

The Story Catcher

Newsletter of the Mari Sandoz Society

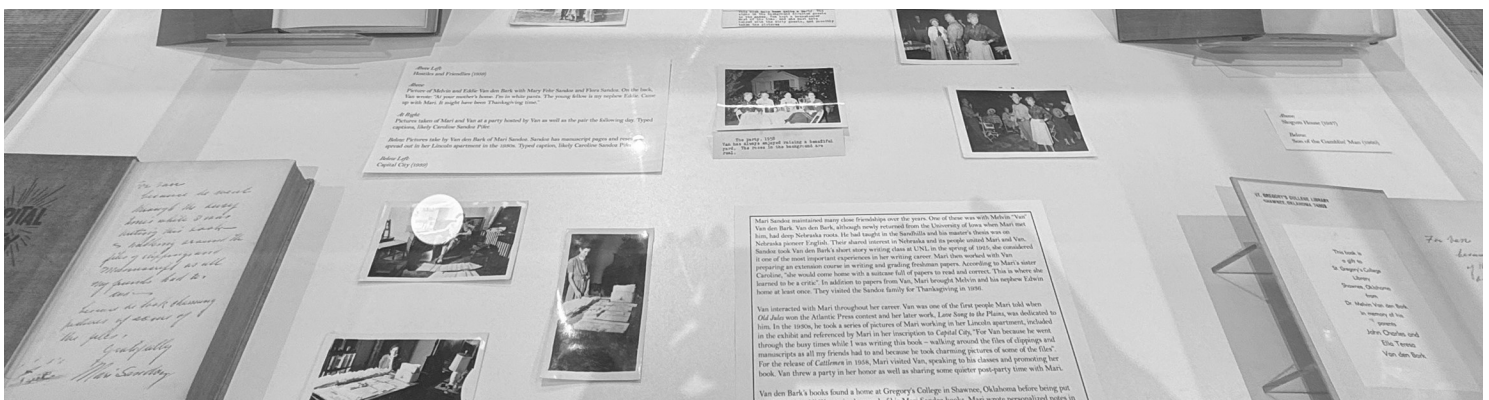


A New Chapter: The Society Partners with the University of Nebraska at Kearney

The University of Nebraska at Kearney is taking on a central role in a statewide effort to preserve and expand access to the legacy of one of Nebraska's most celebrated writers. Through a new partnership with the Mari Sandoz Society, significant portions of the organization's archival collection have been transferred from Chadron State College to UNK's Calvin T. Ryan Library, where they will be preserved, studied and made accessible to students, scholars and the public. The partnership is part of a broader multi-institutional initiative led by the Mari Sandoz Society to strengthen research, scholarship and public engagement surrounding the influential Nebraska author and historian. In addition to UNK, the Society is collaborating with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on digitization efforts and Western Colorado University on creative writing programming inspired by Sandoz's work. "We're not moving a collection; we're building a future," said Shannon Smith, president of the Mari Sandoz Society. "With UNK serving as a central hub for research, scholarship and public access, this partnership creates new opportunities to connect people with Mari Sandoz's life and work while strengthening collaborations across Nebraska and beyond."

The collection now housed at UNK includes correspondence, manuscripts, research materials, personal artifacts and portions of Sandoz's personal library, positioning the university as an important destination for research connected to Nebraska history, Great Plains culture and American Western studies. At the same time, the partnership builds on the Mari Sandoz Society's longstanding relationship with Chadron State College, where many materials will remain at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center to support exhibitions, teaching and public engagement in western Nebraska, including the annual Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series. The center will now emphasize Sandoz's work with Native American tribes. "This expansion of our partnership with UNK complements, rather than replaces, our longstanding relationship with Chadron State College," Smith said. "We are actively working with Chadron State leadership to define a renewed long-term vision for the center that aligns with the college's future direction and ensures it remains an important cultural asset for western Nebraska." As the society expands its reach through partnerships across multiple institutions,

(continued on page 2)



A selection of items from the Sandoz Society archives on display at the Calvin T. Ryan Library at the University of Nebraska-Kearney (Photo credit Peg Gilbert)

A New Chapter continued...

UNK is helping lead the next chapter by serving as a central hub for archival stewardship, research opportunities and broader public access to Sandoz's work. "This partnership will provide hands-on learning experiences for students interested in historical research, archival work and public scholarship while helping foster a new generation of writers, historians and readers interested in the American West," said Nathan Tye, associate professor of Nebraska and American West history at UNK.

