

Story^{the} Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Conference Speakers: Custer Still Fascinates

The 2016 Annual Sandoz Conference speakers continued the discussion started by Pilster lecturer Paul Hutton on Mari Sandoz understanding of and depictions of the Indian wars through her popular writings about General George Armstrong Custer and the notorious Battle of the Little Big Horn. "The Battle of the Little Bighorn" is one of Sandoz's most controversial books, according to University of Nebraska-Omaha instructor Kent Blansett. It was her final publication and the themes throughout the book were about more than just the Indian wars, but touched on a variety of human battles including Black Panthers, Brown Panthers, Red Power and the Vietnam War.

Blansett said the book highlights the author's public stance against America's involvement in the Vietnam War as well as her contributions to the interpretation and understanding of American Indian History. The work, he said, represents a beautiful tapestry of the life and times in which the book was being written. It is layered against the historic background of the biggest and most widely discussed of the Indian Wars, the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Blansett's wife and fellow UNO instructor Elaine Nelson, a Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board member, talked about Mari Sandoz battle with the manuscript and her personal battle with the cancer which ultimately claimed her life. Nelson said completing that book became one of the most arduous tasks of Sandoz's life as a writer. For years she recorded meticulous notes on Custer's infamous last stand from archives around the country, Nelson said, only to later discover that the collections were either "missing" or had been "transferred." She forged ahead despite the setbacks only to learn that she had cancer.

Still, the stiff resolve honed in years as the daughter of Old Jules and growing up in the hardscrabble Sandhills carried her through to completion. On-going revisions and battles with her publisher took its toll, but the spirit of Mari Sandoz prevailed. Nelson's own lengthy research started with a call to Mari's niece, Mary Ann Pipher Anderson in Colorado. She was 26 when she worked with Mari in 1965 while Mari was living in New York City – to be closer to her publishers. At first she told Nelson there wasn't much of anything to discuss, so Nelson e-mailed her a list of questions. The lengthy and detailed response to those questions led to more e-mail exchanges and Nelson's lengthy research. She said Anderson recalled being asked to help Mari keep an even keel amid the stacks of files and edited manuscript pages in her New York apartment.

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Fall Conference (continued)

Keep in mind that Mari wrote six books while in New York, Nelson said. Yet Anderson remembered finding a file labeled “Why I Hate New York.” Mari had a motto, GBQ, which meant Get Busy Quick. She would use an average 10 or more reams of paper per book, so Anderson had her work cut out for her.



Sandoz Board member Dan McGlynn of Omaha offered insights on Custer’s unheralded brother Tom based on his review of a book by Roy Bird, “The Better Brother.” Although Custer’s younger brother enjoyed some military success that his brother didn’t, he always lived in the shadow of his infamous brother, George. They were similar in many ways, McGlynn said, but oh so different. Their lives played out at a time when the American Indians of the Old West were in decline and the European settlers were flooding into the “New” West. Tom Custer was a double Medal of Honor winner, one of only 19 to be so honored in military history. He was to the Civil War what Sergeant Alvin York (who captured 132 German officers and a machine gun nest with only 7 other American officers) was to WWI and Audie Murphy (who received the Medal of Honor at age 19 for holding off an entire company of German soldiers for an hour then leading a counter attack to capture them) was to WWII, McGlynn said.



A panel discussion about “Teaching Custer” explained how Custer remains both a familiar name and a controversial figure 150 years after his death. He is celebrated as an Indian fighter, decried as an ineffective commander, and villainized as a part of the colonial occupation of Native American Lands. Panelists included: Drew Folk of Oklahoma State University; Matthew Rama, Lakota Language Initiative Director from Pine Ridge, SD; and Shannon Smith, Sandoz Heritage Society Board member and Director of the Wyoming Humanities Council. The moderator was Sandoz Board member Kinley Hadden who teaches at the Gordon-Rushville Public Schools. The group discussed the mythology, current attitudes and lasting impacts on Custer’s presence on the Great Plains and how educators approach that legacy. Smith said in her 7 years of teaching American history to Native Americans in South Dakota, she realized there were times when she got rid of the textbooks. The importance of history and its ever-changing nature is that “history isn’t just the first time and then

