

# *The Story Catcher*

*A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society*

## Mary Sandoz Lobbies Governor for Highway 27



Governor Robert L. "Roy" Cochran, Mary Fehrer Sandoz and Mari Sandoz appear in a publicity photo, while Mary was lobbying the governor for highway improvements.

*(This article appeared in the Sheridan County Journal in the section "75 years ago" - 1936. It was originally printed in the Rushville or Hay Springs, Neb. newspapers.)*

"Mrs. Jules Sandoz, operator of the famous Sandoz orchards southeast of Rushville and heroine of the even more famous biography of *Old Jules*, written by their daughter Mari, was in Lincoln Saturday. She made a brief call at the governor's mansion, she and Mrs. Cochran struck up such a friendship that Mrs. Sandoz returned to the mansion for lunch, Mari being among those present. A lively chat about farms

and ranches and fruit trees and flowers and pioneers ensued. The little lady went away with a photograph of Governor and Mrs. Cochran, inscribed by her hostess, a gardenia on her coat and plenty to tell the folks at home.

Scarcely had she returned to her daughter's home for a short rest (this tiny vivacious person never really rests, tho [*sic*] she says she is 69) when here came reporter and photographer from a neighboring city.

She met them with the gracious ease that characterizes this German-Swiss-American orchardist [*sic*] and gave

them an hour out of her short time here. Then she took a nap? She did not.

She hustled Mari out for a round of the stores, to pick up things hard to find in Ellsworth or Rushville or Alliance even if she could get to those towns easily, which she can't.

Those who meet her are always amazed at her vigor, her undiminished taste for life, and the quiet pervasive charm that permeates her presence. For more reasons than one she is indeed, as a fellow rancher dubbed her, the heroine of *Old Jules*." ❀

## 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(c)(3) nonprofit 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 a conference and presents the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series.

Additionally, the society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College.

Address changes should be mailed to 2301 NW 50th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524.

Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society, fill out and mail the form on the back of this newsletter. For more information, e-mail [marisandoz\\_society@windstream.net](mailto:marisandoz_society@windstream.net), or visit [www.marisandoz.com](http://www.marisandoz.com).

## 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*, she was a tireless researcher, a true storyteller and an 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.

## Mary Sandoz Lobbies Governor, II

(This article appeared in the *Sheridan County Journal* in the section "75 years ago" - 1936. It was originally printed in the *Gordon, Neb. Journal newspaper*.)

"Proving that *Old Jules* was a real character and that he spent his life doing the impossible by making the sand hill region in Sheridan county blossom with fruit and vegetation and trees, his widow, aged 69, appeared before Governor Cochran to plead for a passable highway to her home ranch. She was accompanied by her daughter, Mari Sandoz, who wrote the \$5,000 prize story of the life of *Old Jules*.

When called upon, Mrs. Sandoz told the governor, in a pleasant German-Swiss accent, that in 1929 she sold \$2,200 worth of fruit. "Last year I had just as much fruit but sold only \$400 worth," she said. "And I want the same highway facilities for other ranchmen that I ask for myself, for they deserve it."

Governor Cochran told the delegation he would do what he could to improve that part of highway No. 27, twelve miles south of Gordon to the Sandoz ranch, where it connects with a mail route. He said there is a demand for north and south roads in Cherry county as well as in Sheridan county, that the question of how to finance the proposed improvement would be for State Engineer Tilley to determine." ❀

## Governor/Mrs. Cochran were Advocates for Public Library

In a Nebraska Historical Society article, *Books for Nebraska: Roy & Aileen Cochran and the Nebraska Public Library Commission*, Mary Cochran Grimes states that "long before paid lobbyists for libraries, before regional libraries, before federal aid for libraries, and before bookmobiles, Democratic Governor Robert L. "Roy" Cochran and his wife, Aileen, set out to help improve the core of the state library system, the Nebraska Public Library Commission.

Charles W. Bryan had abolished the Nebraska Public Library Commission in 1933 and transferred its responsibilities to the University of Nebraska and the budget for library services statewide was commensurately cut almost in half, so the need for public library advocates was critical.

