

Story^{the} Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Activist and Author Susan Power Set the Tone for This Year's Mari Sandoz Symposium

Mari Sandoz and Susan Power's American Indian mother once met and commiserated about both being Plains women who were out of place in the big city of Chicago. But both of the women became very good at what they did, Sandoz as an author and Mrs. Power as an activist. Susan told more than 130 people who attended the 2018 Annual Pilster Lecture at Chadron State College that her 94-year-old mother is still as feisty as the day she was when she introduced her then 4-year-old daughter Susan to Martin Luther King Jr. at the Olivett Baptist Church in Chicago. "I remember he tugged on my braids and said "we shall overcome, we shall not be moved," Susan Power said. "My mother learned the word, held office, was arrested and stepped in harm's way. I didn't have my mother's ferocious heart, but I carry her spirit through my words." Susan Power shared those words, many of which come from visions. Poems about poor people and winos, the Chicago Indian Movement. "If you want to be radical, be yourself," she said.

She spoke of Josephine Gates Kelly, born on Battle Creek in January 1888, the same year as the great blizzard. She died during a blizzard in 1976. Sitting Bull was alive the first three years of Gates Kelly's life. She was a classmate of Jim Thorpe, a Carlisle graduate. She called for her people to be activists, to fight the Indian Relocation Act and the commissioner of Indian affairs. "The fiercest people I knew were the women," Power said. Gates Kelly chased the assistant Bureau of Indian Affairs Director around his desk, then sat down and said, "There. That's what you would expect from a wild Indian. Now that we have that out of the way, let's talk."

Power read what she calls her poetry rant pieces. She focused on the Early 30s people, the Depression Road, the 1,600-mile hitchhike to Washington, DC, by her mother.

Her mother "whispers" Susan late night Facebook posts, she said. "We aren't your forgotten past, we are your future. Their stories are our stories. America wants us to build resumes, but there's no slot for ancestors on resumes," she said.

Another strong Indian woman was Dr. Susan La Flesche, "A Warrior to Her People," as characterized by University of Nebraska College of Journalism and Mass Communications instructor and author Joe Starita of Lincoln. "Twenty-four years after her birth in a buffalo-hide tipi in western Nebraska, La Flesche graduated as the valedictorian of her medical school class and became America's first Native doctor – 31 years before women could vote and 35 years before Natives became citizens in their own country," Starita wrote. "This is the story of how La Flesche overcame enormous gender and racial barriers to effectively become the chief of her beloved Omaha Indian people." Starita's talk officially opened the 2018 Mari Sandoz Symposium at the High Plains Heritage Center on the Chadron State College Campus. He spoke of the rhythm of the language, not only his words but those he teaches to aspiring young journalists. He said he challenges his students to make the connection between words and music by picking four types of music and writing their assignments to match the music – the rhythm of the language. He said something happens when they are forced to match the two.

When he wrote his book on Standing Bear, he sat on a hillside in northeast Nebraska's Knox County to prepare. When he wrote about La Flesche heading out at the crack of dawn in a snowstorm in her horse drawn buggy, he said

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2018 Symposium continued...

“you want to get the reader on that buggy. You want to experience the mythical panoramic landscape.”

She graduated from the only medical school in the country, in Philadelphia. Here she is on a cold winter morning looking for the right tree to turn off the main path so she can watch for the plume of smoke that will guide her to the home of a 14-year-old girl dying of tuberculosis. LaFlesche married later, Starita said, but then she struggled with being a good doctor but a bad mother and a good mother but a bad doctor. This is the reality, a different way of looking at the Indian woman through a different set of eyes. “She literally gave her life for these people. She started libraries, hosted educators and quilting bee’s,” he said. Hers was a classic struggle of cultural identity. Who determines that? What happens when your language and your religion are outlawed? She was able to tread this narrow line between cultures, Starita said. She elevated the people. She walked a bi-cultural tight rope her entire life and she never stumbled. La Flesche died at age 50. She walked the talk.

