



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Cather Family Letters

Full Citation: Paul D Riley, "Cather Family Letters," *Nebraska History* 54 (1973): 585 – 618.

URL of article: http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1973Cather_Letters.pdf

Date: 4/13/2011

Article Summary: This article presents letters of the Willa Cather family illustrating the role of extended family on the frontier. The Cather family was important in the history of Webster County beyond the fame of author Willa Cather. These letters had only come to light after the death of their owner, Retta (Ayre) Miner in 1951.

Cataloging Information:

Names: William Cather, Caroline Smith, George P Cather, Charles F Cather, Alverna Cather, Virginia Cather, Franc Smith, Jennie Boak, Webb Clutter, Francis E Payne, John G Ayre, Alfretta Ayre, Wilella Payne, Kyd Clutter, Jennie Boak, Franc Smith, Carrie Cather, Blanche Cather, G P Cather, Frank Cather, Oscar Edward Cather, Willa Cather, Roscoe Cather, Douglass Cather, Jessica Cather, James Cather, Elsie Cather, John Cather

Place Names: Frederick County, Virginia; Red Cloud, Nebraska; Webster County, Nebraska; Catherton Township, Nebraska; Little Blue River, Nebraska; Republican River, Nebraska; Bladen, Nebraska; Lincoln, Nebraska; Cooper County, Missouri; Britton, South Dakota; Torrington, Wyoming; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Billings, Montana;

Photographs / Images: William and Caroline Cather; Retta (Ayre) Miner and baby, 1897, the baby became owner of the Cather family letters; G P Cather, Blanche Cather, Carrie Cather, Wilella Payne, just after 1895; William Cather's Red Cloud home between 1884 and 1896; Kyd Clutter on horseback about 1895; George P Cather in 1921; Franc Cather around World War I; George P Cather home south of Bladen; Oscar and Frank Cather about 1895

CATHER FAMILY LETTERS

Edited by PAUL D. RILEY

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1895, Emily Ann Caroline Cather, at the age of 67, decided to make a visit to her old home in Frederick County, Virginia. Her husband, William Cather, had died in 1887, at the age of 64. Since his death, she and her three orphaned grandchildren had continued to live in the village of Red Cloud in the home her husband had purchased a few years before his death. As her granddaughter, Retta Ayre, was soon to be married to Hugh Miner, a young Red Cloud merchant, Mrs. Cather decided the girl should be taken back to Virginia to visit her relatives and childhood home.¹

William and Caroline (Smith) Cather had first visited Webster County, Nebraska, during the winter of 1874-1875. Their eldest son, George Perry Cather, and his bride, Franc Amanda Smith, had moved to northwestern Webster County in the autumn of 1873, being the first permanent settlers in Township 3 North, Range 12 West (present Catherton Township). The trip was probably taken for its therapeutic value, since that summer the Cathers had lost their third child in seven years. The Cather family was susceptible to tuberculosis, and it was for this reason the George Cathers had settled upon the north divide, that stretch of rolling prairie and plain between the Republican and Little Blue rivers.

In the autumn of 1877, Mr. and Mrs. Cather left Virginia permanently and settled in the same township as their son. Their daughter, Alverna, divorced from J.J. Webb Clutter, came with them, along with her 5-year-old son, Kyd; she later married Francis Edward Payne, an old neighbor from Virginia, and before her sudden death in 1883, they had a daughter, Wilella. They were also accompanied by their daughter, Ann Virginia,

known as Jennie, the recent widow of John G. Ayre and her 3-year-old daughter, Alfretta or Retta. Seriously ill with consumption, Jennie Ayre died shortly after their arrival in Nebraska. Of their children, only their son, Charles F. Cather, and his family remained in Virginia, and in 1883 he and his wife, Jennie Boak, and their four children (Willa being the eldest) also moved to Webster County. Since the death of their mothers, Mrs. Cather had raised her three grandchildren—Retta Ayre, Kyd Clutter, and Wilella Payne. When Mrs. Cather decided to make the trip to her old home in 1895, Kyd was grown and “working out” and Wilella, now 13, had returned to her father’s farm.

