Issue No. 1 Spring 2025

The Story Catcher

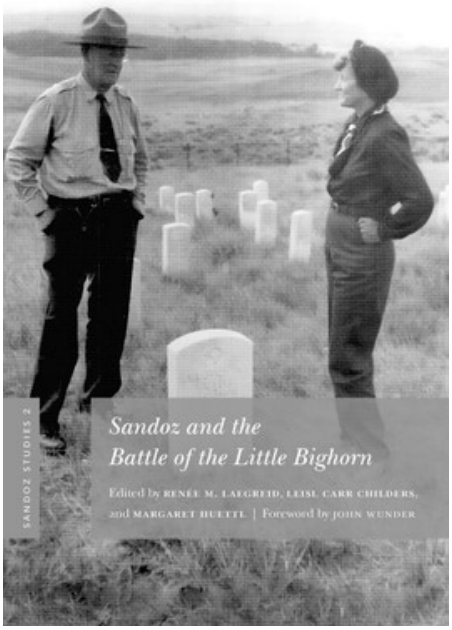
Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn

Newest Volume of the Sandoz Studies Series Receives Wide Acclaim

Late 2024 marked the release of our most recent volume of the Sandoz Studies, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bignhorn*, published in collaboration between the Mari Sandoz Society and the University of Nebraska Press.

Edited by Renee Laegreid, Leisl Carr-Childers, and Margaret Huettl, this volume is the second release in the series that features thematically grouped essays and writings to help place Mari Sandoz and her work into broader contexts, thus enriching our understanding of her as an author and historian. The forward to this volume was written by the late John Wunder. The book is dedicated in memory of John and of Ron Hull, both influential leaders of the Mari Sandoz Society over the more than 50-years that the organization has been in existence and who championed the creation of this series.



Mari Sandoz's *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* encouraged a change in how Americans viewed this infamous fight. By the mid-twentieth century a towering Custer myth had come to dominate the national psyche as a tale that confirmed national exceptionalism and continental destiny. Sandoz set out to dismantle this myth in an intimate account of the battle told from multiple perspectives. Although the resulting book received mixed reviews at the time, it has emerged through the decades as a visionary reinterpretation of the battle and a literary masterpiece. Decades in the making, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* was the renowned western writer's last book, published after her death in 1966.

The scholarly essays in this collection contextualize Sandoz's work in the moment of its writing, situating her treatment of the past within the pivotal moments of her present. The essays address her incorporation of contemporary issues such as the Vietnam War, sensory history, gender study, recentering the Native perspective, environmentalism, and Sandoz's personal challenge to completing her last book. The innovative insights into Sandoz's perspective of the Battle of the Little Bighorn bring the historical acts involved, and her treatment of the site in which they occurred, into the twenty-first century.

"This volume provides several lively and significant perspectives on Mari Sandoz's final book and, in the process, establishes a very cogent and largely well-balanced overview of her career and the literary and archival context in which it emerged. It ably locates her research in her own time and demonstrates the ways trends in literary criticism can be impacted by social and philosophical shifts in culture," notes Robert Root, author of *Walking Home Ground: In the Footsteps of Muir, Leopold, and Derleth*

Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn inspired additional writing by Colonel Rodney G. Thomas, U.S. Army, Retired and author of *Rubbing Out Long Hair-Pehin Hanska Kasota: The American Indian Story of the Little Big Horn in Art and Word* whose paper about this volume of the Sandoz Studies we are proud to publish in this issue of the newsletter.

Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn can be ordered from the University of Nebraska Press at nebraskapress.unl.edu or from your favorite local bookseller.

Sandoz would be proud

Inaugural scholarship granted to writer who embodies her love of place and peoples

Claire Thompson and the Mari Sandoz Society each had a year of "firsts." For Thompson, it was the beginning of a long-held dream: Returning to graduate school to complete an MFA in Nature Writing. A teacher, writer, and Forest Service trail worker, she wanted to prioritize her own writing, and have the rigor and community offered by one of the few place-based environmental programs in the country.

For the Mari Sandoz Society, this year marked a first too. With the aim of ensuring the legacy of Sandoz's passion for writing, love of landscape, and education, several members of the Board of Directors worked with Western Colorado University's Foundation to establish the fund, which will grant one scholarship per year to an incoming student. "I can't express how much this financial help means to students," said Dr. Laura Pritchett, who directs the creative writing program. "The simple truth is that money is the number one reason talented applicants are not able to pursue an advanced degree. Let's face it: Schooling is expensive, writing is not lucrative, and money is a barrier. This scholarship not only supports significant writing about place and helps a student, though -- it also has the benefit of reminding contemporary writers of one of our great forebears. Sandoz's name and spirit are kept alive. It's a win-win."

Thompson, who recently found herself a casualty in the wave of mass firings of federal workers, is currently working on writing about her place, its past peoples, and its current struggles. She writes: "Thank you, again, to the Mari Sandoz Society for their generosity in supporting my pursuit of an MFA in Nature Writing. With Sandoz's work and legacy in mind, I've spent my first semester delving deeper into explorations of my own relationships to the landscapes and communities that have shaped me. Last fall I learned more about the displacement and ongoing legal battles of the Wenatchi tribe, on whose ancestral lands I've been living and working for close to a decade, and whose traditional fishing grounds have been developed into a bustling Bavarian-themed tourist town that barely acknowledges its first inhabitants. I drafted an essay exploring my own relationship, as a public-lands employee, to both the exploitation and stewardship of this place that I've come to call home, too. I'm looking forward to revising and developing this and other related work!" You can find more of her place-based work here: https://www.terrain.org/2021/nonfiction/an-ecology-of-disturbance/

Former U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo Featured Speaker at the 2025 Story Catcher Festival April 9-10, 2025 in Gunnison, CO

The all new version of the Story Catcher Festival will take place on the campus of Western Colorado University in Gunnison, Colorado on April 9th and 10th, 2025. The featured speaker will be the former U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. Joy Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee Nation. She served three terms as the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States from 2019-2022 and is winner of the Poetry Society of America's 2024 Frost Medal, Yale's 2023 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry, and was recently honored with a National Humanities Medal. She is the author of ten books of poetry, including the highly acclaimed, *Weaving Sundown in a Scarlet Light: Fifty Poems for Fifty Years*. She lives on the Muscogee Nation Reservation in Oklahoma.

In addition to the keynote event, the festival will feature two-days of writing workshops, craft talks and panels, additional readings and speakers across a wide range of talents and disciplines in writing and literary studies. Most of these events will be free and open to the public, and most will be streamed for those who cannot join the workshops in person.

Detailed information about the festival schedule can be found here: https://outsideyourself.wordpress.com/

A Note from Our President...

