson's title has been changed from President to Chairman, and Miss McDonald's from Executive Secretary to Executive Director. Kay McCune will continue to serve as Recording Secretary.

Letters are still being received commenting about the Sandoz Country Tour held last year. Others are writing to inquire if there will be a tour again this year. Your comments and questions indicate a measure of the popularity of this event with our membership, and they also reflect the continued high interest in the life and writings of Mari Sandoz. For this we are very grateful.

We value your participation in the activities of the Society, and we hope to be able to sponsor at least one annual event to make this participation possible. We want to keep the tour as the "special thing" that it has been in the past, and for this reason it will not be an annual affair. In its place this year will be a day-long celebration on the Chadron State College campus on May 11, Mari Sandoz Day in Nebraska. We hope that you will join us in observing Mari's day by coming to the campus.

Since the membership year corresponds with Mari's birthdate, May 11, all annual memberships are renewable at this time. Continue your investment in preserving your cultural heritage by renewing your membership at an annual cost of \$4.00; sustaining annual \$10.00; life (individual) \$75.00; or commercial annual \$100.00.



Mari Sandoz
Center for the
Study of Man

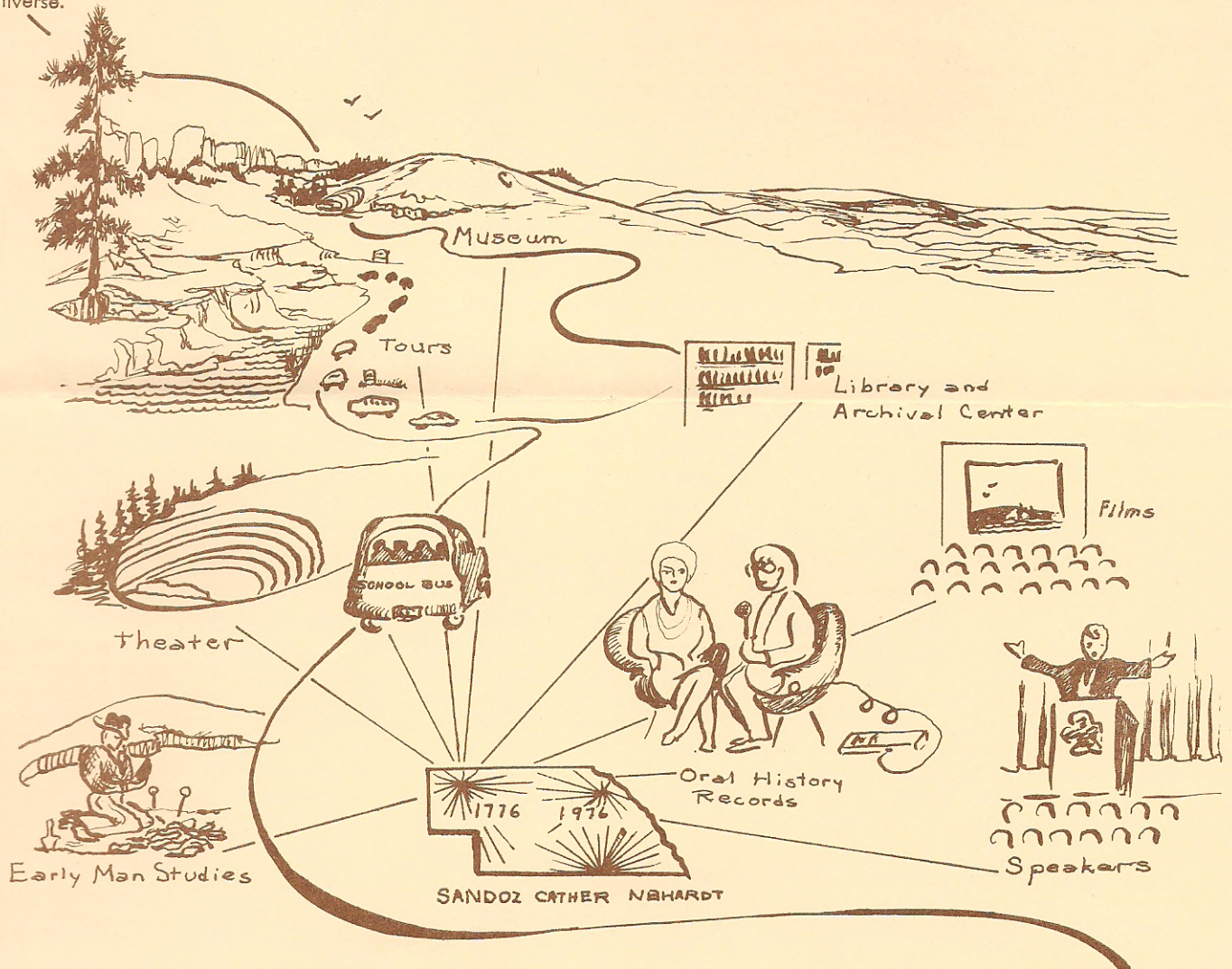
Such a center could serve as a means of making possible a focus on the totality of the life of man on the High Plains which would bring this totality into a clear perspective not only for the present generation but for generations to come. Mari Sandoz made a beginning by studying what happens when so-called "modern man" comes into what was a stone-age region. She was interested in the effect of change upon the life of the individual and the land. The Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man proposes to expand upon existing programs in order to provide a measure of synthesis for understanding and interpreting the region and its people.