Photos Page 1: Kent Blansett (top photo) and Elaine Nelson (bottom photo)

Photos Above: Dan McGlynn (top photo) and the “Teaching Custer” panelists left to right Drew Folk, Shannon Smith and Matthew Rama.

it’s done.” Rama said it’s important to understand young Lakota people and how they see themselves. Too much of their perspective comes from white female teachers. Folk said teachers have an obligation to look through the myths and get to the truth. “Sandoz work is a very thorough criticism of Custer,” he said.

The closing conference discussion was a “Native Lens on the Battle of the Greasy Grass,” best subtitled as the Cheyenne whip Custer’s ass. Rylan Sprague, a Cheyenne River Sioux and employee of the National Forest Service in Spearfish, SD, discussed the battle with Sandoz Board member Holly Boomer from Colorado Northwestern Community College in Rangely, Colorado. They discussed the written and oral histories of the battle as well as perceptions about commemorating the site of the battle. Mari Sandoz made history more readable, Sprague said. “But for this battle, Custer might have just been a military officer,” he said. If anything, she pointed out the hardship of being a leader. He explained that the “greasy grass” name came from the Greasy Grass River which was known for its very slick gumbo soil.

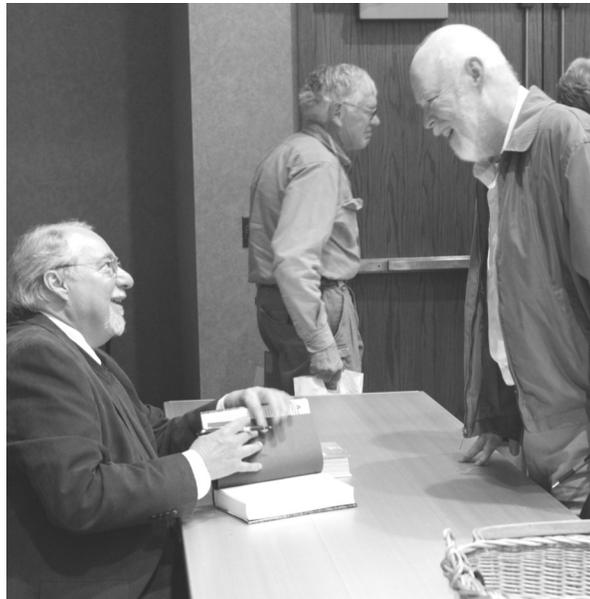
The 2017 Pilster Lecture and Conference “Nebraska 150 and the Future” will be held September 28-29 at Chadron State College. This year’s conference sponsors included: Humanities Nebraska and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment; Chadron State College; Mari Sandoz Heritage Society; Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center and the Dawes County Travel Board.

Speaker Lauds Sandoz As Historian

General George Armstrong Custer wrote his biography at 34. He was dead at 36. Such is the life of a western hero who was seen by some as a scoundrel, but others as a knight in shining armor. Paul Andrew Hutton of the University of New Mexico gave highlights of Custer's life and the Indian wars and the influence of Mari Sandoz during the annual Pilster Lecture at Chadron State College on October 13. The appearance was sponsored by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and supported by the Esther and Raleigh Pilster Endowment.

Hutton said that although best remembered as a literary giant, Mari Sandoz was also an influential historian who had a dramatic impact on America's view of Custer and the Indian Wars. With *Crazy Horse* in 1942, *Cheyenne Autumn* in 1953, *These Were the Sioux* in 1961, and finally with her last book *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* in 1966, she helped to redefine the place of Native Americans in American society. To say that Mari Sandoz was ahead of her times is, of course, a monumental understatement, Hutton told the audience at the Chadron State College Student Center. She anticipated, as well as encouraged, the sea change in the American view of Custer and the Indian Wars by decades.