Mari Sandoz's last book, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, was published posthumously in June 1966 after she edited the final draft from her deathbed in a New York City hospital earlier that year. Knowing full well her time was limited, and suffering excruciating pain throughout her frail, cancer-ridden body, Sandoz did what she had done her whole life—she wrote. And she persevered as long as she could. Ultimately, she left behind a thoroughly unique and important historical analysis of one of the most well-known events of the previous century, the Battle of Greasy Grass, as the Plains Indian survivors called what had come to be known "Custer's Last Stand." In October 2016, the Mari Sandoz Society hosted a symposium exploring Sandoz's contributions to what we know about Custer and the battle. By the end of the event, it was clear that most people were unaware of the significance of Mari's final publication. It was then that the Sandoz Society decided to launch a project to enlist scholars to study and write essays about various aspects of her capstone. The opening article in this newsletter features Volume 2 of the Sandoz Studies Series, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn.* The book has been met with positive reviews from readers who have been keenly excited by the creative angles and new details presented.

In 2024, the Society embarked on a new journey. After celebrating the recent 50-year anniversary of the organization's formation, it was time to take stock of our accomplishments and revisit our goals. The board of directors met in Chadron to plan what our next decade of promoting the Sandoz legacy should look like. With the guidance of a non-profit expert, we designed new mission and vision statements that will guide us going forward:

To encourage and promote an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz and to honor the land and people about which she wrote.

In the spirit of Mari Sandoz, the society will amplify the voices of the dispossessed and challenge the romanticized view of the West through education, publication, and outreach.

In the last few years, many organizations have adopted land acknowledgement statements to raise awareness about the original inhabitants of their region and their ongoing connection to the land upon which the institution resides. Because this kind of recognition would have been important to Sandoz, we felt a strong pull to develop our own statement. We agreed upon a powerful "guiding principle" that will shape our future projects.

Mari Sandoz advocated for Native Peoples throughout her life, and in keeping with that spirit, the Society commits itself to devote a substantial portion of its resources to prioritize Indigenous perspectives in our projects and programs. Sandoz wrote extensively about Indigenous dispossession; we likewise feel a duty to acknowledge this history and work toward reconciliation and healing.

We look forward to what is ahead in 2025. In addition to featuring Joy Harjo, our nation's first Native American Poet Laureate, at the Mari Sandoz Story Catcher Festival at Western Colorado University in April, we will be supporting the Northern Cheyenne Journey Home committee as they work on their Healing Trail project at Fort Robinson. We'll also be featuring an event at Chadron State College in September. We'll share more in future newsletters of our partnership with the University of Nebraska-Kearney to create the Mari Sandoz Papers project that will manage the archival and digitization of Sandoz's letters and research papers from around the state and around the nation. We are also focusing on tours of Sandoz Country including creating maps and improving signage in Western Nebraska.

The Story Catcher

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*. This newsletter is published multiple times a year by the Mari Sandoz Society, a 501©(3) non-profit organization. Our mission is to encourage and promote an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz and to honor the land and people about which she wrote. In the spirit of Mari Sandoz, the society will amplify the voices of the dispossessed and challenge the romanticized view of the West through education, publication, and outreach. Mari Sandoz advocated for Native Peoples throughout her life, and in keeping with that spirit, the Society commits itself to devote a substantial portion of its resources to prioritize Indigenous perspectives in our projects and programs. Sandoz wrote extensively about Indigenous dispossession; we likewise feel a duty to acknowledge this history and work toward reconciliation and healing.

Address Changes

Address changes should be mailed to:
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Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at www.marisandozsociety.org

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.

Banning *Slogum House* in 1938

Summary of 2023-2024 Sandoz Scholar Research by Dr. Nathan Tye

As the recipient of the 2023-2024 Mari Sandoz Research Award, I delved into the Nebraska bans on Sandoz's first novel, *Slogum House*. Drawing on newspaper accounts and archival material held at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center at Chadron State College, the Mari Sandoz Collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the Helen Stauffer Collection at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, I explored the political and cultural dynamics that spurred the bans and the debates readers, critics, and politicians had about the book's content and literary merit. The following is a brief research summary. The complete essay will appear in *Sandoz Studies*, Volume 3, published by the University of Nebraska Press.

Slogum House is the brutal story of Gulla Slogum and the fiefdom she built around her eponymous road-ranch and brothel. She turned her sons into cattle rustlers and murderers, harassed homesteaders, and carved out her own county. It was also an allegory for fascism, built on her study of the political headwinds in Europe. Filled with violence and sex, when it appeared in 1937 readers initially welcomed her unvarnished account of homesteading in Western Nebraska. Yet, by the new year a growing chorus of Nebraskans deemed the book dirty, dishonest, and obscene. The McCook Public Library banned *Slogum House* in January 1938. Omaha's mayor, Dan Butler, soon followed and removed public library copies from circulation.

Early reviews were positive but pointed to the rougher elements of the book. As the *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*'s reviewer noted, "This book demands a second reading, for with the coefficient of shock thus reduced, its real power is more effectively exercised."[1] The popular Civil War historian and journalist Bruce Catton labeled Slogum House "a true book." Instead of romanticizing the homesteading period, Sandoz recognized it "was in some respects an ugly chapter." Ultimately, Catton believed Slogum House, "may shock you, and certainly it will disturb you – but you will remember it."[2]

Others welcomed the bans. The McCook paper argued Slogum House was more of the same "filth which seems to make [Sandoz's] novels popular."[3] Omaha's Mayor Butler proclaimed Slogum House "rotten and filthy" when he banned it. He could not believe such a book made it into print or past the librarians at the Omaha Public Library.[4] Others followed. Pawnee City and O'Neill banned it outright. Gordon also, a shocking outcome for a local writer. Nevertheless, the book sold well in town.[5] Alliance and Scottsbluff kept copies in their libraries, but limited circulation to adult patrons.[6]

National reporters soon picked up the story. Book bans were not uncommon at the time, but the suppression of another western historical novel by an author so recently lauded for the portrayal of her homesteader father, drew wide press and public interest. Reporters found her in Boston, where she was staying with her editor, Edward Weeks. Sandoz was back east conducting research for *Cheyenne Autumn*, which she published in 1953. She told the *Boston Post*, "I have been informed that Mayor Butler is staging a city-wide campaign against rackets and vice. I cannot understand how my novel comes into such a situation."[7] Upon reflection, she told a *Washington Post* reporter that, "I doubt if [Mayor Butler] ever read the book."[8] In other words, he banned it based on hearsay and rumor, not the novel's actual content. As she continued her research trip she offered further comments, signaling a disinterested stance on the bans. She told the *New York Herald Tribune* reporter that it was "no particular honor to be banned in Omaha, and no reflection either."[9]

Omahans rallied in defense of Sandoz. The *Omaha World-Herald* published an editorial criticizing the mayor's ban.[10] Rabbi David A. Goldstein of Omaha's Beth-El synagogue publicly rebuked the mayor, arguing that "Mayor Butler might just as well ban the Bible or William Shakespeare. It seems to me that our mayor is going a step too far."[11] Although Butler defended the ban, he refused to ban other controversial books in the coming months. Eventually, the press attention subsided and Mayor Butler turned his attentions elsewhere. At some unrecorded date, *Slogum House* returned to the shelves of libraries in McCook, Omaha, O'Neil, Pawnee City, and Gordon, where it remains today.

