

# The Story Catcher

Newsletter of the Mari Sandoz Society



## Sandoz Society Making Mari's Wishes a Reality: Society Helps Support the Fetterman Anniversary Youth Ride

Mari Sandoz spent a great deal of her life raising awareness of Native American cultural heritage, history, and social justice issues. The Sandoz Society continues carrying on her legacy by participating in, promoting, and donating to different projects and events whenever possible.

One such event was the First Annual Fetterman Anniversary Youth Ride in Sheridan, Wyoming. Society President Shannon Smith said of the event, "We invested in the youth ride to show the tribes from that region that on behalf of Mari's spirit, we want to encourage them to tell their story through public events, actions, and activities."

On December 21, 2025, ten Lakota youth rode their horses eighteen miles from Sheridan, WY, to the Fetterman Fight site. The date marked the 159th anniversary of that battle.

Sharie Shada, the site superintendent, explained, "The goal of this ride was, in part, to bring attention to the Fight anniversary, but most of all, it was to help build a bridge between the Sheridan area and Native communities."

Shada was pleased with the results but is looking to increase involvement in this year's ride. "We got people's attention with the first Ride, but for the next one, we want to get more of the local population involved so they can ride along with the youth and their parents and talk and get to know one another."

Seven riders and their families drove in from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Members of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation brought drummers. The day began with prayers, drumming, speakers, and blessings.

(continued on page 2)



Youth riders arriving at the battlefield (Photo courtesy Johnson County Tourism via Fort Phil Kearny State Historic Site)

## Youth Ride continued...

The riders made their way through town as the community gathered to see them off. A few miles into the ride, three more riders, from Wyola, Montana, joined the group.

As the riders rode closer to their destination, the Fort Phil Kearny/Bozeman Trail Association was holding their annual Fetterman Fight talk at the Kearney Community Hall. Donovan Sprague, a Miniconjou historian and professor, spoke about the Fetterman Fight from the Native perspective. Afterward, everyone went to the Fetterman Monument at the battle site. Sprague played his Indigenous flute for all gathered, just as the youth riders arrived. Both Lakota and Cheyenne elders and drummers provided more music and prayer and explained what the ride meant to them. The day ended with a blessing from an Arapaho elder and a potluck dinner.

Events such as this help to keep Mari's spirit alive, and that's an effort members of the Sandoz Society can rally behind.

## Sandoz Studies Wins Will Rogers Medallion Award

The second of a multi-volume series engaging with the writings of Mari Sandoz has been awarded the Will Rogers Medallion Award. Published by the University of Nebraska Press, the series includes scholarly essays discussing Sandoz's work in the time that it was written and events that may have influenced her. *Sandoz Studies, Volume 2: Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* pays particular attention to *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, her final book.

Editor Renée Laegreid explains the series as, "it focuses on her work. The first volume was on women and how Mari wrote about them." She goes on to explain that while the first volume was written around a subject, the next three books in the series all center around one of her books.

Each contributor analyzes her work from different viewpoints. "You'll see the gender perspective, the environmental perspective, the Native and literary perspectives, among others. We're really trying to get more people

engaged in studying Sandoz's work and finding ways to make it new and relevant to contemporary readers," Laegreid explains.

According to the Will Rogers website, the Will Rogers Medallion Award was originally created to honor outstanding volumes of Cowboy Poetry. It "soon expanded into other categories as interest and reader demand increased." Will Rogers himself was a famous author and cowboy entertainer. The purpose of the Medallion Award is "to honor this facet of his legacy as well as to highlight current books and other media that embody strong content, excellent production values, and enduring interest."

When looking at the judging criteria, it should be noted that the Medallion Award "recognizes excellence in Western literature and media. The quality of each entry is judged based on content and artistic presentation. All works must represent an accurate reflection of Western Americana, or cowboy and ranch life, historical or contemporary."

*Sandoz Studies, Volume 2*, received the Bronze Will Rogers Medallion Award in the category of Western Non-Fiction. The banquet and award ceremony were held in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Laegreid said, "It was really cool to get this award. Most book awards do not go to anthologies. They generally give them to monographs. And so, for an anthology to get an award is really cool."