By 1969, with the success of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins*, the entire nation had undergone a conversion experience to accept the Sandoz point of view. Hutton said that Custer has been written about in poems by Walt Whitman (*A Death Song for Custer*) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (*Revenge of Rain In The Face*). He assured the audience that it was a myth that *Rain In The Face* cut out Custer's heart. But such is the legacy of controversy. "Historic heroes often had bad press agents," Hutton said.



2016 Pilster Lecturer Paul Hutton signing his books for lecture attendees following his talk.

Custer's widow, Elizabeth, was 34 when her husband died. She called him a knight in shining armor and said he was never impetuous, just quick of mind. Hutton, who once played a bit part in a popular movie, said Hollywood has always been infatuated with Custer. And numerous actors have played the roles of Custer and Crazy Horse in movies that often varied from the historical perspectives in books.

In the 1940s, Hollywood swashbuckler Errol Flynn appeared in "They Died With Their Boots On." John Ford produced "Fort Apache" which was a Civil War interpretation of Custer. Such movies are "a mix of dust and myth and chaos," Hutton said. "History makes people feel pride for their country."

In the 50s came titles such as "Broken Arrow," and "Cochise" and "Sitting Bull." The 1955 movie, "Crazy Horse," featured Italian American actor Victor Mature as Crazy Horse. "They clearly cribbed Mari Sandoz book," Hutton said. "But the movie was so bad that she didn't sue because she didn't want to be associated with the movie."

(continued on page 5)

The StoryCatcher

The "StoryCatcher" is the title of a book by Mari Sandoz and it is the title of Helen Winter Stauffer's biography of Mari, *Mari Sandoz: The Story Catcher of the Plains*. The StoryCatcher is published four times a year by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, a 501©(3) non-profit organization. The vision of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is to perpetuate and foster an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz and to honor the land and the people about which she wrote; Native Americans, ranchers, farmers, and the people who settled the High Plains country. The Society hosts an annual conference, the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, and a writer's workshop. Additionally, the Society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska.

Address Changes

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Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at www.marisandoz.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.

Sandoz Family Reunion In Sand Hills Summer of 2017

Valentine resident and Sandoz family member Dave Sandoz has announced the international gathering of the Sandoz family will be held June 7 -13, 2017.

“We are bringing them to Old Jules Country,” Sandoz told members of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society in October. “This will bring in cousins from everywhere, in America and Europe,” he said. It’s a rigorous schedule, but Sandoz has reserved two motor coaches with room for 50 passengers each and equipped with toilets. He also has rooms reserved in Chadron and Valentine, Nebraska, and Rapid City, South Dakota, to accommodate the attendees.

Wednesday’s activities begin with a visit to historic Mount Rushmore, followed by lunch and a trip to Chadron for lodging and the first of several day’s activity in the area, Sandoz said. Thursday morning features a visit to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College. In the afternoon, busses will take the group to Fort Robinson for a visit, a buffalo dinner and a show at the Post Playhouse.

A tour of Old Jules Country in the Sheridan and Box Butte counties Sand Hills will highlight Friday June 9 as busses travel to Old Jules burial site at Alliance as well as several Sandoz ranches and the last ranch of the family, south of Gordon, where Mari Sandoz grave is located. That visit will be followed by a picnic at the nearby Pleasant Point Church hall before a return to Chadron.

The group will depart Chadron on Saturday for two days in Valentine highlighted by a stop at the Bowring Ranch State Historical Park to learn the history of cattle ranching in the Sand Hills. Lunch will be at a nearby sod house with country entertainment provided. After checking into hotels in Valentine, the group will travel to Dave and Kay Sandoz house for dinner in their garden.