The expanded partnership builds on a relationship that has connected UNK and the Mari Sandoz Society for decades. Longtime Kearney State College and UNK English professor Helen Winter Stauffer, widely recognized as Sandoz's biographer and one of her strongest advocates, played a key role in that history, while UNK faculty and alumni have supported the society's mission through research, scholarship and service on its board over the years. That foundation helped pave the way for what both organizations see as the next phase of their partnership. In addition to housing the archival collections, UNK plans to host future conferences and scholarly gatherings that build upon the society's existing programming. "The Mari Sandoz Society has always viewed itself as a convener and collaborator, bringing together institutions across Nebraska in service to one of our state's most important literary voices," Smith said. "In this next chapter, UNK will help anchor a growing network of partnerships that expands opportunities for research, teaching, exhibitions and public engagement while strengthening Mari Sandoz's legacy."

For more information on the collection or to schedule a visit, contact UNK archivist Laurinda Weisse at weissell@unk.edu. Calvin T. Ryan Library is open 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

Excerpted from a story in UNK News by Tyler Ellyson, managing editor for Communications and Marketing at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK)

Upcoming Pilster Lecture to be Held in Chadron in September

Join us at Chadron State College September 17th at 7:30pm MT, for the 2026 Pilster Great Plains Lecture. Our lecturer is Dr. Peter Kopp, Associate Professor of History and Co-Director of the Public History and Museum Studies Program at the University of Colorado Denver. Kopp's lecture, **To Preserve Unimpaired: The Evolving Nature of the National Park Service**, 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 national 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." For those unable to make it to Chadron, the lecture will be recorded and it will be posted on our website and YouTube channel when it is available.

**PILSTER
GREAT
PLAINS
LECTURE**

**20
26**

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

Chadron State College Student Center Ballroom

September 17, 2026

7:30pm Mountain Time

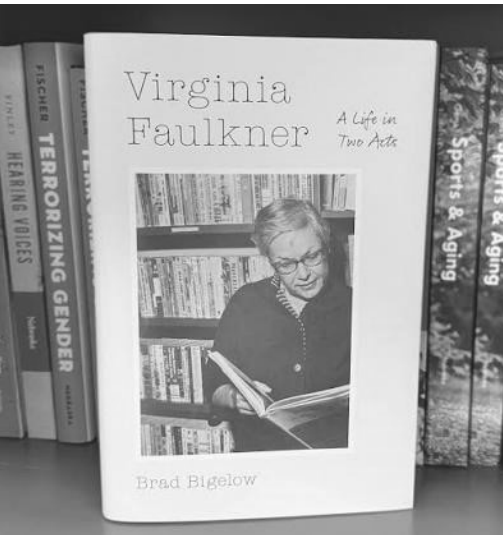


Dr. Peter Kopp
2026 Pilster Lecturer

Virginia Faulkner: A Life in Two Acts, by Brad Bigelow, Bison Books, January 2026

Review by Nathan Tye, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Mari Sandoz's confidence and stubbornness burned through many an editor, but she had champions: Lowery Wimberly, Benjamin Botkin, James Carr, and Virginia Faulkner. Faulkner, Sandoz's editor at the University of Nebraska Press, is the subject of Brad Bigelow's lively new biography, *Virginia Faulkner: A Life in Two Acts*. Drawing on public and private archives, Bigelow illuminates Faulkner's complex life and exacting pen. Born to a prominent Lincoln family, she was educated at home and abroad before working as a Washington political reporter and writer of comedic takes on high



society. Feted at parties on both coasts, she befriended film stars, and began a lifelong struggle with alcoholism. After forays into music, screenwriting, and failed relationships, she returned to Lincoln and joined the University of Nebraska Press.

There, Faulkner and her partner, UNL English professor Bernice Stote, documented and published Willa Cather's early writings and fostered generations of scholarship. Importantly, Faulkner also promoted Mari Sandoz, quickly discovering "that one of the state's most prolific authors was also one of its best" (149).

Faulkner edited Sandoz's 1959 collection *Hostiles and Friendlies* and they became

friends. Bigelow dedicates a chapter to their professional and personal relationship and threads Sandoz's presence through the remaining years of Faulkner's career. Very clearly, she was committed to her authors and their legacy. Faulkner released *Old Jules* as the first volume in the press's paperback imprint, Bison Books. Her last major editorial effort was Helen Winter Stauffer's foundational Sandoz biography. Thus, Faulkner brought Sandoz to new readers and shaped scholarly responses. As Bigelow surmised, "If the press was going to publish a biography of Mari Sandoz, it was going to be as close to perfect as she could make it" (245-246). Sandoz readers would certainly agree with this assessment.