Sandoz drew on this episode in her next novel, *Capital City*. Building on the analysis of the potential for fascism that animated *Slogum House*, this novel illuminated the social and political contours of a fictionalized Great Plains capital. In the novel, the writer Abigail Allerton's book is lauded and then swiftly denounced, a flash of critical whiplash known to Sandoz. The local condemnation is followed by a book ban.[12] This was not the last word on banning *Slogum House*. In 1944, a proposed paperback Armed Services Edition published by Council on Books in Wartime for

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soldiers on the front was halted due to the book's political content, likely her positive descriptions of the Farmer's Holiday Movement in the book's Depression-era section. This ban did not hold. The first paperback edition of *Slogum House* was distributed to soldiers by the end of 1944. Amid the furors over the novel, Sandoz took a disinterested stance, turning to other projects and concerns. She did because she believed her work would outlast the outrage. She was right.

[1] "Footnotes," *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, November 28, 1937.
[2] Bruce Catton, "A Book a Day – A Darker Chapter From Pioneer Life – 'Slogum House,'" *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, December 14, 1937.
[3] "Book Review," *McCook Gazette*, undated clipping, Folder 6: Articles – Slogum House, Box 1, Helen Stauffer Papers, CTR.
[4] "Butler Bans Mari Sandoz' 'Slogum House' as Rotten," undated clipping, Folder 6: Articles – Slogum House, Box 1, Helen Stauffer Papers, CTR.
[5] "Only A Few That Way," *The Sutton Register*, January 27, 1938.
[6] "Sandoz Book Is Being Banned by Neb. Libraries," *Alliance News*, undated clipping, Folder 6: Articles – Slogum House, Box 1, CTR; Undated Scottsbluff clipping, Folder 6: Articles – Slogum House, Box 1, Helen Stauffer Papers, CTR.
[7] "Mari Sandoz Shocked at Banning of Her Book," *Boston Post*, January 18, 1938, Folder 6: Articles – Slogum House, Box 1, Helen Stauffer Papers, CTR.
[8] "Omaha Ban on Her Latest Book Amazes Authoress Mari Sandoz," *The Washington Post*, January 28, 1938.
[9] "Mari Sandoz Indifferent To Omaha Ban on Book," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 21, 1938.
[10] "The Mayor Doesn't Like It," *Omaha World-Herald* (Evening Edition), January 18, 1938.
[11] "'Slogum House' Gets More Free Publicity," *Alliance Times and Herald*, January 21, 1938; "Banned Book Sales Brisk," *Omaha World-Herald* (Evening Edition), January 18, 1938.
[12] Mari Sandoz, *Capital City*. New Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 148, 150-151.

Dr. Nathan Tye is an Associate Professor of Nebraska and American West History at the University of Nebraska-Kearney (UNK). Born and raised in Nebraska, Tye received his PhD from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2019. A labor historian by training, Tye studies transient agricultural laborers, better known as hobos, in the Progressive Era, and has published studies of transient labor in *Nebraska History* and the *Annals of Iowa*. He is also an avid literary historian, with work appearing in *The Willa Cather Review* and *The Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, among other venues. A dedicated local and community historian, Tye is a frequent speaker on Nebraska history, including an appearance on NBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* He serves on the boards of several community museums and cultural organizations including the G.W. Frank Museum of History and Culture and Buffalo County Historical Society in Kearney and the Japanese Hall at the Legacy of the Plains Museum in Gering.

Sandoz Society Hosts Sandoz Descendants This Past Fall

Yvonne Sandoz, a Sandoz family historian and archivist from Basel, Switzerland, and Joy (Sandoz) Lange a direct descendant of the Nebraska Sandoz family who ranches in South Dakota, spent time in Nebraska in late August and early September visiting the Mari Sandoz archives in Lincoln with Society executive secretary Elizabeth Chase followed by visits to a variety of "Old Jules Country" sites in northwest Nebraska with Society president Shannon Smith.

While in Lincoln, Yvonne and Joy visited the Sandoz archives at the University of Nebraska's Love Library and learned about the effort to digitize the archives, making the nearly 200 boxes of manuscripts, correspondence, research materials, notes, maps and her personal library accessible to a wider audience online. Archivists at UNL helped them explore Mari's meticulously organized research note cards and several boxes of correspondence and other materials. Yvonne and Joy also took a tour of the Nebraska State Capitol Building and visited the historic marker that was installed by the Society and the Nebraska State Historical Society several years ago along Lincoln Mall west of the Capitol.

Their tours of "Old Jules Country" included visits to the Sandoz Center in Chadron, the Swiss Beguin Cemetery, Mari's grave, and the old homestead in rural Sheridan County.

Joy (Sandoz) Lange (left) and Yvonne Sandoz (right) with a portrait of Mari Sandoz from the archives at the University of Nebraska Love Library. The 1931 portrait was painted by Louise Austin who taught at the University of Nebraska. Mari received the painting in the mail in the summer of 1952 and it was said that she liked the way her hands were painted.

Autie, Mari, and Me…Down by the Riverside

Rodney G. Thomas, Colonel, US Army, Retired

We begin with a hearty "Thank you kindly ma'am" to the Mari Sandoz Society for the opportunity to review Volume 2 of the Sandoz Studies, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*.[1] Renée M. Laegreid assembled a superb group of scholars who give us a whole new view of Sandoz's work.

I will begin with "Me" and how I ended up "down by the riverside" with two people who at times loom larger than life. And why not? Did Autie not save the Army of the Potomac, not to mention the United States, on 3 July 1863 near a small Pennsylvania hamlet named Gettysburg? Did Mari not continue to write, in her style, in her vernacular, despite refusal after awful review after banned books, not to mention finishing the Little Bighorn manuscript on her death bed? So, come with me as we walk with these two extraordinary people down a lonely Montana hillside with the everyday folks in the story to the banks of a winding, snow- and spring-fed river starting in Wyoming and whose waters mix and flow with others all the way to the Gulf of Mexico—the Greasy Grass.

In 1994, while waiting for some inter-library loans to be processed, I walked through the stacks and tripped over a very thick book on the floor of the Fort Lewis Post Library. That book was *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*, Amos Bad Heart Bull's incredible illustrated history annotated by Helen Blish with an Introduction by Mari Sandoz.[2] It was my first exposure to Sandoz. Not long after, I read her version of the battle. As I looked through Bad Heart Bull's art, history actually, my surprise at the sixty-one drawings of the Little Bighorn fight opened a whole new world to me. So much so, that I spent the next twelve years researching, searching, and eventually finding 200 paintings and drawings by Lakota, Cheyenne, and Crow veterans of the battle. Also found were over 160 warrior narratives, and so I combined both art and words for insights.[3] Sandoz's "Introduction" was instructive and led me to more than just art about a battle.

