

NCB Quarterly

Nebraska Center for the Book

Vol. 5

Winter 1995

No. 1



courtesy the Nebraska State Historical Society

Willa Cather — 1895 Graduation Portrait



Board of Directors

The Nebraska Center for the Book is the 23rd state affiliate of the Library of Congress's National Center for the Book. The Center is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. The Center acts as a catalyst, bringing together individuals and organizations to build the Nebraska community of the book. The Center serves as a partner and supporter of programs, events, and unique projects which celebrate the written word. The current board members are:

Peggy Benjamin	Grand Island
Golda Bockbrader, President	Grand Island
Elaine Johnson, Past President	Omaha
Thomas Boyle, President-Elect	Fremont
Denise Brady	Omaha
Frank Chipasula	Omaha
Carol Connor	Lincoln
Molly Fisher	Lincoln
Diane Kinkle	Omaha
Barbara Lehn, Secretary	Omaha
Ron Norman	Kearney
Laureen Riedesel	Beatrice
Robert Runyon	Omaha
Ellen Scott	Omaha
F.M. Tuttle, Treasurer	Lincoln
Lori Utecht	Bancroft
Rod Wagner	Lincoln

Nebraska Center for the Book Board of Directors Meetings 1995

March 3 at the Nebraska Library Commission in Lincoln

June 2 at the Omaha Public Library

August 31 at the University of Nebraska-Kearney

November 2 at the Heritage Room at the Lincoln City Library.

Note: All Board of Directors Meetings are preceded by morning programs and committee work convening at 9:30 a.m. All NCB members are encouraged to join us for these activities and become more involved in our planning programs. Members may also attend Board Meetings in a non-voting status.

NCB Quarterly is published quarterly by the Nebraska Center for the Book. Subscription is free with Nebraska Center for the Book membership. We welcome your contributions and correspondence. Write to *NCB Quarterly* c/o Lincoln City Libraries, 136 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508.

©Copyright 1995 by the
Nebraska Center for the Book
ISSN 1063-9365



President's Message — Golda Bockbrader

A new year, a new president, and new challenges for the Nebraska Center for the Book in 1995.

In reflecting on the four years of leadership by Dick Allen, our first NCB president, and then two years of leadership by Elaine Johnson, our second president, I'm wondering how to fill the shoes of my predecessors. We all have different backgrounds, different personalities and different styles of leadership.

It might be wise for me to share with you my reason for accepting the Presidency of the Nebraska Center for the Book. I enjoy reading and know there are thousands of Nebraskans who do not know the pleasure of reading and collecting books. Why?? — because they cannot read or lack comprehension skills. Please be aware that I am also talking about some high school graduates and even some college graduates. I have met graduates who have diplomas but cannot read.

As you read my messages, you will realize that I am not a writer, but I do have a very strong desire to make others aware that each and everyone of us should share our love of reading and help every child and/or adult learn to read and help them enjoy reading.

The committee chairs will continue to be a crucial part of the growth of Nebraska Center for the Book. The committee chairs are willing to work to develop and implement new ideas; however, it would be helpful and appreciated if you as members of NCB

would volunteer to serve on the committees. Meetings are held on a quarterly basis and dates and locations for 1995 are as follows: March 3 at the Nebraska Library Commission in Lincoln; June 2 at the Omaha Public Library; August 31 at the University of Nebraska-Kearney; and November 2 at the Heritage Room at the Lincoln City Library. As you renew your membership for 1995, please indicate if you would be willing to serve on a committee.

While we are encouraging you to be a member of a committee, this would be an opportune time to acknowledge the committee chairs:

Rod Wagner	Funding, Membership
Lauren Reidesel	Reading, Writing, Literacy, Literary Heritage
Molly Fisher	Public Relations, Publications
Ellen Scott	Books, Bookstores, Publishing
Denise Brady	Festivals, Conferences

Those who will hold office with me in 1995 are Morrie Tuttle continuing as Treasurer; Tom Boyle as President-Elect; Barbara Lehn as Secretary; and Elaine Johnson as Past President.