The Cochrans' accomplishments between 1935 and 1941 included: reestablishment of the Nebraska Library Commission and a tripling of its appropriations; new laws placing more attention on rural, western communities and regional libraries; and the establishment of bookmobiles to serve outlying areas."

The Cochran's daughter, Mary Cochran Grimes, also wrote the dual biography of Aileen and Roy Cochran, *Aileen and Roy: Up from the Sand Hill to the State House*.

Summary reprint: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1997-Books.pdf>. (Nebraska History 78 (1997): 102-109.) ❀



## Mike Smith Joins Sandoz Board

Michael Smith has joined the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society board. He is director/CEO of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), a position he has held since January of 2006.

Smith has enjoyed a long career in historical and museum administration, entering into the field after earning bachelor's and master's degrees in American history from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in the mid-1960s.

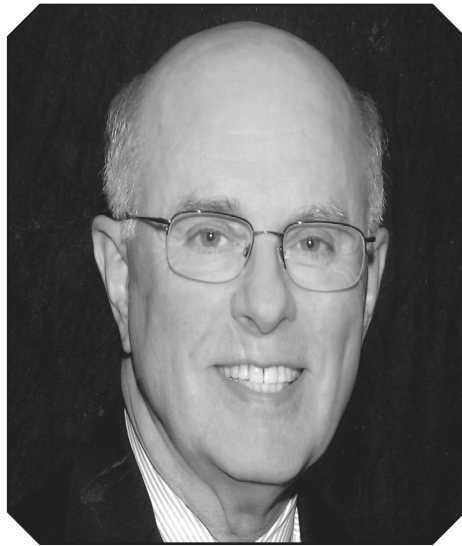
His career has included positions in Tennessee, Michigan, Iowa and New York. After six years as president/CEO of the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Mass., he came to Lincoln for the NSHS position.

Smith was drawn to the post with the NSHS by both a desire to return to the Midwest—he is a native of Freeport, Illinois and his daughter lives in Chicago—and by the NSHS's reputation for excellence.

"I find Nebraska's history to be a fascinating mix of the histories of the Native Americans, America's westward move and settlement, immigration, agriculture and the continuing story of a people's efforts to live in a challenging environment, he said. "I revel in the landscapes

of the Cornhusker State and the skies here are a never-ending source of wonder and pleasure."

Smith first became acquainted with Mari Sandoz through Old Jules, which he read forty years ago. He then gave a copy to his dairy farmer father and Old Jules became a favorite of the entire Smith family.



Mike Smith

"Other works of Sandoz were added to my reading list over the years and have contributed much to my learning about the Plains and the story of Nebraska,"

he said. "I am especially appreciative of her compilation of essays - Sandhills Sundays."

Smith was delighted to be asked to join the Sandoz Society Board.

"Nebraska has been blessed by a rich literary tradition and Mari Sandoz stands at the pinnacle of that tradition with Willa Cather and John G. Neihardt," he said. "Nebraskans are a strong people and their history and literature reflects that strength."

He believes that we must do all we can to share the work of our writers with our fellow

## The Idea is 40; Sandoz Center is almost Ten

October 1972 – The first formal proposal for the "Mari Sandoz Center for the Study of Man" was prepared by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Fund Committee at Chadron State College.

Plans for the center call for the facility to be divided into two main sections: a library with supportive primary research materials and a museum.

According to the proposal, the center will "contain a large open space for the purpose of handling large or small groups; a small lobby area; conference classrooms, storage, work rooms, a small auditorium and a photographic reproduction room.

September 9, 2002 – The Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center opens on the Campus of Chadron State College. In 2012, the center will turn 10.

For information on the upcoming birthday activities for the center, visit Facebook at "Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center" or at [www.csc.edu/sandoz](http://www.csc.edu/sandoz). ❀

citizens, our nation and the world at large. Like her author colleagues, Mari Sandoz has much to say and many of life's lessons to share, invaluable guides for living in this place. ❀

## When I Discovered Mari Sandoz...



Judy Smith (foreground) enjoys herself at her first Sandoz Conference in October.