During the height of the pandemic, I set a goal to re-read my collection of Indigenous art references, and in one was the best description of what I had been learning all the while. Whatever I learned from the "Preface" before I did not recall, but when I read it that time, viola' there "it" was. "It" being a term encompassing the history learned during my research. Bill Reid, a Coastal Salish Haida man, described Pacific Northwest Indigenous masks construction. "At first glance," he said, "one sees the Raven, and when the Raven opens its beak, one sees the Bear. Beak closed and one is returned to the Raven." He said "first the raven, then the bear, then back to the raven. The facts never change, they transform depending on the viewer's view and reveal other truths." Transform. Other truths. Indeed. Just like White Swan. Just like Red Horse or Kicking Bear or Stands In Timber or Old Cheyenne Woman or He Dog, and yes, even Mari Sandoz. "Other truths."[4]

Like so many others, when I first read her *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, I viewed the story through the persona of one George Armstrong Custer. And like so many others, when done with her version of the battle, I discounted it as "full of errors." Consequently, works focused on others involved in the battle and those showing no obvious signs of conventional scholarship had to be flawed. I later learned that to discount Mari is to short-change one's understanding of the "whys" of our collective stories. This is the version of the "other truths" as she knew it, studied it, researched it, listened to it, and eventually wrote of it. So, to discount her telling is to silence further the voiceless who through her telling gained a hearing.

Given an age-old military prescription for success in war, Sun Tzu's famous "Know yourself and know your enemy and you will win 100 battles," my next surprise was the dearth of warrior and tribal histories, in print, and even more surprising were the scholarly dismissals of both the art and the word that had found its way into print. How was it possible that so little had been published about and by the winners of the battle? The simple answer – bias – long-standing, deeply engrained, and in general, there was little interest in hearing of the victors' side. I believe that bias was leveled at those who wrote of and about the targeted people and so Mari and others fell victim of the battle along the Greasy Grass as did those who died there. True, her battle narrative was panned by dozens, all of whom were men, who focused exclusively on the protection of the mythic cavalier and the "traditional historical method." And like her *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Crazy Horse* works, not one Cheyenne or Lakota then or since has ever challenged her words.

But, after all that, after writing a biography of the single Crow scout who was severely wounded in the battle, after listening to tribal elders and historians talk about him and his deeds, reading voraciously and writing feverishly, I did not return to her book on the battle.[5] At least, not until July 2023. Attending the annual Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument celebration as well as speaking from the porch of the White Swan Research Library in the old

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Superintendent's Quarters, I was asked two questions that directly lead us to today.

Stand with me on the high ground celebrated as "Last Stand Hill" in the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument at the monument to the US Seventh Cavalry Regiment, and just down the hill to the east is the monument commemorating the Indigenous peoples also involved in this place. I say "also" as the Indian Memorial was finally dedicated in 2003, 127 years after at least forty-one Lakota and Cheyenne men, women, and children were killed in the battle.[6] The Indian Memorial contains granite display panels by each of the Nations involved, and the questions dealt with the Cheyenne panel. "When were those words first used in print? Why did the National Park Service (NPS) allow them to be used?"

The words, three sentences, comprising the promise of one George Armstrong Custer to never again harm the Cheyenne people, says to all who visit that no further explanation is needed for why he died on the hilltop. At least no further need for the Cheyennes, and Lakotas, and Arapahoes, and even the Crows and the Arikaras as the ceremony of promise is still considered binding by those whose lives and laws are governed by a spirituality not understood by non-Indigenous peoples. Mari Sandoz was one of the first non-Cheyennes to recount that promise, and it resonates still today emblazoned on the granite slab commemorating the Cheyenne story of the battle. Mari, perhaps better than most non-Indigenous people who came seeking knowledge from the elders, understood the spirituality that binds the people together.

That promise as remembered by Cheyenne elders says "I will never harm the Cheyennes again. I will never point my gun at a Cheyenne again. I will never kill another Cheyenne." The citation reads "General George Armstrong Custer (1869)." The vow was made in the Sacred Arrows lodge in 1869. The first written record I found was a paper, "The Story of Custer Made Mistake by Indian Law over at Southern Cheyennes" typed in 1950 by Edward Sandcrane from his grandfather's oral Cheyenne history.[7] John Sand Crane related that Custer said, "I will never fight the Indians anymore." The first published use was by Father Peter Powell in his classic *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat* in Northern Cheyenne History published in 1969 and based on his consultation with Mari.[8] The most recent publication was in John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty's *A Cheyenne Voice: The Complete John Stands In Timber Interviews* published in 2013.[9] That answered the first question.

The second question's answer is that the NPS did not chose those words, and they did not edit, censor, and suggest changes of any kind to the memorial. The individual tribes designed their specific panel and that is the design and information seen on them today. As for the actual words, my impression is that these words, in similar forms, have been a part of Cheyenne lexicon for quite some time. Margot Liberty notes the Northern Cheyennes had no experience with Custer like their southern relatives did. Consequently, only after their southern relatives that came north stayed north, or returned with Dull Knife, was the story made part of their history. The sense of betrayal felt by the Southern Cheyennes was later felt to be part of their reason to go to war. Custer himself recorded what his motives were and the actions he took after the ceremony in his widely read *My Life on the Plains*.[10] Thus, in Cheyenne eyes and beliefs, he was not truthful in the ceremony, and the punishment for not being truthful under the Sacred Arrows was meted out on a Montana hill side above the Little Bighorn River.

As I was developing this story of the Cheyenne panel, I pulled Mari's *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* from my shelf to give it a read with a more expansive understanding than the first time. I had gained a much wider appreciation by the time I wrote of the battle and its participants in the Introduction to *Rubbing Out Long Hair: Pehin Hanska Kasota*:

> *The mythology that has grown around this event clouds discussion about it in most circles to this day. Knowledgeable and otherwise erudite people revert to the modern-day populist view of the Army leader – egoist, crass, stupid, and disobedient – and perpetuate such a view at the expense of serious reflection. In short, it was/is all about Custer. That Indian soldiers outfought White soldiers in desperate combat that day seldom enters the battle mythos.*[11]

This time, pen in hand, and with a three-decade long study under my belt, I felt better equipped to give her approach an unbiased read. After the first "re-read," I re-read it again and with the same conclusions. Mari takes us, her readers, for a walk alongside the river as suggested by another of my favorite writers, Will Durant, who noted:

> *Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting, and doing things historians usually record; while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry, and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks of the river.*[12]

Autie was no longer the main character in Mari's telling. I had never put much stock in the idea that this disaster was

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the result of a craven desire for political office, yet I still found her points compelling. They were, after all, de rigueur for those less interested in heroic myths. I also missed the importance she placed on Custer's two main subordinates. The arguments about Captain William Benteen and Major Marcus Reno's roles had once again gained widespread attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s just as Autie's was on the wane, so her presentations of those two officers aligned with those discussions. Last, if I remembered her inclusion of warrior narratives from my first read, it was a dim one. This time, not only did I pay attention to what the individual warriors said but how Mari wove those threads into her overall narrative.

Truth be told, earlier, while researching the Cheyenne panel, I began to read more about this Plains "storyteller" and frankly, over a few months, my respect and appreciation for her and her work grew. When I first heard Volume 2 of the *Sandoz Studies* was coming out, I quickly raised my hand and asked for a chance to review it. And so here we are.