Chadron State College Visual Arts Professor Mary Donahue explained and showed examples of “Landscape Place and Identity,” her response to the high plains, the landscape she calls home. Samples of her work and that of her colleague Laura Bentz were on display in the adjacent gallery at the High Plains Center. She spoke of seeing cairns – fantastic rock formations – in her world travels. Think Grand Canyon and similar places in the United States. Some reflect the star patterns of the Sioux Medicine Wheels. She said her inspiration came as much from visual observation as it did from the artwork of famous Iowa painter Grant Wood and the literature of Lincoln naturalist Loren Eiseley and Willa Cather and, of course, Mari Sandoz award winning book *Old Jules*.

A presentation by the 2018 Sandoz Scholar award winner, the University of Nebraska Lincoln Department of Textiles, Merchandising and Fashion Design, focused on Mari’s signature style and the relationship between her fashion sense and the crafting of her public persona. Katie Francisco was one of the graduate students in Dr. Claire Nicholas’ class on Museums: Theory and Practice. With a video and slide presentation, she highlighted the museum exhibition displayed on the UNL East Campus from May through early September. Francisco and six of her colleagues explored primary and secondary sources relating to the biographical and professional arc of Sandoz life. Francisco noted it was a journey from impoverished rural Nebraska to the vibrant Greenwich Village literary scene in wartime and post WWII New York City. Using Sandoz’ letters to family and friends, as well as her literature, the students were able to explore her relationship to self-presentation and long-standing interest in fashion and style.

Dr. Kimberli Lee of Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, discussed Sandoz’ approach as Ally and Advocate for Native People. Sandoz, Lee said, used her writing skills and notoriety as an accomplished author as a platform to address civil rights and social justice on behalf of Native American people, specifically the Northern Cheyenne and Lakota.

A screening of the newly released film “Warrior Women” and a visit with filmmaker Dr. Elizabeth Castle and Madonna Thunder Hawk was an afternoon highlight as the women discussed the story of a Lakota mother and daughter and their activism from the takeover of Alcatraz and the second battle of Wounded Knee in 1973 through the more current standoff at Standing Rock in protest of a controversial oil pipeline project. Castle, who lives in Ohio, met Thunder Hawk – the older sister of American Indian Movement co-founder and activist, the late Russell Means – almost 20 years ago as Castle was working on a doctoral dissertation. They have worked together ever since to tell the story of women’s activism in the Red Power Movement and the way it remains a vibrant force in contemporary activist legacy.

Dr. David Christensen of Omaha led the Saturday morning symposium session at the Bean Broker in downtown Chadron and discussed the “Complex Story of Western Nebraska’s Lakota Activism.” The region where Sandoz grew up saw a multifaceted grassroots Lakota civil rights movement during the 20th Century. It was bigger than the American Indian Movement during the early 1970s and often included numerous local activists in places like Alliance and Gordon and Fort Robinson. A study of archives reveal a complex narrative often involving the Sioux Tribal Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Photos from the 2018 Pilster Great Plains Lecture & Sandoz Symposium can be found on page 4

Sandoz Ornament Selected for Capitol Christmas Tree

An illustration of Mari Sandoz' short story *The Christmas of the Phonograph Records*, done by Lincoln artist Kristi Koser, was selected as one of the Nebraska 150 Christmas Ornaments which goes on display in the Capitol Rotunda December 2. Koser, a multimedia graphic designer at NET, said she was honored to have her work selected. She said the subject was perfect because of the story line. Instead of purchasing practical and very needed winter boots for the Sandoz children, Old Jules orders a phonograph and over a hundred records (to his wife's chagrin). The magic of music and dancing enjoyed by family and friends at Christmas time overcame his impulsive purchase. The Lincoln native said when she reads Sandoz' books, she feels like she is reading about the lives of her ancestors. Through ancestry searches she has discovered that many of them were pioneers. The famous Solomon Butcher photograph taken at the John Curry homestead in Custer County is the home of her great-great grandfather, John Curry. Another set of great-grandparents lived in Red Cloud the same time as Willa Cather. Koser's four times great grandfather, Francis Trowbridge, lived in Neligh Nebraska, and she found an article that stated "Francis H. Trowbridge was President of Neligh Cemetery Association and when a young Indian girl died, who was with Indians camped near Neligh, he insisted she be buried in the cemetery in spite of objections by others." That was White Buffalo girl. The ornament was painted in oil, Koser's preferred medium. She has worked as a graphic designer for 30 years, and has painted that long as well.