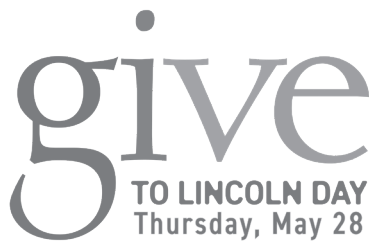
*Sandoz Studies, Volume 2: Sandoz and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* can be purchased from the University of Nebraska Press  
<https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/>



Laegreid and her husband Will at the Birthplace of Will Rogers in Claremore, OK. (Photo courtesy Will Rogers Medallion Award Committee )

# Society Participating in 2026 Give to Lincoln

The Mari Sandoz Society will be participating for the third year in a row in this year's Give to Lincoln Day. Give to Lincoln Day is a giving day event that encourages everyone to contribute to Lincoln and Lancaster County nonprofit organizations through a single giving platform between May 1 and May 28. Give to Lincoln Day is coordinated by Lincoln Community Foundation, in partnership with local nonprofit organizations. Every donation given makes a bigger impact because nonprofits also get a proportional share of a \$650,000 challenge match fund provided by Lincoln Community Foundation and a number of sponsors.

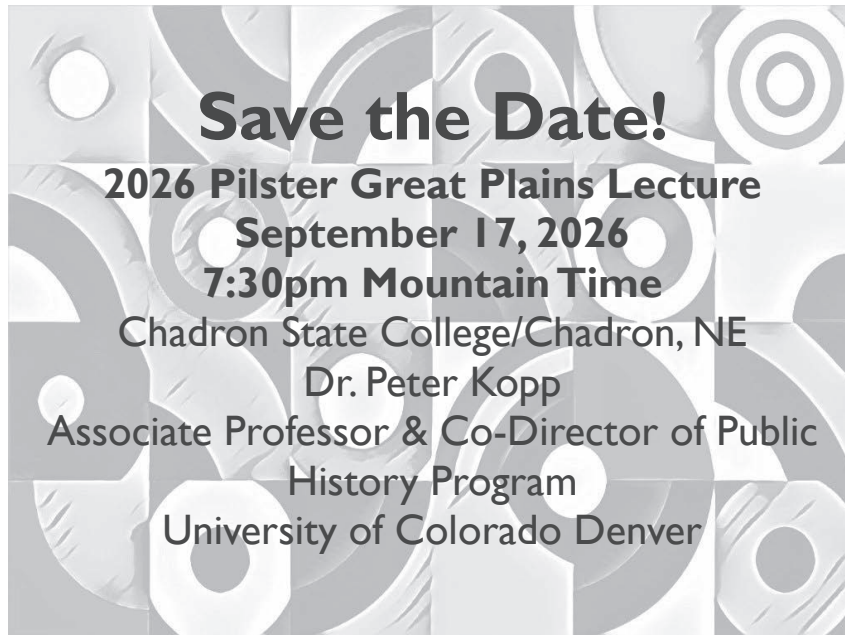


Online donations will be accepted from 12:00am on May 1, 2026 to 11:59pm on May 28, 2026 at [www.givetolincoln.com](http://www.givetolincoln.com). Checks, IRA qualified charitable distributions, and grants from donor advised funds held at Lincoln Community Foundation are also accepted. You can deliver your donation to the Lincoln Community Foundation office on May 28 between 8:00am-5:00pm. Donations may also be mailed and must be postmarked by May 21 and sent to Lincoln

Community Foundation, 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68508. Donors may also drop off their donations between May 1 and May 28 at any of West Gate Bank's Lincoln branches.

The Mari Sandoz Society plans to use the funds raised through this event for programs and activities in the Lincoln area. To learn more, visit the Give to Lincoln Day website at [www.givetolincoln.com](http://www.givetolincoln.com). If you would like to make a secure donation to the Society, you can visit our designated Give to Lincoln Day page—

<https://givetolincoln.com/nonprofits/mari-sandoz-heritage-society>



Want to go paperless? Email [info@marisandozsociety.org](mailto:info@marisandozsociety.org)

## The Story Catcher

*The Story Catcher* is the title of a book by Mari Sandoz and the title of Helen Winter Stauffer's biography, *Mari Sandoz: The Story Catcher of the Plains*. This newsletter is published multiple times a year by the Mari Sandoz Society, a 501c(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:  
**P.O. Box 6808, Lincoln, NE 68506**

Contributions to the Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at [www.marisandozsociety.org](http://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.

## *In Mari's Time*

### Essay Series By Daniel Hobbs

This year marks the United States Semiquincentennial, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. We stand closer to the halfway point of this century than to its beginning, and ever further from the twentieth, the "American Century." One hundred years ago, the sun was setting on the British Empire, and the United States was rising to global importance in a world still reeling from the staggering casualties of the First World War and a global influenza pandemic.