What has been and will be is primarily connected with the land. The 31,000 square mile area of the Sandhills, High Plains, and bad lands offers limitless possibilities for field research in archaeology, botany, ecology, entomology, geology, history, ornithology, and zoology.

Western Nebraska is one of the last areas of the United States to experience the cycle of settlement. Much of this activity has occurred in the 20th century, and, as a result, the region has been hurried into adapting to and becoming a part of a techno-urban society. As a consequence of this accelerated tempo, the people were so preoccupied with providing for the bare necessities of life that they had little or no time for attending to anything else.

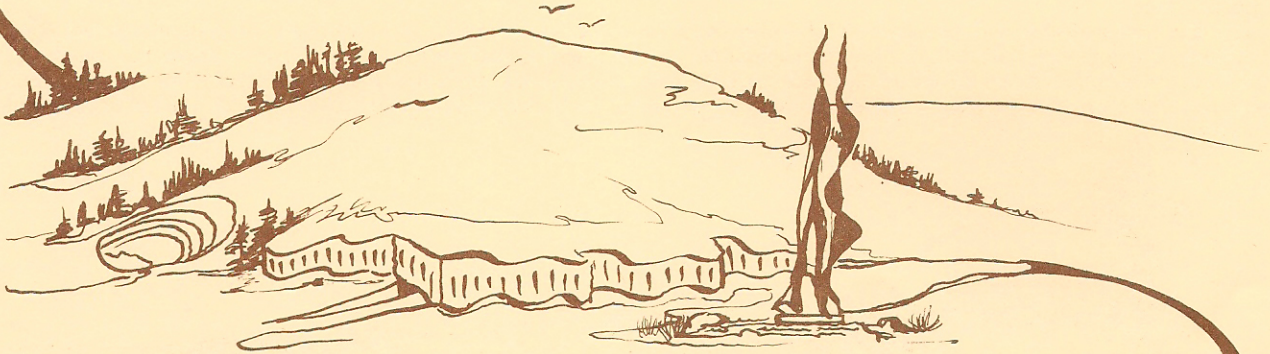
Producing a series of motion pictures on the life of Mari Sandoz and the historical sites she wrote about; sponsoring workshops and seminars in the arts, native crafts, history and science; collecting and researching fossil deposits; sponsoring a continuous oral history program; and preserving and displaying artifacts, records, and specimens of the region and its people would aid in filling the gaps in understanding and appreciating the heritage of the High Plains from prehistory to contemporary time.

But the problems and peculiarities of today must be examined as well. An atmosphere of cultural relativity for diverse cultures, environmental protection, and participation in the creative and performing arts can improve the quality of life for the people who live in or visit the High Plains area. By having an active program that can involve the participation of all people, the Mari Sandoz Center hopes to stand as a symbol in understanding that "one drop of water" in the sea of the universe.





Imagine a place where you can work with a spinning wheel, make candles, whittle or weave; where you can watch dancers, singers, and artists perform; where you can listen to a concert, see a play, or visit an art show; where you can meet sculptors, ceramists, artists, musicians, scholars, or your next-door neighbor; or where you can view and study the story of man from prehistoric times to the present.