With the help of the officers and committee chairs, I hope to meet some personal goals which are to increase the membership of NCB and the continued growth of my pet project "Share the Joy of Reading" which involves giving books to needy children at Christmas. I should hasten to add

continued on page 9



Under the direction of John McKenna and David Raabe of the University of Nebraska at Omaha English Department, "Leaves From the Nebraska Notebook" was a newspaper project funded in 1989 by the Nebraska Humanities Council; the project circulated to forty newspapers in the state with an estimated readership of over one million. Since Tillie Olsen attended the 1994 festival, it seems fitting to reprint this article. Tillie Olsen, a recipient of numerous awards, was featured in the Center for the Book Resource Guide, available from the Center for the Book for \$2.

Tillie Olsen's Fiction Draws on Hard Times of Omaha Youth

Linda Ray Pratt, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

When Tillie Olsen was growing up in Omaha in the 1920s, she read Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron Mills*. Years later she wrote that the book taught her that "literature can be made out of the lives of despised people." Olsen's award-winning fiction, among the most widely anthologized by contemporary writers and translated into thirteen foreign languages, draws on her family's past as Russian Jewish immigrants who settled in Omaha during World War I. Her best known works, *Yonnondio* (1974), a novel about a family in a meat packing city during the Depression, and *Tell Me a Riddle* (1961), a collection of stories about family life, reflect her interest in the "despised people" of American society — the working class, the immigrants, and the minorities.

Olsen's parents, Sam and Ida Lerner, left Russia after the failure of the 1905 Revolution in order to avoid persecution for their socialist beliefs. Tillie was one of six children born in Nebraska, where the family first settled on a farm near Mead, but soon

moved to 2512 Cauldwell Street in north Omaha. Her parents were active in organizing the Workmen's circles, a national Jewish Socialist organization, and Tillie attended Central High School. After Olsen left school and worked for a few months organizing in the Kansas City meat packing industry, she began work on her first novel, *Yonnondio*, in 1933. Olsen's writing was interrupted by the pressures of rearing her four children and helping to make a living. In *Silences* (1978), she wrote about the difficulties she and other women face as writers who must combine many women's roles with their aspirations as artists.

Olsen moved to San Francisco in the 1930s where she still resides. She is active as a speaker about her own work and that of other women writers. In 1979, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln awarded her an honorary degree.

Yonnondio is about the Holbrook family, which moves from work in the mines in Wyoming to a farm in South Dakota and

continued on page 5



Tillie Olsen's Fiction

continued from page 4

finally to an unnamed packing-house city. The details of the city will be familiar to Nebraska readers who know south Omaha. This depression-era story is presented through the eyes of Mazie, a child whose dreams of a placid life on the farm dissolve in the realities of packing-town slums. Olsen portrays an urban world driven by the oppressive power of the meat packing industry:

Here near the top of the street she could see the shattered sun die in a sky of bruises over the decayed life of houses and buildings. Way down, like a hog, a great hulk of building wallowed. A—R—M—O—U—R—S gray letters shrieked. Armours, said Mazie over and over: Armoursarmoursarmours.

The chant of Armoursarmoursarmours identifies the source of this sickness and shame that consumes the family's strength.

In the packing houses, the people become part of a machine, "geared, meshed, timed, controlled." Only the comradeship of the workers who relieve each other keeps down the casualties from collapse in the intense summer heat:

Year-round breathing with open mouth, learning to pant shallow to endure the excrement reek of offal, the smothering stench from the blood house below. Windowless: bleared dark light. Clawing, dinning, jutting, gnashing noises, so overwhelming that only at scream pitch can the hu-

man voice be heard. Heat of hell year round, for low on their head from the lowering ceiling, the plant's steam machinery. Incessant slobber down off its oil and scalding water onto their rubber caps, into their rubber galoshes. O feet always doubly in water — inside boots, outside boots, running water overflow from casing wash. Spurting steam geysers. Slippery uncertain footing on the slimy platform. Treacherous sudden torrents swirling (the strong hose trying to wash down the blood, the oil, the offal, the slime).

And over and over, the one consistent motion-ruffle fat pullers, pluck separators, bladder, kidney, bung, small and middle gut cutters, cleaners, trimmers, slimers, flooders, inflators-meshed, geared.

Tell Me a Riddle includes several stories. "I stand Here Ironing" is a mother's painful account of her own failures with her first child. Emily, a child "of depression, of war, of fear," is shy and hurt by things in her childhood, but the mother sees a strength in her that will suffice: "Let her be," the mother advises those who try to "help" her daughter, "so all that is in her will not bloom — but in how many does it? There is still enough left to live by." The story "O Yes" draws on Omaha memories to tell of two twelve-year-old girls, one white and one black, whose friendship dissolves when race and class consciousness split them apart.