The Christmas of the Phonograph Records (from the artist description)

This design is to honor Mari Sandoz and her short story, "The Christmas of the Phonograph Records: A Recollection," that was first published in 1966. Her father "Old Jules," stated that music was for everybody. The newly purchased phonograph helped friends and family get into the holiday spirit with dancing and feasting to the music of over a hundred records.

Sandoz has left a legacy to all Nebraskans through her more than twenty books written extensively about pioneer life and the Plains Indians.

The StoryCatcher

The "StoryCatcher" 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©(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.

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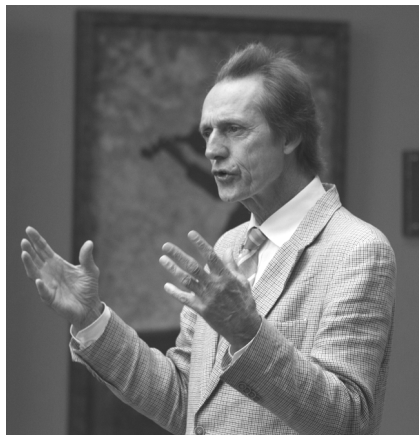
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Mari Sandoz

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.



2018 Pilster Lecturer, Susan Power



Author Joe Starita talking about Dr. Susan La Flesche (L) and signing his book for attendees (R)



Photos from the 2018 Pilster Great Plains Lecture and Sandoz Symposium at Chadron State College in September (photo credits Jillian Wenburg)



Attendees engaged in learning from a variety of speakers at this year's symposium in the Atrium of the Sandoz Center at CSC



Sandoz Society board members Mike Smith and Ron Hull network with a symposium attendee



Symposium attendees enjoy lunch and vibrant conversation at the CSC Student Center



2019 Sandoz Symposium speakers from left—Katie Francisco, representing this year's Sandoz Scholar graduate student class from UNL; Dr. Kimberly Lee, Associate Professor English at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma; Mary Donahue, Sandoz Society Member and Art Professor at Chadron State College; Dr. Elizabeth Castle, Director and Producer of "Warrior Women" and Madonna Thunder Hawk, Native American Activist featured in the film

2018 “In The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award” to Dan Kusek

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society has honored longtime board member Dan Kusek of Alliance with the coveted Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award. The retired railroader, city councilman and mayor has been the go-to guy for the board for a number of years, said Board President Lynn Roper of Lincoln in presenting the award to Kusek during the annual symposium luncheon at the Chadron State College Student Center. As a member of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center Committee, Kusek is no stranger to folks on the college campus where he often meets with administration and faculty as well as Center staff, volunteers and visitors. He makes numerous trips to the Center from his home in Alliance every month, sometimes every week. When he heard that a visitor to the Mari Sandoz grave site south of Gordon had complained that the place was overgrown and difficult to get to, Kusek and his brother drove there and chopped weeds and brush and cut the grass. That’s just typical of the things he does, often without being formally asked. He has not only been a trusted liaison with CSC administration and Center staff, but he also worked closely with the family that owns the land where the gravesite is located. He has overseen everything from mowing and weeding to getting the road to the site rocked and graveled to accommodate visitors. When he isn’t in Ireland chasing ancestral history or playing golf somewhere in the Sand Hills, look for Kusek at the Center or somewhere on campus or at the nearest Sandoz-related event. A tip of Mari’s finest hat to Dan Kusek, the 2018 Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award winner!



