

The Raleigh and Esther Pilster Endowment

In 2006, the late Esther Pilster gave a gift of ranchland in northwest Nebraska near Whitney in Dawes County, to the Mari Sandoz Society. The gift helped establish an endowment as a tribute to her late husband Raleigh, who grew up on the ranch, and to his parents John and Grace Pilster. As a beloved teacher and school administrator for 44 years, Esther served 29 years as principal at Boyd Elementary School in Omaha. Esther wanted her gift to honor the courage and tenacity shown by Raleigh's parents and others who lived on the Great Plains. The Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series and other educational programs of the Society are funded by the endowment.

Mari Sandoz Society

From *Old Jules*, the stark 1935 biography of her father, to *The Battle of The Little Bighorn*, Mari Sandoz wrote more than 20 books. With keen attention to detail, compelling topics, and blunt, accurate, compassionate descriptions, Sandoz created vivid stories of the last days of the American frontier. She was an internationally-known chronicler of the West and one of Nebraska's most important writers. 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. 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. The Mari Sandoz Society is a 501c3 organization. To support the Society with your membership or financial gift, please visit our website www.marisandozsociety.org. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



P.O. Box 6808 | Lincoln, NE 68506
www.marisandozsociety.org



Scan the QR code to learn how you can support the Society!

Mari Sandoz Society

Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series

"To Preserve Unimpaired:
The Evolving Nature of the
National Park Service"

Featuring

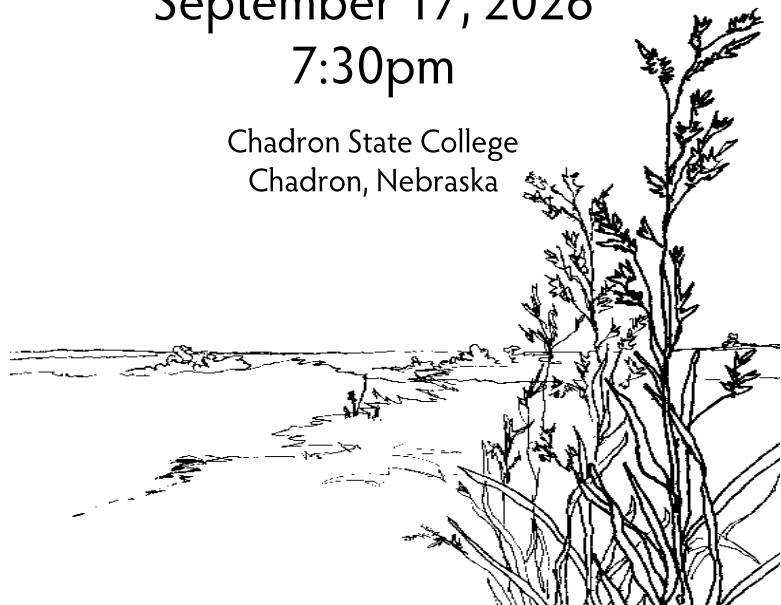
Dr. Peter Kopp

Associate Professor of History and Co-Director of the
Public History and Museum Studies Program at the
University of Colorado Denver

September 17, 2026

7:30pm

Chadron State College
Chadron, Nebraska



Program

Welcome

Dr. Jodi Kupper, Chadron State College President

Mari Sandoz Society Remarks

Shannon Smith, President & Interim Executive Director

Introduction of 2025 Pilster Lecturer

Dr. Sam Herley, Chadron State College

"To Preserve Unimpaired: The Evolving Nature of the National Park Service"

Dr. Peter Kopp, 2026 Pilster Lecturer

Q&A with lecturer followed by a book signing



About The Lecture

This presentation takes its cue from the 1916 mandate that created the National Park Service: to preserve resources "unimpaired" while also making them available for public use. It argues that this dual charge has produced a lasting tension at the center of the agency's work. Beyond the NPS's well-known parks, the talk examines how infrastructure, historic preservation, and interpretation shape what visitors see and how they understand nature and the American past. From roads and visitor centers to cultural resource management, the NPS has actively constructed landscapes and histories in both the "crown jewels" of the system and unexpected places.

More than a century after its founding, the National Park Service remains central to American public life. In a deeply divided political moment, the agency manages a shared civic institution where millions encounter the nation's natural and cultural landscapes. Yet the meanings attached to nature and history have never remained fixed. As the NPS has evolved, so too has the meaning of "unimpaired."

Dr. Peter Kopp

Dr. Kopp is a public historian of the North American West with specialties in the history of agriculture and the environment. He is the author of *Hoptopia: A World of Agriculture and Beer in Oregon's Willamette Valley* and the forthcoming *Chile Pepper King: Fabián García and the Botanical Transformation of the Borderlands*. His work explores the intersections of landscapes, agriculture, tourism, and public memory in the American West. His book, *Hoptopia: A World of Agriculture and Beer in Oregon's Willamette Valley* (University of California Press, 2016) won the American Historical Association's Pacific Coast Branch Book Award for first time authors (2017).

Dr. Kopp has also written articles and developed public history projects on tourism and the National Park Service, the built environment of the Southwest borderlands, and the "green" activism of the Grateful Dead. Kopp earned his Ph.D. from the University of Nevada in 2012 and served as the Director of Public History at New Mexico State University from 2012-2019.