### By Judy Smith

As an avid reader, I enjoyed stories about the west and read many books about horses, such as Zane Grey. Then I came upon and read Mari Sandoz's *Old Jules*.

This turned out to be serious reading. Not the undemanding novels I was accustomed to; this book took some thought.

Although I was a country girl, my life was completely different from that of Mari Sandoz who helped settle a new country. I always wanted a horse, but my life didn't depend on one. I dreamed of western prairies and glowing sunsets, but the prairies of my imagination didn't have Native Americans or outlaws.

My image of life on the prairie was far more pleasant than Mari's existence. I can't comprehend a life with rattlesnakes or white-out blizzards or a lack of food that Mari brought alive so vividly. My great grandparents settled in eastern Nebraska – but their neighbors weren't as far away as

those who lived in the Sandhills.

When Mari wrote about the prairie grasses, I likened the sounds of those grasses to our tame wheat fields.

Later, in Lincoln, Ron Hull led an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute class on Mari Sandoz. As many know, no one can do a better job of bringing Mari to life and helping people come to know Mari Sandoz than Ron. That class sent me back to read more of her books like *Crazy Horse*, *Slogum House* and *Capital City*.

Mari Sandoz's writing is not always easy to read, but if you want to feel the winds and heat of the prairie, hear the birds and cattle and learn about life on the Nebraska high plains in the 1800's through detail and vivid vocabulary, read her you must.

*Judy Smith is "retired," living in Lincoln. She volunteers at The Cat House and has a foster cat, Kiki; she tutors a Lincoln Literacy student and is a Master Gardener with the Lancaster County Extension Office. Judy loves to be able to visit her two granddaughters in Denver. ❀*

## Pilster Not Society's First Lecture

By Sarah Polak

Many people, me included, thought that the Pilster Lecture Series was the first lecture series sponsored by the Sandoz Society.

However, when going through the Judy McDonald Collection in the society's archives, we found a 1975 newspaper clipping titled "Noted Anthropologist To Speak."

It stated, "An internationally-known anthropologist and writer, Loren C. Eiseley, will appear in Scottsbluff in June for part of the Distinguished Persons Series sponsored by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society at Chadron State College.

Eiseley's appearance in Western Nebraska is part of the Sandoz Society's 'Voice of the Past, Visions of the Future' program which has been funded by a grant from the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the nation."

Later, we found that Eiseley was not the first speaker. Jim and Alice Wilson of Polk, Neb. lead the series. An article about the Wilsons reported, they have won widespread attention for their work with native grasses. Their illustrated lecture titled, "Grass, Man and Beast in the Land of the Wide Skies" was presented in Chadron in 1974.

The topics of interest to the Sandoz Society's lecture series thirty-seven years ago are the same today – place, nature and the high plains. ❀

# Quantic Great Plains Collection Given to Society

By Sarah Polak

Diane Quantic has been a member of the Sandoz Society and friend of the Sandoz Center since the 1980s when she taught at Chadron State College. Earlier this year, she donated her Great Plains research collection.

“The central focus (of the collection) is on nonfiction and fiction from the 19th century into the 21st about the Midwest and Great Plains, but it also includes volumes on Native Americans, Great Plains and western history, western fiction, ecology and women’s writings about the West—both literature and nonfiction,” Quantic said.

The works will expand the center’s holdings and will make its resources more current and complete by adding more modern works.

Quantic knew the collection would add significantly to the center’s focus on the Great Plains, and that most of it would remain “intact” as a research tool.

“As my research ranged across the Great Plains region, the collection kept expanding as I discovered connections, new authors and different boundaries” said Quantic. “For example, I realized

I had to consider Canadian writers in my Great Plains.

All Great Plains stories are impacted by the land—landscape, settlement, isolation, community, family, weather and the nature of the place. This research is evident, not only Quantic’s teaching, but also in books she has written such as *The Nature of Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* and *A Great Plains Reader* (written with P. Jane Hafen).

