

# NCB Quarterly

Nebraska Center for the Book

Vol. 5

Spring 1995

No. 2



courtesy the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

**Mari Sandoz**



## 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 Kirkle	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

**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



Golda Bockbrader

## President's Message — Golda Bockbrader

**S**hape Your Future — Read! This is the theme the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress has chosen for its 1995-1996 national reading promotion campaign.

The national reading promotion campaign "Shape Your Future-Read" is designed to involve any and all who wish to promote reading. The campaign is supported to involve any and all who wish to promote reading. The campaign is supported by educational and civic organizations, corporations, professional associations, labor unions, schools, libraries, and others who believe reading is essential for wise government and individual well being.

The brochure for "Shape Your Future — Read!" listed many ideas for shaping futures. Following are some of the ways, you as individual or organizational members, can help shape future:

**For Individuals** — Read while exercising on your bike or treadmill; volunteer as a literacy tutor; give a book as a gift; read aloud to family and friends, recommend a favorite book to a friend; visit your local bookstore, join a book discussion group.

**For Schools and Libraries** — Publicize and distribute lists of recommended books for readers of all ages; invite local authors and well-known personalities to speak about how reading has influenced their fu-

tures; sponsor writing contests — for poems, stories, or descriptions of favorite books, use local newspapers to encourage reading and discussion of interesting topics, participate in National Young Reader's Day.

**For Organizations** — Use your newsletter to spread the word about the importance of reading; provide literacy training classes for employees; sponsor a book discussion group; support a local literacy project; sponsor a book fair; establish reading achievement awards for employees and their families, form a reading promotion partnership with a local school.

Needless to say, I'm excited about this campaign because it enhances my purpose in serving as President of the Nebraska Center for the Book — to encourage others to share their love of reading and help every child and/or adult learn to read and enjoy books.

The 1995 Board of Directors met on March 3 at the Nebraska Library Commission with Rod Wagner as host. The committees met to plan for 1995 and based on their reports, it is going to be a year of growth. Each committee is drafting a job description for the committee chair and their objectives. This will provide more continuity as leadership changes occur in the future.

Again, we invite each and every member of Nebraska Center for the Book to become involved with a committee. Perhaps you have a skill or talent you could share, or

*continued on page 10*



# The Marie Sandoz Heritage Society Annual Program Meeting

June 2-3, 1995  
Chadron State College

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society will hold its annual program meeting, open to all members of the public, on June 3, 1995, in the Student Center on the campus of Chadron State College. The Society's goal each year at its meeting is to confront an issue raised in one of Sandoz's works and explore that issue in depth from a variety of perspectives brought to bear by visiting humanities scholars. This year the Society will focus on *Slogum House*, Sandoz's 1937 novel, and discuss the issue of women on the Great Plains, specifically, the roles European women played in the settling of the area, the roles Native American women played in their culture and the area's history, and the roles women continue to play today in Plains life. The program will feature speakers from several disciplines — history, literature, law — to create a broad context for understanding and appreciating Sandoz's novel and the issues it raises. Throughout the meeting, a photographic exhibit provided by the Nebraska Humanities Council, entitled *Women at Work: Nebraska, 1880-1940*, consisting of twenty-five framed panels of photographs and interpretive text, will also be on display on campus. Home for the

*Andrew Elkins, Chadron State College*

photographic exhibit during its stay in Chadron will be the former college library and media center, the future site of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, a proposed museum and archives for historical and literary material related to all aspects of Sandoz's life and work and the history of the Great Plains.

The program will begin at 9 a.m. on June 3rd with "Lifestyles of Lakota Sioux Women," presented by Phyllis Stone, an elder of the Rosebud Sioux tribe and a descendant of Chief Iron Shell, a Peace Chief of the Rosebud Sioux. Ms. Stone will describe the lifestyles of the Sioux women and discuss the changes in those lifestyles that have come about in modern times.

At 10 a.m. Anita Sue Clement, of the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Schooner, will discuss the lives of mid- to late-19th century frontier women, contrasting the complex realities of their lives with the stereotypes and misperceptions we too often encounter. Ms. Clement will supplement her talk with a slide presentation.