Mari Sandoz's writing career had its germinal moment in 1926, the nation's sesquicentennial year. That summer, a short story she submitted to *Harper's* nationwide Intercollegiate Literary Contest—with entries from eighty-four colleges—was granted honorable mention. There was no monetary prize, and the story would not appear in print during Mari's lifetime, but seeing her name in the pages of a national magazine was a bolt of encouragement.

At the time, she was not yet Mari Sandoz. Divorced for more than six years and living in Lincoln, she went by Marie Macumber, the name she used from her marriage in 1914 until 1929, when a literary agent's suggestion helped prompt the change. Even "guarded" by the married name, *Harper's* recognition found its way back to her father, Jules, all the way back in the Sandhills, whose response arrived in a characteristically irascible letter: "You know I consider writers and artists the maggots of society."

Jules Sandoz died two years later, as the rumblings of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe gathered on the horizon. Only when freed at last from his disapproval did Mari become the unflinching truth-teller—unsparing in her accounts of ambition, greed, abuse, corruption, empire, brutality and evergreen human folly—that we admire one hundred years on.



Caroline Sandoz Pifer Collection 1997.001.10567

*In Mari's Time*—a historical series on the life, work, and world of Mari Sandoz—continues in our next issue.

## *Capital City* Premiere Met with Rave Reviews after Run at the Lied Center in Lincoln

The play *Capital City*, inspired by Mari Sandoz's book of the same name, received rave reviews and is earning a lot of press. The world premiere was held in Lincoln, Nebraska, at the Lied Center for Performing Arts, April 9 - 12. More than 1,000 people attended the 7-show, 4-day run including two student matinees and livestreaming of the play for incarcerated youth at the Lancaster County Youth Services Center. The play was also featured in articles in the *Lincoln Journal Star* and *Flatwater Free Press*. Opening night reviews by audience members included comments like, "*Capital City* was so powerful, creative, thought-provoking and timely! The actors were incredible as the three of them literally inhabited all the various characters they played!" and "This was a well written, well-acted play. We were very impressed, and we left pondering the messages from the play with our current political climate. Want to go read the book now."

Set during the Great Depression, the play follows a fictional Midwestern city divided between wealth and poverty. The story explores tensions between those seeking to reclaim land, homes, and stability, and those working to maintain control. It was performed in the Animal Engine Theatre Company's physical theatre style, with movement and music that depicted a variety of environments including shanty towns, high society gatherings, and labor unrest. The play was an original commission from the Lied Center.

(continued on page 5)

## Capital City continued...

The Society hosted an information table and Mari Sandoz display in the lobby of the Johnny Carson Theater at the Lied. Following the Sunday matinee performance, the Society, along with the Lied's educational department, hosted an informal Q&A for audience members with the play's creators and actors. Brian Rockey, the Society's treasurer, attended the play on Saturday night and said the performance and content were true to the book.

After its debut in Lincoln, the play was performed in Fremont, Falls City, and Auburn as part of the Lied Center's Arts Across Nebraska program.



Attendees visit the Sandoz Society information table and display (left & center photos). Post-performance Q&A for audience members with Animal Engine Theater Company actors moderated by Sandoz Society treasurer, Brian Rockey (right photo).

## Sandoz Society Award Winners, Western District History Day

Chadron State College hosted the annual Western District History Day on March 4th. A variety of categories were offered for high school and middle school student competitors. Each year, the Mari Sandoz Society generously provides a cash prize for at least two projects – a senior level project and a junior level project. In the spirit of Mari Sandoz, the prizes are intended for those projects that display distinguished research and presentation on the American West, especially the Great Plains, and diverse histories of the individuals and groups who have lived in those regions. This year, the Society is proud to recognize two projects, one at the senior level, and one at the junior level. **Junior Division winner Noah Reynaga's** 1,500-word paper was titled "Popular culture has been inspired by acts of resistance by the Hunkpapa (Lakota) people and other Indigenous cultures throughout the world." Inspired by the Avatar film franchise, the paper examines popular culture examples and ties them back to historical struggles of perseverance, survival, and cultural retention among Native American tribes, including of the Northern Great Plains region. **Senior Division group exhibit winners Miranda Betson and Garrett Tollman** presented an exhibit titled "Reformation of the Beef Industry." The judges particularly praised this project for its overall presentation and use of sources concerning the reforms in safety and efficiency in the beef industry in the early twentieth century. The project displays examples of situations historically related to Upton Sinclair's famous novel, *The Jungle*, and how such muckraking and progressive journalism of the era helped spur changes in the industry. Judges noted how the project not only was an overall examination of the beef industry of the early twentieth century but also tied the historical situation to the Great Plains, American West, and Nebraska in particular. Because the project tied together themes of literature, reform, and place so well, the judges noted it to be an ideal project made in the spirit of the Mari Sandoz.