The building housing the Center should be a symbol of the close relationship of both the Indian and the early white settler to the earth. Built into the hillside, it should become a part of and partake of the earth itself, blending almost imperceptibly with the land. This elemental kind of harmonious relationship can be suggested by serpentine walls which will repeat the forms of rivers, sandhills, bad lands, and buttes. The exterior walls could be pebbled with a rough surface that, catching the strong sun light of the area, would repeat the textures of the sands and grasses of the land. The sculptural symbolism of the exterior should be reflected in the design of the interior; interior decor should make use of Sioux Indian designs and the favorite earth colors of Mari Sandoz, especially browns and tans. Native plants, serving as the building's landscape, should be in great enough variety to be representative of what grows in the area and would further relate the symbolic meaning of the building to the land. A piece of contemporary sculpture, resting on a slab base centered in a water pool, could symbolize the need of man to understand himself, his culture, and his land. For this is what the Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man is really about.

DONORS TO SOCIETY

The first Mari Sandoz scholarship will be awarded on Mari Sandoz Day this year thanks to the generosity of her youngest sister, Caroline Pifer of Gordon. She has presented the Society a check in the amount of \$100.00 for a Chadron State College student scholarship. CSC professors, and Council members, Richard J. Loosbrock, Everett Larson, and Larry Agenbroad will handle the selection of the recipient.

Robert Overing of Chapin, South Carolina, has donated a copy of his master's thesis "Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz, Differing Viewpoints of the Early West" to the Society. His work may be seen at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Room in the CSC Library.

Mrs. Richard Johansen of Lincoln has given the Society an 11 x 18 black and white print of Mari, taken for the dedication of Mari Sandoz Hall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. The picture is currently being mounted and framed, and it will hang in the Sandoz room of the CSC library.

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

BY AND ABOUT MARI

Additional research projects on Mari Sandoz which have been identified or begun since the last publication include:

1. Anthony, Anna Lou. A paper in progress on the documentation of **Cheyenne Autumn**, Chadron State College.
2. Cedarface, Kay. A paper in progress on how an individual Sioux regards **These Were the Sioux**, Chadron State College.
3. Millette, Tom. A paper in progress on the historical accuracy of **Old Jules**, Chadron State College.
4. Overing, Robert. "Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz: Differing Viewpoints of the Early West." Unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1971.

"The principal differences between the two authors . . . are those of their personal viewpoints of the West before and after the turn of the century, rather than any differences in literary accomplishments." Mr. Overing has adapted a portion of his thesis for publication in this issue.

MARI SANDOZ CENTER

Three cultural centers honoring Nebraska writers Mari Sandoz, Willa Cather and John G. Neihardt have received the unanimous endorsement of the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. The centers were nominated last September by Mrs. William Hasebroock, Commission member from West Point. Formal proposals for each of the centers were presented to the Commission at their December meeting, and the endorsement was made at their March 1973 meeting.

They are among several projects under consideration by the Nebraska Bicentennial Commission as part of the state's observance of the American Revo-

lution Bicentennial Celebration in 1976. Endorsement does not provide funding, but it does place a project on a high priority basis when funding does become available. The Sandoz, Cather, and Neihardt Centers are considered as one project. It is the only one to date covering the length and breadth of Nebraska.

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is asking for \$200,000 for the purchase of land for preservation only. Their proposal is a two-part plan. One suggests the purchase of seventy acres of the homestead of Nebraska's second Governor, Silas Garber. It was the first homestead in Red Cloud, the site of the 1870 stockade, and the setting for Cather's **A Lost Lady**. The second part calls for the purchase of approximately 160 acres of the original Cather homestead. This was the setting for **My Antonia**.

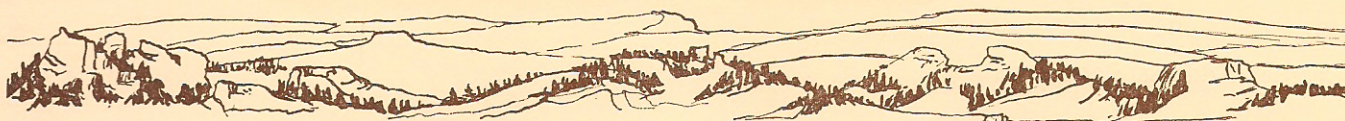
The John G. Neihardt Foundation, Inc. is asking for construction of an \$872,000 building at Bancroft. It would include archives, a museum, and an educational center. The core of the Neihardt Center would be the works of the still living state poet laureate and artifacts, including the holy shirt, pipe, and drum of Black Elk. Their request also seeks Bicentennial assistance in having President Richard Nixon name Dr. Neihardt as America's epic poet.