At 11 a.m., Ann Diffendal, an independent scholar from Lincoln, will deliver her presentation, "Prostitution in the West." Ms. Diffendal, whose doctorate is in history and who has served as a consulting historian and archivist and a manuscript cura-

*continued on page 5*



## The Marie Sandoz Heritage Society Annual Program Meeting

*continued from page 4*

tor for years as well as being the former Executive Director of American Archivists (1991-94), will make an hour-long presentation on prostitution in Nebraska and the Old West, focusing on the years 1870-1920.

Following a lunch break, James Work, Professor of English at Colorado State University and editor of *The Prose and Poetry of the American West*, will deliver a paper entitled "The Balance of Sin in *Slogum House*," a discussion of Sandoz's symbolic representation, through her novel's characters, of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Cardinal Virtues. Immediately after Mr. Work's talk, a panel composed of all the presenters will convene to field questions from the audience to present an overview and summation of the day's ideas. The panel will allow the visiting scholars and the audience the opportunity to pull to-

gether the perspectives developed during the earlier sessions.

The evening's programs will consist of a banquet in the Student Center's ballroom followed by the Fourth Annual Mari Sandoz Lecture, delivered by Glenda Riley, Alexander M. Bracken Professor of History at Ball State University and author of many books, including *Divorce, Art, American Tradition, A Place to Grow: Women in the American West, The Female Frontier, Inventing the American Woman* and *Women and Indians on the Frontier: 1825-1915*. Ms. Riley's talk is entitled "Slogum House and the American West."

Anyone who would like more information about the program, including registration materials, may write to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society in care of the School of Liberal Arts at Chadron State College or may contact Andrew Elkins (308-432-6307) or Don Green (308-432-6276). The program is made possible through the support of Chadron State College and the Nebraska Humanities Council. ■



### Nebraska Center for the Book Board of Directors

*Pictured from left to right:  
Front row: Morrie Tuttle,  
Barbara Lehn, Golda Bockbrader,  
Tom Boyle.*

*Back row: Peggy Benjamin,  
Bob Runyan, Laureen Riedesel,  
Rod Wagner, Denise Brady,  
Carol Connor, Lori Utecht,  
Molly Fisher, Ron Norman.*



## Literature Festival — 1995

The Fifth Annual Nebraska Literature Festival will be held in Kearney on the UNK campus Saturday, September 23, 1995. UNK Ambassadors will greet those arriving at the entrances to the central campus and direct them to parking and registration.

Advance reservations for both the Festival and its special events (advisable due to the space limitations on the UNK campus) may be made by calling Kearney Community Theatre (308) 234-1529 prior to September 5.

The Festival will include presentations on Cather, Sandoz, Eiseley, Aldrich, Neihardt, and Morris, as well as on Kate Cleary and Weldon Kees. Hilda Neihardt will make a special presentation on her father's visit with Black Elk. A panel on publishing in Nebraska and workshops on poetry, fiction, the personal essay, and genealogy/family story will be offered, as well as readings by contemporary Nebraska writers. Besides Hilda Neihardt, featured presenters will include Ruth Thone, Ted Koozer, Matt Jones, Susanne George, Steve Shively, Marlene Plambeck, and representatives of the literary centers and foundations. There will also be a Book Fair. \$3.00 advanced registration, \$5.00 at the door.

Special Events include: "School Day" Friday, September 22. Limited to teachers and 150 students, the day will feature workshops on writing fiction, drama, and poetry, as well as panels on teaching. Stu-

dents will be in small, supervised groups for workshop activities. Each teacher accompanied by students will receive free a new compilation of contemporary Nebraska poetry for use in the classroom. Student work begun at the Festival may be submitted for a student booklet. Presenters include Don Welch, Jim work, Twyla Hansen, Ted Koozer, Bill Kloefkorn, and Marge Sizer. Teachers should register for themselves (free if accompanied by students) and their students: \$7.50 covers the day's program and a pizza lunch. Registrations should be made before September 1.