Sandoz was a keen judge of character and integrity. Lesser friends and editors often withered and went their own way, but Faulkner remained a champion of Sandoz's work and legacy until the end. Bigelow's biography is a welcome and attentive study of a fascinating figure within Nebraska's literary history that Sandoz scholars and fans will enjoy.

This book can be purchased from the University of Nebraska Press
<https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/bison-books/9781496230621/virginia-faulkner/> or
by phone: 1-800-848-6224

Want to go paperless? Email 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 501(c)(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

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Contributions to the Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at
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.

Successful Story Catcher Festival Featured Aimee Nezhukumatathil

This year's Story Catcher Festival held at Western Colorado University in April, featured craft workshops, book excerpt and poetry readings, a pizza party, and even an outdoor working session to wrap up the busy week. Aimee Nezhukumatathil, the headlining author, is an award-winning American poet and essayist known for her nature writing and explorations of cultural identity. A professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Mississippi, she also serves as a firefly guide for Mississippi State Parks.

The Festival began with three craft workshops taught by Joe Wilkins, Claire Boyles, and Sean Prentiss. Attendees were encouraged to bring laptops and participate, often sharing their written work. Workshops included Layers of Landscape: Harnessing the Power of Place, What Hallmark Movies Can Teach Very Serious Literary Writers, and Time Perception in Creative Writing. The day wrapped with evening readings.

The second day of the festival featured WCU Sandoz Emerging Writer Scholarship Honorees Lizbeth Barcena and Claire Thompson. They were followed by Story Catcher Emerging Writers Brandi Blaisdell, Stephanie Johnson, and Laura Mahal. An Emerging Writers Luncheon included representatives from campus groups Amigos, Asian Pacific Islander Club, Black Student Alliance, Native American Student Council, and Queer Collective.

Nezhukumatathil taught her afternoon workshop "How to Fall Down Into the Grass: Writing from Astonishment," to an enthusiastic crowd. Her theme encouraged participants to use their sense of awe for inspiration. Using hybrid forms of non-fiction, they focused on finding a beginning and ending to projects that may have previously only set up roadblocks for the writer. The afternoon featured Jonathan Rovner, Story Catcher alum and former Western Colorado University writing instructor, who read selections from his upcoming book *All the Old Stories*. An "Evening with Aimee Nezhukumatathil" ended the day. The author read from her latest collection of poems assisted by Laura Pritchett in a moderated discussion, and held a book signing.

Day three of the festival offered sessions organized and led by Laura Pritchett. The first was "The Intersection of Journalism, Writing, and the Natural World." "Overview and Explorations into Environmental Writing Now" followed, and finally, "Writing for Planet Earth," where participants took their writing outside.

The 2027 Story Catcher Festival is already being planned for April 14 and 15 in Gunnison, Colorado. The featured author will be Stephen Graham Jones, the *New York Times*-bestselling author of nearly 30 novels and collections, including novellas and even comic books.



(top left) Opening Session in Rady Hall with Joe Wilkins (Photo credit Matt Everton); (top right) Aimee Nezhukumatathil delivered remarks to student groups and workshop participants at the Emerging Writers Luncheon. (Photo credit Olivia Reinhardt); (bottom left) Aimee Nezhukumatathil reads from her latest collection, *Night Owl* (Photo credit JB Alfaro); (bottom right) Laura Pritchett took workshop participants outside for a fitting conclusion to Story Catcher (Photo credit Brenda Lanpehar)

The Mari Sandoz Legacy Lives On:

Jamie Siebrase awarded scholarship; “Learning about Sandoz’s grit, tenacity, and commitment to her craft has been an unexpected wellspring of inspiration”

Longtime Denver journalist, trained naturalist, and environmental writer Jamie Siebrase has been awarded the 2026–2027 Mari Sandoz Nature Writing Scholarship to attend Western Colorado University’s Graduate Program in Creative Writing (GPCW) with a concentration in nature writing. Siebrase is the author of four FalconGuides guidebooks and a nature-based children’s book. She also writes for *The Denver Post* and other publications. “I can’t stop thinking about how excited I am to start the Nature Writing program this summer. For lack of a better simile, I’ve been feeling like a 6-year-old on Christmas Eve,” Siebrase said, joking that she “fully expects to be crafting more creative comparisons after completing Western Colorado’s MFA program.”