Tell Me a Riddle portrays how her parent's generation often abandoned their beliefs in

continued on page 8



Willa Cather's University Days (1890-1895): A Centennial Celebration

April 6-9, 1995

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This celebration of the centennial of Willa Cather's graduation in 1895 from the University of Nebraska will focus attention on the Nebraska roots of one of America's greatest writers, thus celebrating not only Cather but the school and the state which did so much to form her.

The multidisciplinary program will place Cather in the context of her time and of this particular place — the University, Lincoln, and Nebraska by reaching out to members of the Nebraska community. Music, dance, tours, exhibits, and talks will give participants a greater understanding of the cultural life of the late nineteenth century and how it influenced Cather, a writer who drew more deeply than most writers on her early education and experiences. Many of the influences that will be addressed in the celebration are still at work today, inviting consideration of what it means to be of and from Nebraska.

The centennial year will be introduced February 14th in a performance by the Lincoln symphony Orchestra, which will present music important to Cather. A pre-concert talk by Kari Ronning and Susan Rosowski and reading during the evening will discuss Cather, the music lover.

In conjunction with the Centennial festivities, the Center for Great Plains Studies is publishing a booklet, titled *Willa Cather's University Days: University of Nebraska-Lin-*

coln, 1890-1895. This collection of articles, edited by Kari Ronning and Elizabeth Turner, discusses Lincoln and the University in the 1890s and Cather's life at the University.

On April 6, 1995, the celebration will begin with readings of Cather's fiction in English and translations. That afternoon guided tours will visit places and objects related to Cather, with stops at special exhibits of photographs and manuscript materials at Love Library, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and Andrews Hall. Lucia Woods, photographer and co-author with Bernice Slote of *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*, will exhibit photographs on the importance of place to Cather and her work; Lucia Woods' gallery talk will take place Thursday afternoon in Architecture Hall. That evening Robert Knoll, author of a forthcoming history of the University of Nebraska, will speak about the University in Cather's time to be followed by a reception for celebration registrants.

On Friday, April 7, the celebration will resume at the University Student Union's Centennial Rooms with talks from Frederick Luebke on the nation, state and city in the 1890s, David Lewis on "The Farm, Once-upon-a-time," and Margaret Bolick on women and science at the University. After lunch a tree will be planted in Cather's memory in the University's Cather Garden to be followed by talks

continued on page 7



Willa Cather's University Days (1890-1895): A Centennial Celebration

continued from page 6

given by Thomas Rinkevitch on Cather and the Classics, Susan Rosowski on "Cather Then and Cather Now," and Linda Pratt on "Literary Contexts of Gender Identification in the 1890s." In the afternoon Beverly Cooper, a longtime collector and photographer of Catherania, will present her slide show about places of importance to Cather. Friday evening members of the community will gather for an informal session of storytelling about personal and family recollections of Cather and her circle; slides of Cather and her university friends will be shown by Kari Ronning and Elizabeth Turner.

On Saturday, April 8, Karen Janovy will speak about Cather and the art scene, and Cathy Downs (University of North Carolina) will discuss Cather and journalism. Patricia Behrendt will talk about Cather, theatre, and the literary imagination, and David Breckbill (Doane College), an authority on European art music on the great plains, will talk with celebration participants as well. Saturday afternoon registrants will enjoy lunch at the Old City Hall building; James McKee, noted Lincoln historian, will show slides of Cather's Lincoln followed by a bus tour conducted by Ed Zimmer, preservation officer for the city of Lincoln. The celebration will conclude with a performance choreographed by Lisa Fusillo, director of Dance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and scripted by Pat Be-

hrendt, followed by comments from University of Nebraska-Omaha professor, Bruce Baker.

The Cather Centennial Celebration will be of interest to the public as well as members of the University community. For further information and to register, contact Phil Coleman-Hull and Deb Forssman in the Center for Great Plains Studies at 472-3082.

The celebration is made possible through the support of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Great Plains Studies, Department of English, Academic Affairs, College of Arts and Sciences, and the University Honors Program; the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Education foundation, the Nebraska State Historical Society; and the Cather Colloquium.