“Sandoz wrote honestly about the people, the place and the history she knew and she never wavered in her insistence that what she wrote was true,” Quantic said. “Even when she was writing fiction, she based her stories on the people and experiences from her own life and the lives of the colorful people of the Sandhills.”

Copies of Quantic’s books are available through the University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books or through the Sandoz Center.

She lives in Kansas with her husband, Bruce.

For more information about the materials donated by Quantic or access to resources at the Center, please contact the Center staff at 308-432-6401 or [spolak@csc.edu](mailto:spolak@csc.edu). ❀

## Donating Collections to the Sandoz Heritage Center

By Sarah Polak

If you are considering donating items to a museum, historic home or other organization, you should begin by researching the organization and learning the types of items they collect.

At the Sandoz Center, we are forced to turn away many donations that don’t fit our mission or collections.

Be prepared to answer questions and send photos because this is the best way to show your potential gift. The Center Committee makes the decisions regarding gifts for the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center and photos easily allow the committee to make those decisions.

Ask how your collection be used. Museums accept items for a number of reasons. Your items may be used in educational programs where they are

handled and studied by many people. In this case, they will not last as long as something accepted for a permanent collection.

It is best to find out early if the way an organization chooses to use your donation is not compatible with your wishes. So ask what their policy and procedures are.

If your donation is accepted and you are interested in a tax deduction, it is up to you to get an appraisal and decisions should be made in consultation with your tax professional.

For the policies of the Sandoz Center, contact center staff at 308-432-6401 or at [spolak@csc.edu](mailto:spolak@csc.edu). ❀



Sarah Polak,  
center director



# When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Ann Van Hoff

I have been impressed with the manner in which several writers for this newsletter have told how they first “Met Mari.” All seemed to have been impassioned by her books – especially *Old Jules*. This was not the case for me.

Having grown up in Knox County, specifically Verdigre, it is amazing to me that I didn’t read any of Mari’s works until I was an adult. My high school reading of Nebraska authors was confined to John G. Neihardt. I was, however, well aware of Jules Sandoz whose original cabin is located on private property just a short distance southeast of Verdigre.

Jules Ami Sandoz immigrated from the French-speaking Neuchatel area of Switzerland in about 1880. After working his way across the country, he arrived and settled in the area in Northeast Nebraska known as the “Bohemian Alps.”

Records at the Knox County Courthouse in Center, Neb. document a license to marry issued to Jules and an Adele Balmer from Switzerland in June of 1883. There is no marriage certificate; so, one assumes that the marriage didn’t occur.

Barely three months later, a license to marry and a certificate of marriage to a Stella Thompson of Wisconsin were issued. Mari’s story of her father says that he left the area in about 1884 when his young wife, Estelle (Stella) refused to build the morning fires and run to catch his team. Following that failed marriage Jules headed for Valentine where the land office offered free land west and south of town.

Jules, was one of those people who was either admired or disliked. Having spoken with several residents of the area, I suspect that the latter image was most common. People near Verdigre knew about him; however, it wasn’t until, I believe, 1992 that the town embraced his legacy as their heritage, too. At that time, Caroline Sandoz Piefer, the youngest child of Jules and his fourth wife Mary, came to Verdigre to plant a tree at the site of the cabin.

I hope the cabin will remain at this site; thus, maintaining the historical importance and integrity of the life of Jules in Nebraska.

So, my acquaintance with Mari’s writing began late when I read *Miss Morissa: Doctor of the Gold*

*Trail*. My interest peaked, no doubt, because I am a professional nurse. The *Miss Morissa* story impressed me with its meticulous and careful research. Sandoz’s writing carefully, and I might add, accurately described the use of what became known as a Thomas splint to secure a fractured leg and of the measurement of body temperature. Of course, I have since come to realize that all of her works were done with the same attention to detail and meticulous research.

We lived in Manhattan in the late 1950s and early 1960s and I am sad to say I wasn’t aware of Sandoz or that she lived so close in the West Village.