The Annual Awards luncheon, Saturday, September 23 will be limited to 150 and will feature a lecture and slide show by Betsy Downy. \$7.50 advanced registration (\$10 at the door if any seating remains) covers the lunch and program.

A Special Gala Presentation is scheduled for Saturday, September 23, 4:30 - 8:30 p.m. Don't miss *Upward and Outward: Voices of Color in Nebraska*, the literature festival's first celebration of our Native American, Hispanic, and African American heritage. Hosted at the Museum of Nebraska Art by UNK Chancellor Gladys Styles Johnston, the evening will feature:

- top-quality live jazz and blues music
- readings from diaries, speeches, poems, and fiction by both past and living writers
- commentary on how "voices of color" have come to be heard in Nebraska

*continued on page 10*



# Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund Grant Report

Laureen Riedesel

The Library of Congress awarded a Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund grant for \$5,000 to the Nebraska Center for the Book in order to support Nebraska's literary heritage. A Nebraska authors book discussion series was developed to implement the goals of the grant. From April to December 1994, over 300 citizens participated in 32 book discussions held at public libraries in Ainsworth, Alliance, Beatrice, Bellevue, Broken Bow and Minden. The total attendance at the six sites was 667.

The six books selected for the series were *My Antonia* (Cather), *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt), *Old Jules* (Sandoz), *A White Bird Flying* (Aldrich), *The Home Place* (Morris), and *Shingling the Fog and Other Plains Lies* (Welsch). Each site was given their choice of five of the six titles. Two locations (Beatrice and Bellevue) opted to read all six titles with the additional discussion handled at their own expense if necessary. Multiple copies of each title were made available through the generosity of the Nebraska Humanities Council and the Columbus Public Library.

There were four different discussion styles used in this series: The "Great Books" format, the "Let's Talk About It" plan, a hybrid combining characterization of both, and finally, the classic book review. (Regardless of format, each leader was paid \$50 per session.) The differing styles were demonstrated at the September 1994 Ne-

braska Literature Festival in Omaha. A representative from each site led one of the six discussions. Seventy people attended these programs.

The "Great Books" format was used at the Bellevue Public Library. There was consistency in leadership and procedures from one program to the next. A list of rules was distributed and followed. A formal "question and answer" period provided the basic structure for each discussion.

Beatrice, Broken Bow and Minden use of the "Let's Talk About It" discussion plan originally developed by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The first part of each program was an introduction to the book presented by a scholar or local "expert" who had done their homework. This was followed by a discussion of the work that can be as open and informal as the leader can handle! In this type of discussion, the leader usually changes with each program. Any continuity comes from the participants.

Ainsworth had the same discussion leader for each program. She did a great deal of preparation in order to present such a varied group of books. Her opening was followed by an informal discussion like that of the "Let's Talk About It" format.

Alliance provided the classic book review to some of the largest audiences of any of

*continued on page 8*



## Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund Grant Report

*continued from page 7*

the participating communities. Attendance ranged from 40 to 60 people at each program. The large size as well as the restrictions of time and space made reviews the most realistic format for them to use. A different leader was responsible for each title. In their followup comments, these leaders noted that the discussion format would have been preferred. It was a great deal of work for each of them, and there was no opportunity to get interpretations and opinions from the audience.

The final stage of the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund grant is the publication of a Study Guide for the six titles used in this series. All six sites noted how helpful it would have been to have had this guide. It would have made recruitment of readers much easier providing the same basic background information to all groups. Information used by leaders at each of the sites is currently being compiled for the composite guide that should be available later this year. Each of the six library sites is planning an "author party/reunion" to celebrate the study guide's publication.

The only real difficulty with the discussion series was the challenge of getting books through the mail from one site to the next. Some of the groups scheduled particular books at a convenient time for them leaving no guarantee that the books would arrive when they planned to have them. During the summer, substitute workers did not always understand the urgency of mailing

unfamiliar paperback books to a location across the state. Libraries were reimbursed for all postage and telephone costs related to this project. However, many times librarians would wait to send all the books at once to save postage expense while other libraries waited for the books to arrive so they could be read before the next discussion.