Before we discuss the essays in Volume 2, I would like to point out some of the reasons some thought that Sandoz's version was "off-kilter," at least in my understanding and professional experience. Most of the period reviews I have read dwell on the "invented dialogue" and "scanty evidence," and especially damning was her characterization of Custer and his motives for attacking. That this was written by a woman and that it did not place Custer at the center of the story saw them double down on their conclusion that her work was not to be taken seriously. Those same reviewers ignored that the book was part of the renowned and respected publisher Lippincott's famous series, "Great Battles of History" edited by the well-known and respected Pulitzer Prize awarded editor Hansen Baldwin.

Sandoz's limited understanding of military doctrine and terminology, command and control processes, and organizations of the nineteenth-century US Army caused some of my concerns other than those noted above. That those whose criticisms were the loudest had the same lack of awareness mattered not as their critiques grew in number and volume. For example, Mari notes in several places that the Seventh US Cavalry Regiment's mission was a "scout."[13]

Not so for Brigadier General Alfred Terry's orders to Custer clearly stated, "The Brigadier-General commanding directs that, as soon as your regiment can be made ready for the march, you will proceed up the Rosebud **in pursuit** (emphasis mine) of the Indians whose trail was discovered by Major Reno a few days since."[14]

"In pursuit of" is, and was then, a doctrinal mission designed to gain or regain contact with an enemy force. It is one of several doctrinal missions expected of a mobile force that includes reconnaissance (scouting as in Reno's mission mid-June that found the main trail), surveillance, screening, and guarding forces. In modern-day Army parlance, a "pursuit" is to "find'em, fix'em, fight'em" and contrary to Mari's description of what the regiment was ordered to do and organized for, the regiment was on a mission to find and engage. Not only that, but she, and many others over the decades, missed the part about the regiment being supplied for at least two weeks for that mission. That the hoped for engagement came four days into the mission and despite all the ink spilled about a "joint attack" by both Colonel John Gibbon's and Custer's combined forces, there was never such a plan, merely a "hope" as expressed by Terry in his June 21, 1876, report to General Sheridan.[15] She missed all that, but then so did/have 80 percent of those who have tried to figure out "how they died with their boots on."

There are other issues such as her recounting desertions along the Rosebud approach march when there are none recorded along the march from Fort Abraham Lincoln.[16] Nor are there recorded "Whiskey sellers" along that same route, until the steamboat *Far West* docked along the Yellowstone River.[17] The Arikara (Ree) and the Crow scouts have been denigrated by specious and false accusations as well as disparaged for serving with the Army since the dead of Custer's immediate command were found. Mari makes the same characterization, not fully understanding I think, the history of those two tribes. The Arikaras were decimated by smallpox in several epidemics and were constantly at war with the Lakota. The Crows were decimated also by disease and warred upon by several tribes surrounding their traditional lands. Both had allied with the United States as a last resort.[18] More modern study and consideration of their oral histories has revealed a much different view of the scouts' actions in this battle. Additionally, the Crows were defending their traditional lands that they inhabited for four hundred years or more. That Mari apparently was not aware of most of this does not soften her less than positive treatment of them. Had she been aware of this history, perhaps she would have written about them more clearly, especially given that their service and sacrifice was later sullied by those they fought alongside.

In today's environment, the winds have shifted once again from the 1930s-1940s heroic myth to the 1960s-1970s criminality to the last two or three decades of expanding the interpretive width and depth. As this goes to print, the "old" Visitors Center at the Little Bighorn Battlefield

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National Monument has been torn down to be replaced sometime in 2026 with a new facility. The National Park Service and National Monument leadership actively sought input from the public in general and the involved tribes specifically regarding the design, interpretation, and displays. Comments received clearly reveal the 1930s-1940s is still the view of some while other comments offered a more inclusive "tell the whole story" view.

Robert Utley, in his remarks at the one-hundredth anniversary ceremony of the battle, noted "For there are doubtless those among you who passionately believe that some of the people we would honor do not deserve to be honored, and there are others who believe with equal vehemence that they do."[19] Utley went on to position both views as part of a national "legend" and reminded the crowd of Anatole France's observation about legends. "From legends men draw all the ideas of their existence" he said. "They do not need many, and a few simple fables will suffice to gild millions of lives."[20] And then Utley pointed out "But when fables go beyond mere amusement, they cease to be wholly harmless."[21] And if there is a place, an event, a Memorial that does all that, it must be this one. Utley was not a public fan of Mari but that day, his remarks sounded like he secretly agreed with her.

There is a downside to ventures that try to "tell the whole story." There is an old Army saying, "If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority." To the point, if everyone is included, who then tells the whole story? And this is where the beauty of Mari's design in telling this story comes forth. She picked, and wisely I think, the two main subordinates and put their stories front and center. After all, the national myth had them responsible for the death of their commander. Their stories depended on how they reacted to those they attacked and by making Reno and Benteen respond to warrior moves, Mari placed those same warriors in charge of not only how the fight happens but how her story unfolds.

No wonder many of the reviews by those hoping to sustain the great myth were at times so vitriolic. No wonder her book was not sold at the battlefield Visitor Center. Mari told more than "a" story. She was able to "tell the whole story" focused on those whose voices had been muted or sullied. Utley and most other serious students of the battle were aware of this enforced silence. And they knew it based on John Stands In Timber's compelling observation, among others, that "Each man saw what he saw, and had his own experiences. There were so many stories that if you could collect them all you would have books full."[22] Stands In Timber's grandfather, Lame White Man, was killed in the battle almost atop the ridgeline by Lakota warriors.[23]

Despite that awareness, those in positions to do something were unable or unwilling to incorporate a more inclusive interpretation at any level. The 1991 name change from the "Custer Battlefield National Monument" to the "Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument" initiated actions to tell more of the story. The dedication of the Indian Memorial in 2003 ensured that even more stories would be presented, and it would act as a bulwark against any efforts to "return to those thrilling days of yesteryear."[24]

Paul Andrew Hutton begins Volume 2 *Sandoz Studies* by introducing readers to the last published book in the storied career of Mari Sandoz. *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, published posthumously in June 1966, now receives the fresh look her work deserves. Having Hutton lead off provides instant certainty that the chapters that follow his foundation would be more than instructive. Given his long and widely respected "association" with the history of the battle and its main characters, his even-keeled discussion reduces any angst by those more attuned to the great myth of this story. Hutton, in crafting the groundwork for what follows notes: "Here then, in the second volume of Sandoz Studies, is a rich selection of writings that highlight the diverse approaches – literary, historical, environmental, sensory, Native – used to interpret Mari Sandoz's final book."[25] Each of these essays is a gem.

Elaine Marie Nelson leads off with a history of the manuscript itself and of Sandoz's fight against terminal bone cancer to finish the manuscript from her death bed. Nelson points out that "She wove together the disparate strands of a story that previous works on the battle ignored because they were not central to the American mythic hero embodied by Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer." While Mari worked off and on the manuscript from 1961 until 1966, I think she spent almost three decades on this book. Like the smoke signals of a John Ford western movie, she sent signals of how she viewed the battle and the participants, especially Custer, in some of her other works. Nelson's chapter answered all my questions as to why she took on the book knowing full well her time was limited by cancer. At the end of this chapter, I wrote the following note in my research notes about Sandoz: "Blind in one eye, left arm paralyzed, suffering unimaginable pain of untreatable bone cancer, she simply willed herself through the final draft. As Mari always did, despite all the criticisms of her earlier works, she simply wrote."