Mari Sandoz dreamed of having a library and research center located in western Nebraska, and it is this dream that the Heritage Society has attempted to bring into reality in its proposal for an \$893,000 Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man. The insert in this issue provides a visualization of that plan. The text accompanying the drawings is taken from the proposal.

The Center would be divided into two main sections: an archival library with supportive primary research material in western Americana and a museum with interpretative displays presenting the geological-paleontological-archaeological background and development of the High Plains from Cretaceous times to the present. The archives would make available to scholars the source materials necessary to scholarly research connected with the work of Mari Sandoz and her major interests — the trans-Missouri West and native Americans. The museum would provide the accommodations necessary for the physical handling, display, and storage of specimens and artifacts. Workrooms, meeting rooms and an auditorium would enable all those using the Center to meet in groups.

Chadron State College has been selected as the site for establishing and maintaining the Mari Sandoz Center because of its proximity to her native land, the Nebraska Sandhills, and because her many friends and admirers now actively support the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society headquartered at the college. Although the building would be located on the campus, its programs and facilities would serve not only the residents of northwest Nebraska, students of Chadron State College, interested scholars, and local public schools, but tourists and visitors in the area as well.

The deadline for the receipt and study of proposals is July 4, 1973. Since only one project will finally be selected as the state's focal point, your support of the project involving the three cultural centers is urgently needed. You can help by expressing your interest and support in a letter to: Mr. Wayne Ziebarth, Chairman, Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commis-



sion, 1343 M Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508.

A free slide program is available for loan to individuals and organizations who wish to learn more about the proposed Sandoz center; or members of the Heritage Society Council are willing to make the presentation in person.

Please write to the Bicentennial Commission today. **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

The time has arrived when the appetites in Rural America are calling for some of the cultural benefits which have been enjoyed in the more densely populated areas of our country.

The Mari Sandoz Center will contribute significantly to the educational and cultural development of the people of outstate Nebraska. In the study and the preservation of the heritage of Mari Sandoz, school children, college students and the general public in a sparsely populated area can benefit and be encouraged by the marvelous works of one who spent the growing years of her life in these environs.

Certainly this is the setting for the gathering of persons from the various fields of literature, arts, sciences, and humanities in a facility housing library, museum, and display materials for research and appreciation purposes.

Let us support this Cultural Center proposal! The Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges has endorsed the project and recommended to the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission that it be funded.

Edwin C. Nelson, President
Chadron State College

MARI SANDOZ DAY

Mari Sandoz may never have had a birthday party during her lifetime, but she is having one given in her honor on May 11, 1973. She would have been 77.

Heading the list of guests will be members of her family, including two brothers and two sisters. Other special guests will be members of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The public is also invited to attend the day long celebration on the Chadron State College campus.

The party will start at 9:00 a.m. in the gallery of Memorial Hall where coffee and rolls will be served. An official welcome to the Sandoz family will be extended at 9:30, and the first winner of the Mari Sandoz Scholarship will be announced at 9:45.

This birthday party will have something left when the candles are blown out. At 10.00 the Sandoz family will be interviewed by Vance Nelson, Ft. Robinson Museum Curator and Chairman of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The interview will take place in the Memorial Hall auditorium before a live audience. The interview will be video taped for posterity and will be carried live over KCSR radio. Tour participants will remember how well received the family was, and what interesting people they are in their own right. The talk session with the family is being called a convocation for Society members, students, and the public. If time permits, the audience will be given an opportunity to ask questions too.

Mari Sandoz books will be on sale in the foyer of Memorial Hall throughout the morning. An autograph party with the family will follow the convocation. A noon luncheon is planned for the family and Society members, and other guests at the CSC Campus Center.

In the afternoon the Sandoz family will make an appearance at the Chadron City Schools. A social hour from 2-4 will have an Indian craft exhibit.

A western style cookout from 5:30 to 7:00 will take place on the Elliot Field grounds. Western singer, Norm Martin will provide the entertainment. Square dancing on the tennis courts will conclude the entertainment.

Reservations are needed for the luncheon and cookout by May 1. Cost of the luncheon will be \$2.25, and the cookout will be \$3.00. You may send your reservations to Judy McDonald, Chadron State College, Chadron, Nebraska 69337.

Sorry, but this will be the only opportunity to extend a personal invitation to each one of you. A day full of history, people, and fun is in store for you.

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Edited by Judy McDonald

CHADRON STATE COLLEGE
Chadron, Nebraska 69337



MCDONALD D E
ROCKVILLE NE 68771

FIRST CLASS

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