

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Nebraska	
COUNTY: Webster	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Willia Cather House

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Southwest corner, Third and Cedar Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
Red Cloud

STATE Nebraska	CODE 31	COUNTY: Webster	CODE 181
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**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Comments	_____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Willia Cather Pioneer Memorial

STREET AND NUMBER:  
c/o Mrs. Mildred R. Bennett

CITY OR TOWN: Red Cloud	STATE: Nebraska	CODE 31
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**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
County Recorder

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Webster County Courthouse

CITY OR TOWN: Red Cloud	STATE: Nebraska	CODE 31
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**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) bordered PPEARANCE

Situated on a corner lot/by a white picket fence, the Willa Cather House is a simple, L-shaped one-and-one-half story clapboard structure. It was a rectangular dwelling as originally completed in 1878, but shortly thereafter the northward-projecting rear portion was added, giving the house its present configuration.

Across the front, or east facade, of the house extends a narrow porch with a shed roof, believed to be original to the house. The four slender, square wooden posts are bracketed at the eaves in the manner of the 1870's. The doorway is at the left of the three-bay facade, and the high-pitched gable above the porch roof is pierced by a narrow double window trimmed with green blinds. Windows throughout the main floor contain two-over-two sashing, and most of the windows are flanked by louvered shutters. Inside, there is a narrow entrance hall, opening on the right or north side into the parlor, which is lighted by four windows: two at the front and two on the north side.

While the goal of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is eventually to furnish the house as much as possible with Cather pieces, those furnishings not associated with the Cather occupancy are nonetheless of the period. An ornate iron stove at the western end of the living room is flanked by diagonally-placed doorways surmounted by two-paned rectangular transoms. The doors lead respectively to the master bedroom on the north (in the projecting addition) and to the dining room on the south side of the house, to the rear of the entrance hall.

Beyond the dining room lies Grandmother Boak's bedroom--the "grandmother's room" described in Cather's short story "Old Mrs. Harris," then the kitchen. The original narrow, enclosed stairway which led from the kitchen to the attic where the Cather children slept was torn out shortly after the family moved from the house. In the restoration, however, the stairway has been reconstructed on the basis of structural evidence.

The removal of the stairway and the closing of the attic story preserved, however, the character of this space as it was during the Cather period. The main body of the attic consists of one long room through the center of which a brick chimney, resting on 4" by 8" beams, slants diagonally upward to exit at the ridge of the roof. The room is floored with rough, wide planks, and the walls consist of white-painted flush boards which rise to the slanting rafters. This portion of the attic is unceiled, leaving the rough underside of the wooden shingles exposed. The gable window at the front of the house furnishes light to the long bare room. From the descriptions among the writings of Willa Cather, the room has been restored and furnished as it was when her brothers occupied it. Off the west end of the attic, above the projecting addition, is the space which was partitioned off to serve as Willa Cather's bedroom. A single window set at floor level and identical to the one at the front of the attic, is situated at the north end of the room. Crudely ceiled with flush boarding, the room retains the same flowered wallpaper placed there

--continued on Form 10-300a--

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1884-1890

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Science  | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature  | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Willa Cather captured the spirit of the pioneer era as perhaps no other American author. Her craft has been called local in scope--for she dealt primarily with the West and the Southwest--but national in significance,<sup>1</sup> not only because she chronicled the life and influence of the westward movement, but did so in such a vibrant and gifted way as to preserve a vital aspect of the American spirit.<sup>2</sup> Both her artistry and the content of her works place Willa Cather in the forefront of modern American authors.

In a 1921 interview, Willa Cather stated that the "years from eight to fifteen are the formative period in a writer's life, when he unconsciously gathers basic material. He may acquire a great many interesting and vivid impressions in his mature years, but his thematic material he acquired under fifteen years of age."<sup>3</sup> Virtually all of Willa Cather's fiction reflects the trace of these years in her own youth, and the Red Cloud, Nebraska, home where she lived from the age of eleven until she went away to the state university at seventeen is minutely described in three of her works: *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and the later short stories "Old Mrs. Harris" and "The Best Years." In the town of Red Cloud itself, and on the sweeping prairies around it, she discovered the heroic spirit that pervades her works. Personalities and places the author remembered there, impressions and moods gleaned from this girlhood setting, were the raw materials from which such novels as *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* were created.<sup>4</sup> Some time

--continued on Form 10-300a--

1. Henry Seidel Canby quoted in Robert E. Spiller et al., eds., *Literary History of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 1216.

2. Sculley Bradley et al., eds., *The American Tradition in Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962), Vol. II, pp. 975-77.

3. Quoted in E. K. Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 3.

4. Ibid., 30-32, 305; Spiller et al., eds., *Literary History*, p. 1216.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Bradley, Sculley et al., eds. *The American Tradition in Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962, Vol. II, pp. 975-77.

Brown, E. K. *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1964.

Spiller, Robert E. et al., eds. *Literary History of the United States*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960, p. 1216.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		40	05	14
NE	° ' "	° ' "		98	31	13
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/2

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Robert S. Gamble, Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology, and Historic Preservation, National Park Service

DATE: July 19, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:  
801 - 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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STATE Nebraska	
COUNTY Webster	
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7. DESCRIPTION (1) Willa Cather House

by Miss Cather as a girl of ten. Although badly deteriorated, the wall-paper survived when the upper part of the house was closed.

Until 1904, Willa Cather's parents rented this dwelling from the original owners, the Newhouse family, then moved to another Red Cloud residence. The main floor was greatly altered inside by successive occupants, although no major structural changes were made.