Scholarship funds are provided by the Mari Sandoz Society. To ensure the legacy of Mari Sandoz’s passion for writing and love of the landscapes and peoples of the West, WCU awards one scholarship in her name each academic year to support a student in WCU’s Graduate Program in Creative Writing with a concentration in nature writing.

“I’ve been writing for twenty years, but I’ve mainly thought of myself as a journalist, as opposed to an artist. But I think I have the talent and passion to explore the artistic side of writing—and I think art is more important now than ever before, as we experience a breakdown in civil discourse at the same moment generative AI has begun replacing human thought,” Siebrase noted. “I’m in my 40s, so sometimes I feel like I’m way too old to be getting a wild hair,” she said, adding that she then recalled a section from Laura Pritchett’s novel *Three Keys* about how “women in midlife (and beyond) still have so much to offer the world, and we can’t let the general public forget that we’re here.” Because they both began new chapters later in life, Siebrase sees parallels between her own journey and Mari Sandoz’s. “I’m currently doing a deep dive into Mari’s life and work, and I was thrilled to learn that things didn’t really start happening for her, career-wise, until she was my age,” Siebrase explained. “Learning about Sandoz’s grit, tenacity, and commitment to her craft has been an unexpected wellspring of inspiration, and I’m genuinely excited to read work from this amazing writer as I begin my journey into the next stage of life, whatever that might be.” And that stage might be harder to set if it weren’t for support from the Mari Sandoz Nature Writing Scholarship. “I can’t express how much this financial help means to students,” said Dr. Laura Pritchett, who directs WCU’s Nature Writing program. “The simple truth is that money is the number one reason talented applicants are not able to pursue an advanced degree. Let’s face it: Schooling is expensive, writing is often not lucrative, and money is a barrier. This scholarship not only supports significant writing about place and helps a student, but it also has the benefit of reminding contemporary writers of one of our great forebears. Sandoz’s name and spirit are kept alive. It’s a win-win.”



Scholarship winner Jamie Siebrase
(Photo credit Ben Siebrase)

Excerpted from an article by Seth Mensing, University Media and Communications Manager, Western Colorado University

The Mari Sandoz Legacy and Northern Cheyenne History

Guest article by Gerry Robinson, *Northern Cheyenne*, author of *The Cheyenne Story: An Interpretation of Courage*

In the 1940s, while researching her book *Cheyenne Autumn*, Mari Sandoz traveled south from Nebraska into Kansas and Oklahoma to retrace the route the Northern Cheyenne took in 1878 when they escaped from their assigned agency in what was then called Indian Territory. Their journey spanned nearly 1,100 miles back to their homeland in the northern plains. As a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and an author and researcher of our tribal history, I have come to appreciate the value

of Sandoz’s work and the support of the Mari Sandoz Society as I research my book series about my ancestors’ return home. In my own research, like Sandoz, I have traveled through the challenging country of the southern plains, searching the red hills, rugged draws, and parched prairie grasslands for those places where Northern Cheyenne valor, suffering, and persistence marked this historic trail.

(continued on page 6)

Sandoz Legacy and Northern Cheyenne History continued...

Several sites along the northern portion of the trail, such as Fort Robinson in Nebraska, Oberlin, KS, and Punished Woman's Fork, also in Kansas, have been recognized and commemorated. They welcome visitors and tell their stories. In contrast, many locations along the southern portion of the trail have nearly vanished from memory. Thanks in part to Sandoz's meticulous notes and maps, many of these forgotten places are now being rediscovered. One of her maps recently helped locate the site of the Wall Site Battle in southwest Kansas. Memories of the battle's location had faded so completely that the landowner knew only that it had happened "somewhere on the property." Using Sandoz's research, military accounts, and archaeological evidence, my colleagues and I have since identified the site, conducted a revealing archaeological survey, and will soon begin efforts to secure its designation as a National Historic Site by the National Park Service.



An unfired 45-70 shell unearthed on a ridge at the Wall Battlefield in Kansas (Photo credit Gerry Robinson)

Also, during my research, I identified the lost grave of Black Beaver, the first Northern Cheyenne to be killed during the homecoming journey. For 146 years, his burial site along Day Creek in Clark County remained a mystery. Through historical research, local folklore, and archaeological assistance, the gravesite location was confirmed in 2024. It was Sandoz's interviews with Northern Cheyenne survivors and descendants in the 1940s, especially with Clara Wolf Voice, Black Beaver's daughter, that provided key details about his family and lineage, reconnecting his story with living descendants. Mari's determination to tell the Northern Cheyenne story from the Cheyenne perspective preserved voices and histories that otherwise might have been lost.