The reactions from the participating libraries were enthusiastic. Representative comments included statements such as "Our patrons have loved those discussion groups...Thank you for asking us to share in all the fun and learning," (Broken Bow) and "It was a fun, lively group" (Ainsworth). All the groups asked to be included in any future book discussion opportunities that might be developed.

There were no requirements that participating libraries continue the book discussion series when they agreed to accept grant funds. According to reports, Broken Bow and Ainsworth have begun their own groups. Beatrice also sponsors a group that meets monthly. A town near Ainsworth has also begun a discussion group on their own patterned after the one funded by the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund grant. They even began with *Old Jules*, one of the titles selected for the statewide series. The Ainsworth's discussion leader noted, "I believe the discussion series...started a trend."

It is the intent of the Nebraska Center for the Book to use the momentum created by the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund grant to further the development of book

*continued on page 10*



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 their publication Ron Hansen has published *Mariette in Ecstasy* and has a novel coming out in 1995. "Wickedness," discussed in the article, has been performed by the creative dance troupe, the Wagon Train Project.

## Hansen Finds Blizzard's Fury, Small Town Peace in Nebraska

David Raabe, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Nebraska-born author Ron Hansen's first collection of short fiction, *Nebraska*, was published in 1989. Not all the stories in the book are about Nebraska, but those that are show Hansen's keen powers of observation and description. He sees and feels the plainness and the beauty of Nebraska and the shortcomings, struggles, and triumphs of the people in it.

Hansen favors a fact-based kind of writing, rich in fictional detail, which gives history a vivid immediacy and makes the reader certain that life in a faraway time or place is the same as life now and here. With this technique, he shows Nebraska's fiercest face: the Great Blizzard of a hundred years ago — how people survived it, how they didn't, or how they were changed for life.

### From the story *Wickedness*:

"In the year 1888, on the twelfth day of January, a pink sun was up just after seven and southeastern zephyrs of such soft temperature were sailing over the Great Plains that squatters walked their properties in high rubber boots and April jackets and some farmhands took off their Civil War

greatcoats to rake silage into the cattle troughs. However, sheep that ate whatever they could the night before raised their heads away from food and sniffed the salt tang in the air."

"A Danish cattleman named Axel Hansen later said he was near the Snake River and tipping a teaspoon of saleratus into a yearling's mouth when he heard a faint groaning in the north that was like the noise of a high waterfall at a fair distance. Axel looked toward Dakota, and there half the sky was suddenly gray and black and indigo blue with great storm clouds that were seething up as high as the sun and wrangling toward him at horse speed."

"Although his sod house was but a quarter-mile away, it took Axel four hours to get there. Half his face was frozen gray and hard as weather-boarding so that the cattleman was speechless until nightfall, and then Axel Hansen simply told his wife, 'That was not pleasant'."

"Cow tails stuck out sideways when the wind caught them. Sparrows and crows whumped hard against the windowpanes,

continued on page 11



## Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund Grant Report

*continued from page 8*

discussions across Nebraska. Funding for mini-grants to begin book discussions in three new communities has been budgeted. These funds will be provided with the understanding that for each program funded by the grant, the participating library must sponsor one on their own. The Nebraska Center for the Book also intends to use the *Quarterly* as a means of communicating ideas and information to the various book discussion groups across the state.

The Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund grant enabled the Nebraska Center for the Book to start a discussion series project that brought Nebraska's great literary heritage to life at the local level. In the words of one discussion leader, "It gave some of us, with reading as a hobby, an opportunity to share it with others." ■

## Literature Festival — 1995

*continued from page 6*

- and, in the side galleries, video-clips and slide shows of migrants, settlers, and contemporaries.

All this and a lavish spread of wine and substantial h'ors d'oeuvres for the end of our day (limit of 200). \$15 advanced registration (\$20.00 at the door if space is still available) covers the supper and program.

The Festival planning committee represents workers from eight central Nebraska communities. ■

## President's Message

*continued from page 3*

you could implement a project in your community. You can be involved even if you don't want to attend the meetings. Contact the chair of the committee you would like to serve on — offer your help. Invite your friends and acquaintances to become a member of NCB. A membership brochure has been developed. Let us know if you would like a brochure sent to a potential member.