In 1960, the house was acquired from the descendents of the builder by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation, and in 1966-67 it was restored and refurnished to represent the 1884-1891 period. Restoration, based on structural investigation and Miss Cather's accounts of the house, was accomplished largely through a grant from the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. of Chicago. Furnishings restoration continues.

A number of other structures in and about Red Cloud have also been acquired by the Willa Cather Foundation because of their associations with her life and work. These include the old Burlington Railroad Depot, the Episcopal Church where in 1922 she was confirmed with her parents, and the building erected in 1889 by Silas Garber--the "Captain Forrester" of Miss Cather's novel, *A Lost Lady*. The latter structure now houses the Museum and Archives of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

after Willa Cather left Red Cloud, her parents moved to another house. Each year until their deaths, unless Miss Cather was on an extended trip to Europe, she returned "home" for a month or two in the summer or fall, and often for shorter stays at Christmas. Thus her physical associations with the locale if not directly with her girlhood home continued through most of her life. Her writing was done principally in the East, but the Red Cloud house where Miss Cather lived from 1884 to 1890 remains the single most tangible reminder of the life from which--as Leon Edel has said--she chiseled her work.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Brown, *Willa Cather*, pp. xxiv, 287.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (2)

Willa Cather House

Biography

Willa Cather was born in 1873 near Winchester, in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Although her background was deeply rooted in the South, the major influences of Willa Cather's life post-dated 1881, when her family moved to frontier Nebraska. It was here that she became acquainted with the immigrants who lived in the area, gaining insights into their lives which would later appear in her writing. The milieu in general would become the wellspring of her most successful creative effort.

The earliest of the Nebraska years were spent on a ranch, then the Cather family moved to the nearby town of Red Cloud. After a primary education under the guidance of her grandmothers, supplemented by wide reading, Miss Cather finished high school in Red Cloud and attended the University of Nebraska. In 1895, she went to Pittsburgh, where she worked for a time as telegraph editor and drama critic for the *Daily Leader*. Journalism hampered her more creative writing however, and in 1901 she began teaching in a local high school, meanwhile publishing a few of her poems in *McClure's Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan*. A volume of poetry, *April Twilights*, was published in 1903, and *The Troll Garden*, a collection of short stories, appeared two years later. But these early writings, which did not deal with the life she knew best, lack the depth of understanding that characterizes her more mature work.

During this time, and afterward when she was managing editor for *McClure's*, Willa Cather traveled widely in the United States and abroad, and in 1908 she met Sarah Orne Jewett. Although Miss Jewett lived but a year longer, the New England novelist exercised a profound influence upon Miss Cather. As her admiration for Flaubert had signally molded her craft, it was the tutelage of Sarah Orne Jewett that profoundly influenced Willa Cather's discovery of her subject. "You must find your quiet center of life and write from that," advised the elder novelist. "To write and work on this level we must live on it--we must at least recognize it and defer to it at every step."<sup>6</sup>

This "center of life" proved to be for Willa Cather her own Western heritage. She left *McClure's* in 1912 to devote herself entirely to writing. A trip to the Southwest that same year--the beginning of a strong love for the region--deepened her appreciation of the raw pioneer spirit and the kaleidoscopic flavor of the westward movement in America. The succeeding decade saw the appearance of the first of the novels which,

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6. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (3)

Willa Cather House

tapping this resource, would make Willa Cather a nationally-prominent novelist. *O Pioneers!*, published in 1913, was her first popular success. The death of the lovers in the novel has been called "one of the notable scenes in English literature." *Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* followed within the next five years. All three books were written as if they were memoirs of pioneer life, and they dwell extensively on the valor of human beings facing the psychological and physical hardships of the frontier. But in doing so, they transcend the scope of the West to explore the universal theme of the reaction between the soul of man and its environment.

This became the touchstone of most of her future novels as well, including the now-classic *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), sensitively written against the colorful past of the Southwest. The work was also permeated with a note of spiritual escapism reflecting Willa Cather's growing discomfiture amid the materialism of post-World War I America. An earlier novel, *One of Ours*, for which Miss Cather received the Pulitzer Prize in 1922, had marked her pilgrimage to this point by its portrayal of the artistic temperament wrought upon by a materialistic environment.

During the next decade, this alienation between Miss Cather and a changing America increased. Her first novel of the thirties, *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), was followed by a collection of short stories, *Obscure Destinies*, published in 1932.

Increasingly in a world that seemed to be crumbling about her, Willa Cather turned to reminiscences about a lost past, now made even more so by the deaths of her parents and the termination of her annual visits to Red Cloud. Her last published novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), turned for its setting to the ante-bellum Virginia she had learned of through her grandparents, and similar nostalgia is reflected in *The Old Beauty*, a collection of short stories, published a year after she died on April 24, 1947.

Although Willa Cather felt herself and her work to be anachronistic during her last years, the spirit she immortalized by her writing has assured her place in American literature. Sinclair Lewis observed that her works rose "high and free, far more creative than critical"<sup>7</sup> in an

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7. Quoted in Spiller, et al., eds., *Literary History*, p. 1216.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (4)

Willa Cather House

age when the works of many literary contemporaries conveyed a mood of pessimism. Henry Seidel Canby has stated that while Willa Cather knew "evil and suffered from the grossness of materialism and the smugness of cheap success," she "preferred to celebrate the vitality of the good"<sup>8</sup> as both artist and chronicler of an American epic.

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8. Henry Seidel Canby in *Ibid.*, p. 1216.