Cheryl A. Wells then places the reader in the sensory assaults Sandoz wove into her narrative. Smells, sounds, and all the "cacophony of combat" that combat veterans

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know all too well. Sandoz once counseled a writer that "his words should 'let the reader see and hear, feel, and smell it all.'"[26] That is one of the strengths of Sandoz's battle narrative. Another example of her awareness of the sensory attributes involved an American artist, Archie Teater, and his portrayal of the battle. Mari and Archie found each other at the battlefield in 1949, and Archie decided to paint the event. When Mari saw one of the first versions, she advised him to add more dust and gun smoke. She also noted his depiction of the terrain was not accurate. Teater, an internationally known and award-winning landscape painter, did not make the changes, and his portrayal did not sell.[27]

Cathryn Halverson places the literary works of Sandoz and Elizabeth Bacon Custer side-by-side. Halverson notes that Elizabeth Custer was and is still by many considered a widow first and a writer second. Such a view detracts from her literary career. Halverson deftly "decentered" the mythic hero by showing how Elizabeth Custer maintained that image while Mari Sandoz gave voice to those who had been silenced or marginalized. Of interest, when Mari's book was published, she was only the fourth woman to write about any aspect of the battle and Custer that would receive widespread attention until the 1960s. The other three being Elizabeth Custer of course, then Katherine Fougera, *With Custer's Cavalry*, in 1940, then Marguerite Merington, *The Custer Story*, in 1950.[28] That all changed with Mari's book in 1966, followed shortly by Helen Blish's wonderful book of *Amos Bad Heart Bull's A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux* with Mari's Introduction, and then Margot Liberty's collaboration with John Stands In Timber in *Cheyenne Memories*.

Taylor G. Hensel's essay, "Recentering Custer," provides one of the strongest and clearest descriptions of Sandoz's text, intent, and construct to be found. The integration of Sandoz's work and the works of others fills a long-standing gap in our more complete understanding of the battle. It also increases our clarity into Mari's works and the growth they sparked about Indigenous studies.

Kent Blansett's "Writing Against Empire: Mari Sandoz and the Fog of War" brings into focus Sandoz's telling of the fight using both warrior and soldier perspectives, unique for that time. One could legitimately add "… and control of the 'Custer myth'" to his title. Blansett's weaving of Mari's story with the Vietnam anti-war movement, and the emergence of "Red Power," is insightful and integral to how and when the national myth changed. Those movements spawned an artistic portrayal that still resonates today. His inclusion of the conflicts about the one-hundredth anniversary observance highlights that while the momentum had started to change the narrative, at that time change was just beginning. I should note that the death threats were real, the armed NPS Rangers on the roof of the Visitor Center had orders to use deadly force, and the exclusion of the Custer family was because of those threats.[29] Blansett's inclusion of one of the most succinct and poignant descriptions of what "manifest destiny" was/and is, came from a 1961 interview of Mari. "We broke up … their … whole system of life and gave them nothing to fit their environment in turn. We gave them no philosophical pattern, we gave them no economic pattern … so now we have a … transitory people."[30] He notes "Collectively, the intersection of music, brushstrokes, and prose of the Indigenous Custer Myth positions Sandoz's methodology and collected works as an influential contributor to the historiographical development of two critical academic fields."[31]

Leisl Carr Childers takes the reader on a literal "walk around the park." One of the top ten questions asked by visitors concerns how the ground looked then compared to now. Childers answers by noting that such environments are always evolving and influences our interpretations. The landscape will now change again as the new Visitor Center begins construction. As small as the old one from 1950 was, it seemed to dominate the surrounding ground. Although one of the significant parts of the "last stand" fighting took place on and around the Custer National Cemetery, the Center and the adjacent parking lot all clouded a more complete interpretation.[32] Porta Potties on the Last Stand hilltop invade any sense of dignity and respect no matter who it was that died there. Widened roads to accommodate large recreation vehicles (RVs) impede other traffic so at times convoy-like groups led by those RVs make their way to and from the Reno-Benteen portion of the National Monument. Walking trails ensure visitors are not wandering over the ground, that is still classed as a burial site as remains are yet to be recovered. Mari's descriptions of the terrain come from a time when one drove up a dirt road to the monument and markers for the dead of Custer's immediate command. Some of the more intriguing stories come from a time when visitors could, like Mari did, camp in the battleground, and especially from those who fought there. I can imagine the quiet she heard then. Early morning and late evening visits in any season except summer replicate that quiet. Childers reminds us that most modern-day visitors enter a "foreign country," that of our own collective stories.[33] I would add "quiet" as part of that "foreignness."

Volume 2 of the Sandoz Studies clearly places Sandoz's telling in the pantheon of works about the battle and all the people involved. For this longtime student of and writer about a quintessential American military disaster,

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this volume is magnificent. Both academe and general readers will find this appealing.

As you read this, thousands of people around the world are asking questions, crafting replies, posting photos, researching, referencing, and in general discussing a battle that took place in 1876 along a small river in then Montana Territory. Literally thousands. Most will never set foot in the "West" much less along the Little Bighorn River. But that does not sway nor deter their interest, curiosity, fascination, or desire to be a part of all this history, and perhaps even vicariously mount up and ride to the sound of the guns. I think those of us who "traffic" in this history, in whatever form that takes, who burrow into a myriad of prairie dog holes and rabbit warrens looking for that elusive proof that "A" happened because of "B," must I think, take special care to point out those "other truths" when, where, in whatever form, and however they are found. Mari did.

Ralph Waldo Emerson posited that all history is biography. General history tends to be general, and while jampacked with details, tells a story seldom at the individual level. Biography forces us to face the person, the event, and the circumstances of their accomplishments and failures, impacts, and yes, even understanding the wider involvement of their lives. And so it is with this story. Especially this story.

Mari Sandoz had to tell this story. She had, unlike so many other storytellers, listened to those who had been there as well as those who knew them. She had, like few others, traveled the terrain on foot or car, and as she listened to the people, she also listened to the ground's version. Along with her, always guiding, always pointing out, were those people who had been there. It is like she once described Cheyenne spirituality – what was once there, rocks, hilltops, trees, is still there.

And all that happened there, joy, pain, especially pain, is experienced still, today, no matter how deep in the past it happened.[34] She heard, unlike the others who according to a long-held Lakota belief, "had no ears."

As we near another anniversary of their lives and deaths, if we stand on the slopes where they fought and died, the air around us grazes our faces, the sun takes on another fading hue, and in the distance, we hear the silence. Mari did, and she wrote to fill it with sounds of voices waiting to be heard. We should listen more carefully now, especially along "the banks of the river."

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[1] Renée Laegreid, ed., *Sandoz Studies, Volume 2*, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024).

[2] Amos Bad Heart Bull, Helen H. Blish, Introduction by Mari Sandoz, *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

[3] Rodney G. Thomas, *Rubbing Out Long Hair: Pehin Hanska Kasota: The American Indian Story of the Little Bighorn in Art and Word* (Spanaway, WA: Elk Plain Press, 2009).