Following is a very brief overview of committee activities:

The **Membership Committee** is working on increasing membership this year as well as looking for funding sources.

The **Festival Committee** is working diligently on the Literature Festival to be held in Kearney on September 22 & 23, 1995.

The **Reading, Writing & Literacy Committee** is working with book discussion groups, encouraging retirement home residents to write their memoirs, and planning to expand the Share the Joy of Reading project.

The **Public Relations Committee** is working on future editions of the newsletter assisted by Editor Linda Dageforde. They are also updating the membership brochure.

The **Books, Bookstores, Publishing Committee** was unable to meet. We look forward to hearing their plans.

Every Board of Directors member is to be commended for their dedication to the Nebraska Center for the Book programs. Please join them in helping NCB grow. ■



## Hansen Finds Blizzard's Fury, Small Town Peace in Nebraska

*continued from page 9*

their jerking eyes seeking out an escape. Cats died, dogs died, pigeons died. Horizontal snow that was hard and dry as salt dashed and seethed over everything, sloped up like rooftops, tricked its way across creek beds and ditches, milkily purred down city streets, stole shanties and coops and pens from a bleak landscape that was even then called the Great American Desert."

"At six a.m., the temperature at Valentine, Nebraska, was thirty degrees above zero. Half a day later it was fourteen below, the difference between having toes and not, between staying alive and not."

"A forty-year-old wife sought out her husband in the open range land near O'Neill and days later was found standing up in her muskrat coat and black bandanna, her scarf-wrapped hands tightly clenching the top strand of rabbit wire that was keeping her upright, her blue eyes still open but cloudily bottled by a half inch of ice, her jaw unhinged as though she'd died yelling out a name."

The title story of Ron Hansen's *Nebraska* is a panorama of a small Nebraska town a hundred years later. Circumstances have changed. There is a lingering and permeating awareness of the hard history; Nebraska life still has its grim aspects. But the state also bears evidence of a persistent human habitation for whom this place — in its simplicity, beauty, and familiarity — is home. Hansen contrasts the first settlers' "green sod

houses that crumbled and collapsed in the rain and disappeared in the first persuasive snow" with the more comfortable habitations of today. Nebraskans have not changed so much over the years, but their mastery of the hard environment has. Their stewardship has made life in Nebraska practical and fruitful.

### From the story *Nebraska*:

Now the "houses are big and white and two stories high, each a cousin to the next, with pigeon roosts in the attic gables, green storm windows on the upper floor, and a green screened porch, some as pillowed and couched as parlors or made into sleeping rooms for the boy whose next step will be the Navy."

"Overgrown elm and sycamore trees poach the sunlight from the lawns and keep petticoats of snow around them into April. In the deep lots out back are wire clotheslines with flapping white sheets pinned to them, property lines are hedged with sour green and purple grapes, or with rabbit wire and gardens of peonies, roses, gladioli, irises, marigold, pansies."

"Fruit trees are so closely planted that they cannot sway without knitting. The apples and cherries drop and sweetly decompose until they're only slight brown bumps in the yards."

"The Union Pacific night train rolls through town just after ten o'clock when sixty-year-old Adolf Schooley is in bed. He can hear the train saying *Nebraska, Nebraska, Nebraska, Nebraska*. And he cannot sleep."

"Mrs. Antoinette Heft is at the Home Restaurant, placing frozen meat patties on waxed

*continued on page 12*



## Hansen Finds Blizzard's Fury, Small Town Peace in Nebraska

*continued from page 11*

paper. She stops when the train passes, then picks a cigarette out of a pack of Kools and smokes it on the back porch, smelling air as crisp as Oxydol, looking up at stars the Pawnee Indians looked at, hearing the low harmonica of big rigs on the

highway, in the town she knows like the palm of her hand, in the country she knows by heart."

Among Ron Hansen's other works are *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and *Desperadoes*, a story of the Dalton gang. For more information see your library or books source or contact the Lincoln office of the Nebraska Humanities Council. ■

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



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

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

SE Library System  
Union College Library  
Attn Kate Marek  
3800 South 48th Street  
Lincoln NE 68506