Award winner Dan Kusek with Sandoz Society Board President, Lynn Roper [photo credit Jillian Wenburg]

Wenburg Discusses Sandoz’s “Clearing Up” Sappa Incident at Decatur County Museum in Kansas (written by Dr. Jillian L. Wenburg)

The Decatur County Museum, Oberlin, KS, proves itself a destination worth a trip for any Sandoz aficionado. The museum provides a wealth of physical objects and stories from western history. While there, juxtapose the varying interpretations of the Sappa Creek history discussed in Mari Sandoz book *Cheyenne Autumn*. Sandoz worked to inform the public about this event through the Cheyenne perspective and, as Sandoz wrote in a letter to H.D. Wimer, “One incident of Cheyenne history...needs clearing up. Most of the accounts I have are from the military and the buffalo hunters who took part. The Indians have been reluctant to speak of this, even to old friends...Perhaps, with all my material together, I can get the few old Cheyennes still alive to talk. ‘It is better forgotten’ they sometimes tell me. [...] Perhaps they will understand that I mean to defame no one” (“Letter to Wimer,” Qtd. in Lee, 42-3). I was invited to participate in a special “Celebration Sunday: Mari Sandoz” event on August 19 to discuss Sandoz’s *Cheyenne Autumn*. The event began with an evening dinner presentation at the LandMark Inn, a historical inn owned by Gary Anderson. We had a vibrant informal discussion about Sandoz and the Sappa Creek incident in 1878. Sunday, I presented a talk entitled, “Mari Sandoz: Writing (Righting) History: An Examination of *Cheyenne Autumn*.” The community supported this event handily, with the Decatur County Museum and local visitor’s bureau providing funding support. The talk culminated with an ice cream social and rich audience discussion. My discussion centered around Sandoz’s *Cheyenne Autumn* and the story of the Cheyenne as they traversed a 1,500-mile escape from Oklahoma to Yellowstone. I focused on the Cheyenne perspective of this event and Sandoz’s interpretation and exigency in writing this story. There are amazing resources for both professional and budding historians alike in Oberlin. The Museum has tracked down the physical location of many of the events that happened in both 1875 and 1878. Museum director, Sharleen Wurm, serves as a fantastic resource. The book store is well stocked with



Dr. Jillian Wenburg, Sandoz Society Board Member speaks at the Decatur County Museum in August [photo credit Lem Marsh]

Sandoz material, and there has been encouragement from locals to create a larger Sandoz event there in the future. For more information about the event see <https://www.mccookgazette.com/story/2544416.html> or visit <https://www.facebook.com/Decatur-County-Last-Indian-Raid-Museum-117431381636411/> for information about the museum.

New Board Members and Staff Keep the Sandoz' Spirit Alive

There are four new people keeping the spirit of Mari Sandoz alive. Laure Sinn and Courtney Kouba can both be found nearly every day at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center on the campus of Chadron State College.

Leisl Carr-Childers and Heather Stauffer are new members of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board. Laure Sinn is the Rangeland Program Coordinator at the college, but was asked by the Administration to be at the Center as often as



possible after the previous longtime Center director resigned. She said her main goal is to keep the place open with lots of fun activities and shows for the students, faculty, staff, students and public. She has worked at CSC for a number of years in different capacities: Student Activities Coordinator; the Rangeland Program Coordinator and now the Rangeland Program Coordinator who augments the ongoing events etc. at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center. Sinn is currently reading *Old Jules* and has read numerous short stories by Mari Sandoz. She said she particularly liked the one titled: *Victorie and Other Stories* because she could relate with some of the things going on in the story. Courtney Kouba is the Society's Archivist and said she wants to be helpful to the Society with a primary goal of ensuring archival materials are readily available for use and records are as up to date as possible.