The John H. Ames Reading Series

Sponsored by

The Nebraska Literary Heritage Association

Readings are held in the Heritage Room,
3rd floor

Bennett Martin Public Library
14th & N Streets, Lincoln, Nebraska
on the third Thursday of the month
at 7:30 p.m.

For more information phone 441-8516
Join us in celebrating another decade
of Nebraska poet and author readings
by attending one of the following programs:

Spring 1995

February 16	Cheryl St. John - <i>Romance Writer</i>
March 16	Clarence Davis - <i>Poetry & Prose</i>
April 20	Fred Murray - <i>Cowboy Storytelling</i>



Nebraska Literature Festival: Success in 1994 and Kearney in 1995

Approximately 700 people attended the 1994 Literature Festival in Omaha. The festival highlighted Nebraska authors and featured Omaha's Ron Hansen Tillie Olsen, and Jonis Agee. Jonis remarked at how much she liked the friendly, celebratory atmosphere of the festival. At a luncheon in her honor, Tillie Olsen spoke of her school experience at Central High School; she said how much she enjoyed the presentation of her short story "I Stand Here Ironing." She read from *Yonnondio* and answered questions from the audience. In addition to these special guests, Maurveen Williams of

the National Center for the Book spoke to the group. The festival featured many of Nebraska's poets and authors, and included storytelling, book discussions, poetry readings, a book fair, and general sessions on Nebraska authors.

The Literature Festival will be held in Kearney on September 22 and 23, 1995. For further information contact Dr. Charles Peek, Chair English Department, UNK. 308-234-8293 or E-mail, peek@platte.unk.edu

Tillie Olsen's Fiction

continued from page 4

a better world in order to make a living in a new one. As Eva dies of cancer, she and her husband, David, recall the socialist dreams of their youth: "Aaah, children" David says, "how we believed, how we belong," The parents realize with regret that they failed to give their children the heritage of values that had enriched their own lives:

And he yearned to package for each of the children, the grandchildren, for everyone, that joyous certainty, that sense of mattering, of moving and being moved, of being one indivisible with the great of the past, with all that freed, ennobled.

("Leaves from the Nebraska Notebook" is a project of the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities. For further information, contact your local library, bookstore, or the NCH office in Lincoln.)



NHC Director, Jane Hood visits with Tillie Olson at the Literature Festival. Pictured from the left: Dave Whitaker, Jane Hood, Linda Pratt, Tillie Olson and Elaine Johnson.



Mildred Bennett Award Given to Sue Rosowski



Sue Rosowski receives the Mildred Bennett award. Pictured from the left: Elaine Johnson, Sue Rosowski, Betty Kort.

As an acknowledged leading Cather scholar, Sue Rosowski is the fourth recipient of the Mildred Bennett award. Sue is the editor of the scholarly edition of Cather's works and is known for her outstanding teaching. She is UNL's Adele Hall Distinguished Professor of English, an honor given for excellence in teaching and research. Author of *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism*, she serves as a board member of the Willa Cather Memorial Foundation. Her active leadership in Nebraska's literary community, her teaching and research make her an outstanding recipient of this award.

Sue commented about the strength of Nebraska's literary heritage and literary community. She sees it as remarkable that the many author groups, living authors, and in-

terested community come together to celebrate writing in Nebraska.

Previous recipients of the Mildred Bennett Award include Jane Geske, Caroline Sandoz Pifer and Flora Sandoz, and Hilda Neihardt Petri.

President's Message

continued from page 3

that each and every program of the NCB is important and every effort will be made to help the programs grow.

Elaine Johnson deserves recognition and appreciation for her leadership and enthusiasm during her term of office. Thank you Elaine — we look forward to having you on the Board as we continue on our path of growth.

We wish to acknowledge and recognize the efforts of Kira Gale, who served as Festival Chairman and has left the Board as her term of office expired.

We also welcome new Board Member Lori Utecht from the Neihardt Center in Bancroft.

We learned from the Literature Festival in Omaha which left us with challenges and insight for future festivals and were pleased when a long-awaited membership brochure made its debut in November.

I look forward to this year of 1995, knowing that many experienced Board Members are available and willing to keep the NCB moving forward, making changes to meet the challenges of the future.