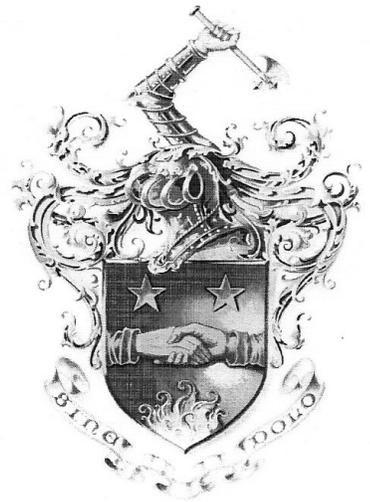
Sunday morning, June 11, features a worship service in the old Saint Charles Church in Rosebud, South Dakota. That will be followed by a visit to the Rosebud Sioux Reservation for a native meal and a children’s Pow Wow.

The group will travel back to Chadron after those events. Monday morning is free time for attendees to visit downtown Chadron which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the afternoon, the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society invites participants to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center for an Assembly of the Sandoz Fund which is dedicated attendees to members of the family.

An official group photo will be taken at the Center at 5 pm followed by cocktails. The Grand Farewell semi-formal dinner will follow at the Chadron State College Student Center Ballroom at 6:30 pm. Governor Pete Ricketts and his wife will greet the group and there will be musical entertainment.

Busses will transport visitors back to Rapid City for departing flights. Dave Sandoz says those wanting to participate in all or part of the events should contact him in

Valentine at (402) 376-3741 or d42sandoz@gmail.com



Sandoz Series
Volume No. 1
Women in the Writings of Mari Sandoz is now available!
Purchase your copy for \$10 at the Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center book shop or purchase online at www.marisandoz.org
A limited number of copies are available, so purchase yours before they are gone!

Mari Sandoz
HERITAGE SOCIETY

Pilster Lecture (continued)

On the topic of Hollywood pilfering the story, Hutton said Sandoz was “given no credit and no money.” Her letters to the Hollywood producers are a delight to read, he said. “Believe me, you didn’t want to get on her bad side. I’ve read the letters.” With the success of the movie “How the West Was One,” James Webb wanted to novelize it and call it “Cheyenne Autumn.” Sandoz, who wrote “Cheyenne Autumn,” sent Webb a letter that said – among other things – “your face must burn with shame.”

Hutton has published widely in both scholarly and popular magazines, and is a five-time winner of the Western Writers of America Spur Award and six-time winner of the Western Heritage Award from the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for his print and film writing.

He is also the editor of *Western Heritage* (2011), *Roundup* (2010), *Frontier and Region* (1997), *The Custer Reader* (1992), *Soldiers West* (1987), and the ten-volume *Eyewitness to the Civil War* series from Bantam Books (1991-1993). He has written several short films for state and national parks as well as a dozen television documentaries and has appeared in more than 300 television programs on major networks. In 2003 he was historical consultant for the Ron Howard film *The Missing*, and in 2010 he repeated that role in Jon Favreau’s *Cowboys and Aliens*, and again in 2016 on Gavin O’Connor’s *Jane Got a Gun*. As for his own acting career, “I had six lines in the movie ‘Naked Gun 33 1/3’,” he said. “I played the doctor in the last scene. If you watch the last 4 or 5 minutes of the film you can see me.”

The Pilster endowment started with the gift from the late Esther Pilster of ranchland in Dawes County in honor of her late husband Raleigh who grew up there with his parents John and Grace Pilster. Esther, a teacher and school administrator for 44 years, lived in Omaha. The mission of the lecture series is to bring speakers of national renown to the northwest Nebraska college campus for the benefit of the college and residents of the high plains of Western Nebraska.