[4] Bill Holm and Bill Reid, *Indian Art of the Northwest Coast: A Dialogue on Craftmanship and Aesthetics* (Houston: Rice University Institute for the Arts, 1975), 9.

[5] Rodney G. Thomas, *Bíilaachia–White Swan: Crow Warrior, Custer Scout, American Artist*, Foreword by Mardell Plainfeather (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2022).

[6] Megan Reese, "The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and an Indian Memorial After 1988," Microsoft Word - Megans Thesis Final Draft.doc. BA honors thesis in History from the University of Colorado at Boulder, 2005. To my knowledge, this is the only detailed history of the making of the Indian Memorial. The NPS references it as the primary source.

[7] Edward Sandcrane, as told by John Sand Crane, "The Story of Custer Made Mistake by Indian Law over at Southern Cheyennes," University of Nebraska Archives, Mari Sandoz Research Collection, Box 30, File.6.

[8] Father Peter J. Powell, *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History, Volume One* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969),120-121.

[9] John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, *A Cheyenne Voice: The Complete John Stands In Timber Interviews* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 196-197.

[10] George A. Custer, *My Life on the Plains or Personal Experience with Indians* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1874).

[11] Thomas, *Rubbing Out Long Hair: Pehin Hanska Kasota*, 2

[12] Will Durant, "The Durant's Do It Again: Spry Old Pair Put Out Another Volume in Their Famous History," *Life Magazine*, By Jim Hicks, October 18, 1963, 89.

[13] Mari Sandoz, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966), 85,177.

[14] Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, "Headquarters of the Department of Dakota (In the Field), Camp at Mouth of Rosebud River, Montana Territory June 22nd, 1876. 15 Instructions addressed to Lieutenant-Colonel Custer, 7th Calvary." As found in the *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1876, House Executive Document 1 for the second session of the Forty-fourth Congress* (Serial volume 1742), 492.

[15] National Archives, U.S. Army Commands, Record Group 98, Department of Dakota, Letters Received (Terry) June 21, 1876, File 4161. Terry's report read in part, "I only hope that one of the two columns will find the Indians." Colonel John Gibbon commanded the second column under Terry and was comprised mainly of infantry units stationed in then Montana Territory.

[16] Sandoz, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, 30.

[17] Sandoz, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, 23.

[18] For those with interest, the best treatment of Sahniš-Arikara history, I suggest Mark van de Logt, *Between the Floods: A History of the Arikaras* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2023), and for the best early history of the Apsáalooke-Crow people is Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America 1805-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). While Orin G. Libby's "The Arikara Narrative of the Campaign Against the Hostile Dakotas" presented campaign participating scouts' narratives, first published in 1920 in Volume IV of the *North Dakota Historical Collections*, subsequent research indicates Libby likely wove what the scouts said with his own views of how the battle progressed. Sandoz referenced Libby in her book but had no inclination that Libby's versions may have been tainted.

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[19] Robert M. Utley, "Remarks at the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn," delivered June 24, 1976. Billings Public Library, Folder "Anniversaries," 1.

[20] Utley, "Remarks," 1.

[21] Utley, "Remarks," 2.

[22] John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 209.

[23] The first memorial marker to any of the Lakotas and Cheyennes killed in the fight was erected by the NPS to mark where Lame White Man was killed along what is known as "Battle Ridge."

[24] First broadcast in 1933, "The Lone Ranger" was one of the most successful, and faithfully followed, entertainment programs on radio, TV, and film. Each episode was introduced by announcing partly "Nowhere in the pages of history can one find a greater champion of justice! Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear!"

[25] Paul Andrew Hutton, "Introduction," *Sandoz Studies*, *Volume 2*, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024).

[26] Mari Sandoz. Letter to Charley O'Kieffe, February 13, 1956, as found in Helen Winter Stauffer, ed., *Letters of Mari Sandoz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 284.

[27] Helen Winter Stauffer, ed., *Letters of Mari Sandoz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 248, 254; University of Nebraska Archives, Mari Sandoz Research Collection, https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/6/resources/4430; Lester D. Taylor, *The Life and Art of Archie Boyd Teater* (Kaysville, UT: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 2016), 55, 185-191; Hagerman Valley Museum, Hagerman, ID, https://hagermanmuseum.org/.

[28] Elizabeth Custer, *"Boots and Saddles" or Life in Dakota with General Custer* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1885); *Tenting on the Plains or General Custer in Kansas and Texas* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887); and *Following the Guidon*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1890). Katherine Gibson Fougera, *With Custer's Cavalry: From the Memoirs of the Late Katherine Gibson, Widow of Captain Francis M. Gibson of the Seventh Cavalry, USA (Retired)* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1940). Marguerite Merington, ed., *The Custer Story: The Life and Intimate Letters of General George A. Custer and Wife Elizabeth* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1950).

[29] In attendance were Colonel George A. Custer III and his son George A. Custer IV. Colonel Custer was a veteran of WWII, Korea, and Vietnam and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star. The threats were sent to the NPS and forwarded to the FBI. Once most of the attendees departed the area, Colonel Custer and his son were allowed time to lay a wreath at the base of the Seventh Cavalry monument. Author, conversation with George A. Custer IV.

[30] Kent Blansett, "Writing Against Empire: Mari Sandoz and the Fog of War," in *Sandoz Studies*, *Volume 2*, *Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, ed. Renée Laegreid (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024) 118-119.

[31] Blansett, "Writing Against Empire: Mari Sandoz and the Fog of War," 138.

[32] The official designation of the Custer National Cemetery was not part of the 1991 Congressionally mandated name change to the NPS property and is
administered by the Veterans
Administration.

[33] Leisl Carr Childers, "All That We
Cannot See: The Little Bighorn Battlefield Then and Now," *Sandoz Studies*, *Volume 2*, Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024), 157. "The past is a foreign country" citation is of David Lowenthal's observation. I've been "to the battlefield" many times and in different seasons. It's the quiet in those down times when one's imagination returns to those "yesteryears" trying to make sense of the sacrifice by all who fought there.

[34] Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), vii.

Colonel Rodney G. Thomas, U.S. Army, Retired, is a 30-year veteran of the U.S. Army. He holds a MA in Strategy from the U.S. Naval War College and a MS in Management from Florida Institute of Technology.

His first book, *Rubbing Out Long Hair- Pehin Hanska Kasota: The American Indian Story of the Little Big Horn in Art and Word* published in 2009 was awarded by both The Little Big Horn Associates and the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association. He was published in the *Journal of the Indian Wars* and subsequently served as an associate editor along with his regular column "Thomas On-line." His works have been published by ABC-CLIO, Greenwood Press, Congressional Quarterly Press, Michigan War Studies Review, the St. Joseph Museum's *Museum Graphic* to note a few. His most recent book, *Bíilaachia-White Swan: Crow Warrior, Custer Scout, American Artist*, is the first full-length biography of White Swan, a nineteenth-century Crow warrior and prolific artist, and was published by McFarland Publishing in 2022.