[Left Photo] Junior Division winner, Noah Reynaga of Scottsbluff with Assistant Professor Sam Herley; [Right Photo] Senior Division competitors Garret Tollman and Miranda Betson of Crawford, with Assistant Professor Sam Herley (Photos by Tena L. Cook/Chadron State College)

# Mari Should be Remembered and Cherished

On Saturday following the Mari Sandoz Heirtage Society Conference, a few carloads of hardy souls trekked to Mari's grave about 30 miles south of Gordon, Neb.

*"Mari Sandoz was buried, as she requested, on the family ranch in the Sandhills, the place she always considered home, no matter where she lived...Halfway up on a hill north of the ranch, her grave faces the southeast, overlooking the orchard, the hay meadows, the farm buildings, and the 'constantly changing tans and mauves of the strange rhythmical hills that crowd away into the hazy horizon.' There one can stop for a little while, admire the prairie flowers, the grasses, and the yuccas, and think of this friend, as the Indians paid respects to their buried chiefs long ago."*

Helen Winter Stauffer, Mari Sandoz, Story Catcher of the Plains

You want it to mean something. You want it all to mean something. I am here in the Sandhills at Mari Sandoz's gravesite. The wind is blowing. Yes, there is a little snow in the air, a chill at the fingertips."

I would speak of the immense silence, yet there is a steer nearby sounding a mewling sort of beller. There is the rustle of wind among the grasses and dry prairie plants. There is the schrrr-schrrr-schrrr of my own imagination. And there is the essential silence of the grave.

We are like the wind, here but for the moment, then we are gone. Like a rabbit taken by the hawk. Like the hawk taken by time. Like Old Jules, Mari's father, and the other homesteaders who settled these Sandhills - gone. So soon gone.

One must make his mark. One must claw his message onto the pages of history. This moment should not be forgotten. These people should not be forgotten. Mari should be remembered and cherished. This place, the smell of it, the wind in it, the sense of loss here. This should not be forgotten.

The poet's task is to sing lauds each morning, to sing praise again and again. To hold the small common things of life up for notice, to make them objects of astonishment, to cherish them and commit them to memory, and finally - yes - perhaps to say good-bye.

If I didn't have loss and longing, what would I have to write about? I don't know. I have driven down six miles of dirt track to sit here at Mari's grave and listen to the wind, and I ask myself: why do I do it? What is to be gained? What do I want to take?



*This sign marks the turn off from Highway 27 30 miles south of Gordon.*

There is nothing I need. Rather, I feel that this should not be lost, this local moment, the history of this place, our memory of the writer who recorded it, Mari Sandoz. I can only hope that someday some poet will sit at my grave site thanking me for recording my local moments, and that at some day beyond that another poet will sit at his grave site to honor him, and that this line will stretch forever, the line of us grateful for the poets of our local moments.

Wind claws the grey sky. The sun breaks through and then is gone. The least flutter of snow appears and disappears. The sound of the grasses and the immense silence. The emptiness and fullness of everything.

I sit here writing. Wind shakes the car. All I really want to say is: Thank you, Mari.

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*The Mari Sandoz Memorial Drive leads to Mari's grave and the remnants of the Sandoz orchards described in her books.*

# SUPPORT THE LEGACY OF MARI SANDOZ

*Your gift preserves Mari Sandoz's words, advances archival preservation,  
and supports the next generation of Great Plains writers.*

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The Story Catcher Circle level of gifts \$150 and above will receive a copy of Dr. Kimberli Lee's book, *"I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter": The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965*

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**Thank you for your support of the Mari Sandoz Society!**

## A GIFT TO THE FUTURE

A bequest to the Mari Sandoz Society endowment is a gift to preserve the history and legacy of Mari Sandoz and the High Plains. For wills, trusts and gifts, our legal name is Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. Our Federal Tax ID number is 36-3879773. Contact Lynn Roper, President Emeritus of the Society at [LRBARNEY@AOL.COM](mailto:LRBARNEY@AOL.COM) for further discussion.

The mission of the Mari Sandoz Society 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 vision of the Mari Sandoz Society will be to amplify the voices of the dispossessed and challenge the romanticized view of the West through education, publication, and outreach.

Our Guiding Principle...

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.



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