Mari Sandoz was and remains in my mind the pre-eminent writer of Nebraska history. I have been honored to have served on the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society board and to see the creation, building and continuous work of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center on the Chadron State College campus.

*Ann Van Hoff was a board member of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society in the late 1990s and maintains an active interest in the society. She lives in Omaha. ✨*

## Of Note . . .

The Nebraska Book Awards program, sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book, honors books that are written by Nebraska authors, published by Nebraska publishers, set in Nebraska or concerning Nebraska.

Dan O’Brien, who spoke with Michael Forsberg at the 2010 Pilster Lecture, received the 2011 award for fiction for *Stolen Horses* (Publisher: University of Nebraska Press).

Joe Starita, professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications, was honored by the National Education Association (NEA) in July.

Starita was acknowledged for his work toward the education and achievement of equal opportunity for American Indians. Noted were his books *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey* and *I Am a Man – Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice*, as well as his Native Daughters project to help his students examine the roles that Native American women have traditionally played in Indian history, culture, art, medicine and politics. ✨

# Sandoz From Switzerland Enjoys Nebraska

*Edited from article by Con Marshall*

Swiss citizen, Yvonne Sandoz, is not closely related to the members of the Sandoz family who live in Nebraska and South Dakota. She's from another branch of the far-flung family, but she has made two trips to Nebraska to meet people who know about Mari Sandoz.

"I've had a delightful time seeing distant family members and friends whom I met when I was here two years ago," Sandoz said. "Everyone here is so nice. This won't be my last trip to Nebraska. I'm sure I will be back."

In September, she spent three weeks in "the Land of Crazy Horse." She gave presentations to audiences in Alliance, Crawford, Chadron and Scottsbluff and spent a couple of days on a ranch on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

During her presentations, Sandoz discussed the Sandoz Family Society, which adopted its statutes in 1752 and continues to thrive. She was recently elected the family society's archivist. The society provides assistance to European family members who are having financial or health problems or need help continuing their education through a fund created by family members.

The society also works to collect and record genealogy for as many family members as possible. Additionally, the Swiss branch of the Sandoz family has a reunion every five years that draws people from several countries. All told, Sandoz said there are about 5,000 Sandozes in the world with two-thirds

of them living in Europe and the others in North and South America and Australia.

"The reunions help us keep our family bonds," she said. "I met several Nebraskans at the reunion in 2000 and that's another reason I have come here to visit twice now."



*Yvonne Sandoz speaks to members of the Pine Ridge Corral of Westerners International in Crawford in September.*

An archivist and librarian in Basel, Switzerland, Sandoz initially came to the United States when she developed an interest in author Mari Sandoz.

"After I saw pictures of Nebraska that were shown at a Sandoz Family reunion in Switzerland, I became interested in coming here," Sandoz said. "Then I started to read about Mari and her work. I have a German copy of her book, *Old Jules*."

I greatly admire what she did,

she said. She felt the need to be correct in what she wrote and did so much research.

Sandoz said numerous other members of the extended family also have gone into the arts and humanities.

"We don't seem to have a lot of doctors and lawyers, but we have many writers, actors, musicians and artists," she stated. "Mari couldn't help but become a writer, I believe."

Last year Jules R. Ostrander, a great-grandson of *Old Jules* Sandoz, visited her in Switzerland while he was serving in the military. Together they found the home where Old Jules was born in Ferin.

In the near future, she wants to find the birthplace of Mary Fehr, Old Jules' fourth wife and the mother of his children, in the village of Rudingen.

"We don't know much about her or what made her come to American to marry Old Jules," Yvonne noted. "That's something I want to learn more about."

At Old Jules' urging, four of his brothers, a sister and three uncles came to Nebraska late in the 19th century. But as early as 1774, other Sandoz members had settled in Oregon, Louisiana and Alabama, according to family records.

A primary goal after she returned to Switzerland, Yvonne said, would be to help make Mari's work more prominently known in that country. She said the author is not well-known there. ✨

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