He is a well-known presenter and researcher of North American warfare and military history from before European arrivals to Wounded Knee and of Indigenous warrior biographic art.

New signage at Mari Sandoz gravesite and Jules Sandoz orchard installed in the fall of 2024. These installations were made possible by the Mari Sandoz Society, Sheridan County Tourism, and Panhandle Fab of Alliance, NE

Finding Mari Sandoz in a Little Women's World

By Krystyn Hartman

I could almost hear their voices rising from the pages of *Old Jules* as we rode in silence, our minds trying to grasp the otherworldliness of the moment, the strange greenish-yellow hues of the prairie grasses rippling in concerted waves, contrasting with "the black wool bed of the horizon," which meant "there could be rain." Lightning flashed, commanding our attention.

I'd always been in awe of grasslands, a far cry from the dusty red rocks and piñon junipers of my childhood in northern New Mexico, but I'd never seen them the way I saw them in that moment, on that particular day. The color, the light, every undulating wave of grass chatting with excitement, like aproned old ladies preparing a potluck. Lightning flashing ahead of the talent show portion of the event.

Bob, my husband, pulled to the side of the road and turned off the engine. I was compelled to step into this other world, to listen to the grasses, the wind, the lightning with its requisite thunder. We were on one of our annual treks to Chadron, Nebraska, for Fur Trade Days where Bob's family gets together for a sort of reunion each year because that's where they all grew up. The next morning, after a late breakfast, Bob said he had a surprise for me and a few minutes later we were standing in the Mari Sandoz Museum on the Chadron State College campus. We were always so busy with family during our Chadron visits each year that I had no idea the Museum was even there.

Standing in that space, surrounded by her spiritedness, her raw imperfections, her grit and determination, her vulnerability, her intrusiveness — her solitude, I wept. Many of us troublesome wild gals live most of our lives in some form of solitude, even when we're among people, sometimes especially when we're among other people.

Growing up in a northern New Mexico reservation border town on old Route 66 in the 1960s and 1970s meant my childhood reality was a far cry from those prim, corseted young ladies of literature we were assigned to read in our school books. Those eloquent young lasses were on the same plane as faery tales and other mythological worlds, as far as I was concerned. While I admired the quality of their prose and gained valuable literary insights, there was so very little in their lives, their stories, that resonated for me. And believe me, I was looking for stories I could relate to.

The porcelain-skinned gals of classic literature, while lovely and deserving of their place in classic literature, hadn't learned to fight and shoot straight by the time they were in third grade. They didn't have to be up before dawn feeding the horses out at the corrals they had to help build, including digging most of the post holes themselves.

Photo Credit: Krystyn Hartman

I would secretly imagine those dainty gals digging post holes in their fluffy dresses — splattered in mud. The mud. When it wasn't dust, it was mud. And cold winter wind. Sometimes I envied the Little Women's and their orderly lives — their rare encounters with mud. But only sometimes. I enjoyed a freedom of movement that none of those contained gals in literature knew or would ever know, but could only dream about, despite the dangers and constant unknowns. How strange our world would look, I mused, to the Little Women if they were the readers and ours were the stories being read. I still imagine such a reverse today with the stories of Mari Sandoz as a standard-bearer, she who did indeed capture moments when and where the prairies meet "the black wool bed of the horizon," as well as the voices of the peoples, indigenous and settler alike, forever holding them alive in history, inspiring others to do the same.

Without Mari Sandoz, wild and inquisitive little girls like me and so many others, no matter how old we get, would still be alone in our solitude, bulls in Little Women's China cabinets, never knowing if there is a pathway for our stories, where we can stretch and question and embrace our vulnerabilities with as much enthusiasm as we embrace those fleeting moments of confidence, as Mari teaches us still today through her legacy. "Perhaps Jules was made awkward and afraid by a softness within him that he would not confess," she wrote, not only about Old Jules, but perhaps projecting from her own reticence at revealing that "softness within."

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She is telling all of us, I believe, to own our wildness and the awarenesses that come with it, to keep the stories going in each generation, building upon each as we try to evolve — individually and as a species. To own our grit while questioning, yet loving, in a way, and yes, forgiving. To recognize and empower each other as much as we can despite of and because of our inherent maverick natures and that "softness within."

Thank you to everyone who made and continues to make possible the legacy and lessons of Mari Sandoz so that all us story catchers, no matter how old we get, never lose that sense of wildness — dust, mud and everything in between — because even in our solitude, at times feeling lost among the Little Women, we are not alone.

Krystyn Hartman is a lifelong learner and adventurer who, in retirement, is a first-year/incoming student in the MFA Creative Writing Nature Program at Western Colorado University while volunteering with husband Bob as campground hosts in a remote National Park this summer 2025. You can follow their adventures (and misadventures) at CampHostBlog.com.

Sandoz Society Supports 2025 History Day Awards at CSC

Chadron State College successfully hosted the annual Western District History Day on March 14, 2025. A variety of categories were offered for high school and middle school student competitors including individual and group websites, documentaries, research papers, and tabletop exhibits. Three winners in each category will advance to the Nebraska State Contest in Lincoln on April 12. Sandoz Society board members Dr. Sam Herley and Dr. Kurt Kinbacher presented $50 awards on behalf of the Mari Sandoz Society to two teams from Crawford. Sawyer Moody is the winner of a Sandoz Society Great Plains Special Award for her exhibit titled *Crawford Livestock: More Than Just a Salebarn*. Miranda Betson, Garett Tollman, and Joe Lambert are the winners of the Sandoz Society Great Plains Special Award for their Senior Group Documentary *FFA Taking the Responsibility to Lead Agriculture*.

Left Photo: Sawyer Moody of Crawford, Neb., right, poses with Chadron State College Assistant Professor Dr. Sam Herley at the Western District History Contest in the CSC Student Center, Mar. 14, 2025. Moody is the winner of a Sandoz Society Great Plains Special Award for her exhibit titled "Crawford Livestock: More Than Just a Salebarn." (Photo by Tena L. Cook/Chadron State College)

Right Photo: Competitors at the Western District History Contest pose in the Chadron State College Student Center, Mar. 14, 2025. From left, CSC Assistant Professor Dr. Sam Herley, Miranda Betson, Garett Tollman, and Joe Lambert of Crawford, Neb. The students are the winners of the Sandoz Society Great Plains Special Award for their Senior Group Documentary "FFA Taking the Responsibility to Lead Agriculture." (Photo by Tena L. Cook/Chadron State College)

Sandoz to be Featured in Upcoming Episode of "Nebraska Stories"

Watch Nebraska Public Media in early April for a story about Sandoz on their popular locally produced show, *Nebraska Stories. Nebraska Stories* explores the richness of Nebraska through the people who call it home. The hallmark of the series lies in its feature-oriented content produced by a variety of talented storytellers who travel statewide to bring you a celebration of our culture, history, arts, science, nature, sports and more. Every episode incorporates masterful storytelling with beautiful visuals that mirrors the broad spectrum of our state's diversity. If you are not in Nebraska, you can catch these stories on their social media or visit this website and watch current and previously broadcast video stories https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/series-media/nebraska-stories-video/

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