2014 Conference Presentation To Be Featured in Great Plains Quarterly

"Contested Events and Conflicting Meanings: Mari Sandoz and the Sappa Creek Cheyenne Massacre of 1875," the paper presented by Dr. Kurt Kinbacher of Chadron State College is slated to appear in the Autumn 2016 issue of the *Great Plains Quarterly*. The *Great Plains Quarterly* is published by the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You can find out more about this publication and purchase copies of the journal on their website:

<http://www.unl.edu/plains/publications/GPQ/gpq.shtml>



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The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society welcomes contributions



to our newsletter. If you have a story idea or articles you would like to share, please contact our public relations coordinator J.L. Schmidt at jlschmidt67@gmail.com

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Photo by Bill Peters

In The Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award: Lloy Chamberlin

The recipient of the 2016 “In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award” is the Chamberlin family, originally of Gordon. The award was accepted at Friday’s luncheon by Sandoz Board member Christy Chamberlin of Box Elder, South Dakota, Christy’s sister Caroline Hobbs of Lincoln and her three sons Tim Hobbs of Lincoln, Jeremy Hobbs and Dan Hobbs of New York City.

Gordon businesswoman Loy Chamberlin was one of three women credited with planting the seeds for the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. Ranch woman Sybil Berndt, Mari’s sister Caroline Pifer and Chamberlin recognized the significance and historical value of Sandoz books.

Shortly after Mari’s death in 1966, Caroline Pifer organized the vast memorabilia, letters, certain papers and manuscripts, furniture, clothes and personal effects of Sandoz and created an unnamed highway museum south of Gordon, near the Sandoz gravesite. This early beginning offered an exciting glimpse of Mari’s “outpost among the Aborigines,” as she was fond of saying. After renegade bullets riddled the Highway Museum, the Chamberlin’s offered space in the second floor of their downtown Gordon furniture store for the collection. It had everything the ladies wanted. It was on a main street, uptown, accessible. They called it the Mari Sandoz Room and students and visitors soon came to view it.

About 5 years later, Chadron State College President Vance Nelson and college librarian Judy McDonald started a non-profit Mari Sandoz Heritage Society. The organization’s mission was, and still is, to perpetuate Mari Sandoz’ memory and to preserve and interpret the cultural, historical and scientific heritage of the High Plains and the Nebraska Sandhills. Society President Emeritus Ron Hull and President Lynn Roper presented the award to the Chamberlin family.



Lloy Chamberlin’s daughters and grandsons accepting the 2016 In the Spirit of Mari Sandoz Award

Sandoz Society Board Welcomes Two New Leaders

New Sandoz Board members Jillian Wenburg and Jamison Wyatt attended the Pilster Lecture and Sandoz Conference in Chadron in October.

Dr. Wenburg is a lecturer in the Writing Program at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. She was last year’s Sandoz Scholar and has published other works about Sandoz. She joined the college in 2011 and teaches composition and Honors courses. Her areas of specialty include writing, composition, rhetoric, twentieth century American literature, Western literature, and the history of the American west. She serves as a writing coach for the Teacher Education M.A. Program at Fort Lewis College and has served as mentor to many undergraduate students. Prior to joining the faculty at Fort Lewis College, Wenburg was a graduate teaching instructor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, an adjunct instructor at Central Community College in Kearney, Nebraska, and an adjunct at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. She also started and developed her own website and publication design firm. Wenburg presents frequently at conferences and has received numerous travel grants and awards to support her work. She is a member of several professional organizations, including the American Studies Association, Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, Modern Language Association, College English Association, American Historical Association, American Culture Association, and the Southwest/Texas Pop Culture Association. Among her works is “Constructing Women: Well-knit Bone and Nerve; Androgyny and Activism on the Great Plains,” presented last year at the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference in Chadron. “Stoking while Stalking: Sandoz Increases Awareness While ‘Stalking the Ghost of Crazy Horse,’” Pop Culture Association/American Culture Association Conference, Chicago, IL, 2014. “Barely Legal: Call Girls and Cattle Thieves – Nebraska Plains Law and Justice in Slogum House,” American Studies Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2012.