Harry Duncan's Work Recognized with the 1994 Jane Geske Award

Harry Duncan and Denise Brady at the presentation of NCBs 3rd Annual Jane Geske Award



November 3rd the Nebraska Center for the Book presented Harry Duncan with the 1994 Jane Geske Award at its annual meeting in Lincoln. Mr. Duncan, Professor Emeritus in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has published such esteemed 20th century poets as Wallace Stevens, Allen Tate, Robert Lowell, William Carlos Williams, R.P. Blackmur, Marianne Moore and Yvor Winters. His work as editor, typographer and printer has furthered the art of the book for over 50 years through the Cummington

Denise Brady

Press which he co-founded in 1939, and through Abattoir Editions, the UNO imprint he founded in 1972. Mr. Duncan retired from teaching typography at UNO in 1985 but has continued to print by hand limited editions of poetry and prose from his shop on the UNO campus.

About fifty people attended part or all of the festivities which began in the Heritage Room of the Bennett Martin Library with a display of Mr. Duncan's most recent books and the presentation of the award by outgoing President Elaine Johnson. Mr. Dun-



Jane Geske and Harry Duncan at the Estuary Bookstore, Lincoln, Nebraska.



Harry Duncan

continued from page 10

can spoke briefly about his work and thanked the NCB and acknowledge Jane Geske's friendship and work.

This NCB award gave me a rare opportunity to thank publicly my teacher and mentor whose work and instruction have given form to my love of poetry and making things with my hands. It was especially satisfying for me to highlight another of Harry Duncan's skills when I read his translation of a Dante poem that I printed for the occasion. Copy number one was presented to Mr. Duncan and copy number two to Jane Geske.

The celebration continued at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery where an exhibit entitled "Biblio/ Graphics" featured hand-made books from their permanent collection including three by Harry Duncan. Norman Geske, former director of the Sheldon accompanied the group to the exhibit.

Afternoon turned to evening at the Geskes' Estuary Bookstore in the Haymarket where guests enjoyed refreshments and conversation and Mr. Duncan graciously signed copies of his books. Though Harry talked that day about ending his printing because of his health, he has since printed several runs of a collection of poems by Laurence Leiberman which I look forward to reading sometime this spring when the printing and binding is complete. Maybe I'll be binding the edition.

If you have not held one of Harry Duncan's books in your hands nor read the po-

etry he's published, inquire at the Estuary Bookstore in Lincoln (402) 475-7323 or contact me at the Nebraska Book Arts Center (402) 554-2773. Copies of *I Come to the Place on the Wheel* (the Dante translation) and several Abattoir Editions titles are available.

The following is a letter sent to Elaine Johnson, Past President, Nebraska Center for the Book from Jane Geske.

The festivities last Thursday were very special for me and I am very grateful to you and to everyone involved. The obvious, and continuous, development of the Center bodes well for a most important element of Nebraska's cultural life: its literature and the access to it — which includes literacy for all.

I am indeed proud to have my name on an award from the Center which has gone to such forces as The Heritage Room, The Nebraska Humanities Council, and Harry Duncan. It seems to me that my name could be an acronym — relaxing the term as given in the dictionary — for some of those persons who are gone but who created the climate for this as a part of their broadening and expanding of the whole concept of books and library services for the state. For instance: Margerite Johnston, Ray Means, Louise Nixon, Ellen Lord, Frank Gibson, Nellie Carey, Dorothy Lessenhop, Frank Lundy, and Eleanor Manning. It is especially important that we acknowledge their contributions in this centennial year of the Nebraska Library Association.

Again, I want to thank you and the other NCB Board Members and congratulate each on the steps taken to date.

Sincerely, Jane Geske



Coming Events . . .

March 3	NCB Board Meeting Nebraska Library Commission in Lincoln	June 3, 1995	Mari Sandoz Society
April 29	Spring Neihardt Conference	August 31	NCB Board Meeting University of Nebraska-Kearney
May 6	Willa Cather Spring Conference	September 22-23	Nebraska Literature Festival
June 2	NCB Board Meeting Omaha Public Library	October 1, 1995	Bess Streeter Aldrich
		November 2	NCB Board Meeting Heritage Room, Lincoln City Library.

The Nebraska Center for the Book
an affiliate of the Library of Congress



*c/o Bennett Martin Library
136 South 14th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508-1899*

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LINCOLN, NE
PERMIT NO. 988