The work of rediscovering and preserving these sites continues today with support from the Mari Sandoz Society. In addition to partnering with the Northern Cheyenne Journey Home Committee, in support of their project, the Northern Cheyenne Healing Trail at Fort Robinson, NE, the organization has also assisted recent efforts to correctly identify the location of the Turkey Springs Battlefield, the site of the first battle between the Northern Cheyenne and pursuing U.S. forces during their long trek home. After years of research and archaeological study, the Turkey Springs site was confirmed to be six miles from an earlier misplaced marker and was recently recognized by the National Park Service and designated a National Historic Site in 2025. All of these efforts demonstrate that, while Mari's research and writing have provided a deeper understanding of the moving story of the Northern Cheyenne, her legacy, through the work of the Mari Sandoz Society, continues to facilitate new discoveries and to preserve the history

of this historic and inspirational homecoming.



The South Fork Fire in June just outside of Fort Robinson State Park burned almost 40,000 acres near Crawford in NW Nebraska including the area around the Cheyenne Breakout Monument. The photo on the left shows the monument before the fire (Photo credit Heidi Beguin), and the photo on the right shows the monument surrounded by burned landscape and remaining smoke (Photo credit Justin Haag).

Sandoz Society's Screening at Kearney World Theatre a Success

By Sam Herley

About 100 people attended the World Theatre in Kearney, Nebraska on June 26 for a celebration of Mari Sandoz. Scholars, students, Sandoz buffs, Sandoz family members, and local residents who just thought it looked like a great learning experience flocked to the event, which featured a screening of the Nebraska Public Media documentary, "Mari Sandoz, the Story Teller's Mark." Following an introduction by Sandoz Society Board President Shannon Smith, the event featured presentations by Dr. Nathan Tye of the University of Nebraska at Kearney and Dr. Renée Laegreid of the University of Wyoming. Both Tye and Laegreid spoke of the unique status of Sandoz's works. Tye detailed Sandoz's relationship with Kearney, and Laegreid made connections to Sandoz and commemorations going on this summer regarding the Battle of Little Bighorn's 150th anniversary. "We really believe this is a renaissance of information about a unique individual," Shannon told the crowd at the classic theater, much of which has been restored to its 1930s state. Tye described Sandoz's output as one of the most "evocative, important collections of writings ever related to the American West." He went on to tell how Sandoz, during her own lifetime, came to Kearney to encourage young people especially to become readers and writers. "Mari was a force of nature but also an incredibly attentive teacher and historian," Tye said to the audience.

"I encourage you to learn about Mari Sandoz and come visit us at UNK." June 25th marked the official 150th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn (also known as the Battle of Greasy Grass to Lakota peoples and other Plains nations). Sandoz was one of the major twentieth-century writers to focus on Native American viewpoints of the battle, as well as other aspects of Indigenous history in the West. Laegreid thus emphasized the importance of the Society's mission to generate increased scholarly interest in Sandoz. "Her books (are) springboards to explore different topics in history," Laegreid said. Audience members new to Sandoz's writings found themselves eager to dive in after attending the event at the World Theatre. "I didn't realize how large her volume of material is," Kearney resident Angela Murrish said afterward. Fellow Kearney resident Dan Pokorney agreed. "I was surprised at how big of a name she is coming out of the Sandhills like that," he said. "I'm definitely glad I came to see this." Beth Ann Lee, the Mari Sandoz family executor, thanked the Society for putting on the event and expressed gratitude for all who attended. "The Society always gives me a little bit of my home. It's just priceless that they keep putting Aunt Mari's work in the spotlight," Lee said at the theater. "It's worth more to me than anything I could ever buy."



(Photos clockwise) Sandoz Society President, Shannon Smith, welcoming attendees; Sandoz Society Board Member Renée Laegreid talking about the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Sandoz Studies series; Sandoz Board Member Peg Gilbert with Mari (Photo credit Dale Gilbert); Attendees looking at the Society's display in the theatre lobby; Sandoz Board Member Nathan Tye talking about the new relationship and archives at UNK; attendees networking in the theatre lobby (Photo credits Elizabeth Chase).

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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 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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