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New Board Members (continued)

Jamison Wyatt is a Legislative Aide and former Capitol Tour Guide in Lincoln who has also become acquainted with Mari Sandoz and her life in Lincoln. Walking past her bust in the Capitol on a daily basis, Wyatt said he was inspired to research and learn as much as possible about Sandoz. That led to him creating a Facebook page and conducting walking tours of



New Sandoz Society Board Members Jamison Wyatt of Lincoln and Jillian Wenburg of Durango, CO

some of the famous landmarks Sandoz would have seen daily. The Facebook page, “Stalking the Ghost of Mari Sandoz”, helps one understand importance of the Capitol in her life and it reinforces the importance of the building as a living part of Nebraskans’ lives, and our collective history. Information about Mari Sandoz in Lincoln and the architecture that shaped her life in Lincoln can be found on the Stalking the Ghost of Mari Sandoz Facebook page. While the tour and studying the history of Mari Sandoz is a hobby for Wyatt, his passion for the subject presents itself profoundly on the walking tours. Wyatt said his interest in Sandoz began in high school when he found a copy of “Old Jules” in his grandparents’ basement. “I read the book; I was enamored,” Wyatt said. “Later at the university, when I was a student there, I took a course under Dr. John Wunder (also a Sandoz Heritage Society Board member). It was a course which focused on Mari and the works of her literary contemporaries. So we got to read more Sandoz there in that class, so my fascination with Sandoz is intensified through academic study. And since then, I’ve kind of delved into personal research.” While walking from stop to stop, Wyatt sprinkles the tour with smaller bits of information about

Sandoz’s life. The tour winds its way past The Cornhusker Hotel, now a Marriott Hotel built on the site of the original Cornhusker where Sandoz spent much of her time, writing and relaxing in the air-conditioned rooms. The tour also passes the former site of the Boston House where Sandoz lived for much of her time in Lincoln. It ends at the west side of the Nebraska State Capitol, where Sandoz worked on the ninth floor while employed by the Nebraska State Historical Society. Wyatt, who lives in the same apartment building Sandoz did, said he follows her every day, walking the same streets and sidewalks she did. “She’s, in essence, become my personal hero, my personal religion, if you will,” Wyatt said. “I decided maybe other people want to know about her, and we kind of stalk her ghost and follow her shadow here in the city.”

(An article in the Daily Nebraskan newspaper contributed information to this story)

Nebraska 150 and the Future

The 2017 Sandoz Society annual conference celebrates Nebraska’s sesquicentennial. The 2017 Pilster lecturer is Walter Echo-Hawk (Pawnee) who will present “Nebraska before it was Nebraska” on Thursday, September 28 at 7:30 pm. Pawnees lived in the Loup and Platte River Valleys hundreds of years before Europeans arrived in North America, but they were removed from Nebraska in 1876. The Echo-Hawk family is distinguished for its contributions to Pawnee Nation and the State of Oklahoma. In that tradition, Walter Echo-Hawk is a noted attorney, author, and speaker with expertise in indigenous history, federal Indian law, and Native American cosmology. For more information about our lecturer, please see: <http://www.walterechohawk.com/>. Friday presentations begin with Twyla M. Hansen, the Nebraska State Poet, who will be reading from her published works and from new compositions in honor of Nebraska’s 150th

statehood anniversary. You can read more about Hansen through Humanities Nebraska at <http://humanitiesnebraska.org/twyla-m-hansen/>. She will be followed by Steven Rolfsmeier and Robert Roy Foresman. Rolfsmeier is the director of the Herbarium at Chadron State College. He will regale the audience with his knowledge of “Plants of Nebraska.” Foresman is this year’s Sandoz Research Award recipient, and he will present “Mother’s Joy: Early 20th Century Technological Innovations on the Great Plains.” Afternoon sessions will be dedicated to time capsule events. Shortly before her death in 1966, Mari Sandoz made some astounding predictions of what life would be like in 2017. After celebrating the truths and errors of these prognostications, a panel of dignitaries will be encapsulating their own projections about the future for Nebraska at its bicentennial.

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