She said she'll add additional goals as opportunities present themselves. This is Kouba's first foray into archiving, but she has some background experience through an internship at the Center in 2017 and some work with exhibits at the Center earlier this year. Her primary goal is to continue her education and expand her knowledge in archiving and history to apply the knowledge to her work. While she hasn't finished reading any of Mari's books yet, she is currently working on *Cheyenne Autumn*. She said her favorite short story is *Christmas of the Phonograph Records*. "I enjoy reading Mari's descriptions of that Christmas. Her writing makes it easy to imagine all of the activities going on: the dancing; Mari preparing the meals with the music in the background; and her parents arguing over her father's purchase of the phonograph. It reminds me of the Christmas specials I used to watch as a kid. Everyone comes together – regardless of past disputes or status – to enjoy the

New Sandoz board members Leisl Carr-Childers (L) and Heather Stauffer (R) (top photo); Sandoz Society Archivist Courtney Kouba (bottom left photo); CSC School of BEAMSS Rangeland Program Coordinator Laure Sinn (bottom right photo) [photo credit Jillian Wenburg]

music and bask in the goodwill of the season." New Board member Leisl Carr-Childers said she viewed the recommendation of current board member Elaine Marie Nelson of Omaha as a chance to get more involved in the Sandoz Symposium which she has known about for years. She said she hopes to help the Society bridge the transition between the generation that built it and knew Mari to the generation who needs the continuing relevance of her work. Carr-Childers is an assistant professor in the History department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins where she teaches public and digital history. Her research focuses on the history of the American West, particularly on landscapes and people that are often overlooked and undervalued. She said she first encountered Mari's work with *The Cattlemen*. She said she admires Mari's narrative writing style, her unflinching honesty, and her descriptions of place. Landscapes in her work are characters as much as people. New Board member Heather Stauffer of Lincoln said it was the lobbying of Board Chair Lynn Roper and Board member Jamison Wyatt that brought her on board. She said she has known about the MSHS for as long as she can remember and being asked to join the board is a wonderful honor. Her goals include assisting wherever needed to share Sandoz's writing, life, and activism with new audiences. (continued on page 7)

She is currently an associate acquisitions editor at the University of Nebraska Press, which proudly continues to publish Sandoz's books. She admits that choosing a favorite is difficult, but one that quickly comes to mind is Winter Thunder. "I first read it on a cold, snowy afternoon and could not stop thinking about children and blizzards... a combination that was later the focus of my master's thesis," she said.

Mark Your Calendars! 2019 Pilster Lecture & Sandoz Symposium "Populism"

Mark your calendars for September 19-21 for the 2019 Pilster Lecture and Sandoz Symposium. The symposium committee is currently lining up speakers for the event. Watch for information on the Sandoz Society website and in upcoming newsletters as details become available.

Wunder's Work Published in Studies in Midwestern History

Longtime Mari Sandoz Society Board member Dr. John Wunder of Lincoln has an article on Mari Sandoz and her 50-year predictions published in *Studies in Midwestern History*, an exclusive on-line journal of the new Midwestern Studies Association. Wunder, who recently retired from the Board, spoke on the topic during the 2017 Mari Sandoz Symposium in Chadron. He devoted his presentation there to the predictions prepared for time capsules in 1957 and 2017. Sandoz made predictions that were sealed in the 1957 capsule. He noted that her predictions joined those of 57 other prominent, and some not-so-famous, prognosticators. In his talk last year, Wunder noted that Mari was living in New York City at the time and was at the height of her writing productivity, publishing four books and preparing for publication of two other books. She was also experiencing significant life challenges. She learned she had breast cancer; lost two very close friends, Louise Pound and Don Hollenbeck; and lived through a devastating fire in her apartment. Wunder also explored seven specific predictions she made -- some far-reaching and others already realized. They included ideas about the environment, water, travel, life and labor, the "Century of the Mind," advancements of art, and diplomatic relations. Wunder's article is available for free download at this link: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/midwesternhistory/vol4/iss1/1/>

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Your gift is important to our programs and activities. Each dollar helps us preserve and share the important work of Mari Sandoz. Members receive our newsletter, advanced notice of special events, and discounted registration for the fall symposium and the annual Story Catcher Writers Retreat in Chadron.

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