After she had become famous, Willa Cather once stated that for a writer the years between eight and fifteen were of greatest importance, for during those years the artist is unconsciously gathering his thematic material for later creative purposes. This is certainly true in her own case, as is easily evidenced upon reading her Nebraska novels and stories. Yet, surprisingly little is known of her own youth. Mildred R. Bennett, in her *World of Willa Cather*, is the only Cather scholar to have delved at all deeply into her childhood and family background. For further scholarship in this direction, there has seemed little chance for furthering Mrs. Bennett’s pioneer research. The friends of Willa Cather’s childhood are now dead, and the Red Cloud newspapers, as was to be expected, have not provided more than scattered clues into her childhood.²

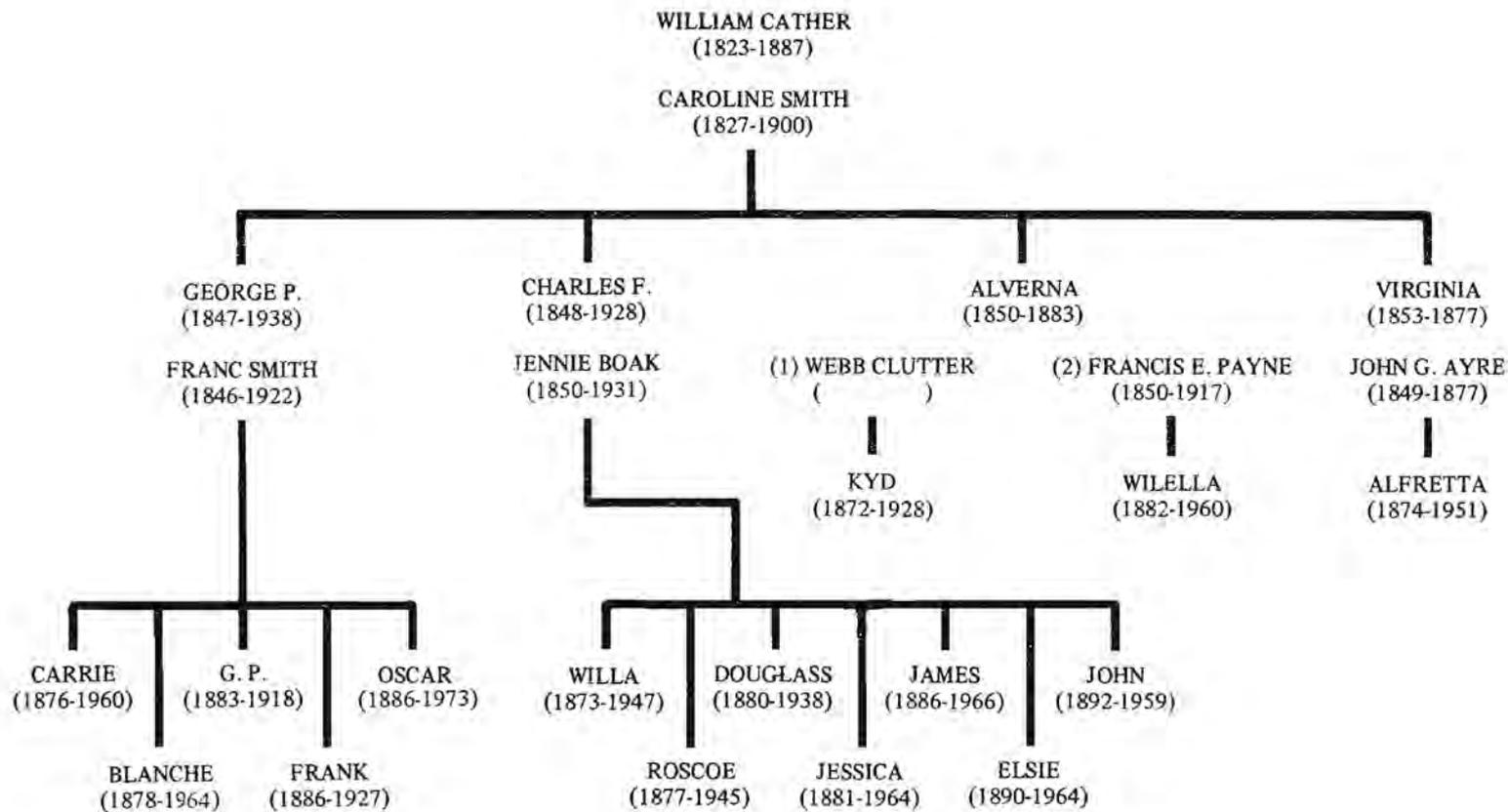
It now appears that the Virginia journey of Caroline Cather and Retta Ayre will prove important to those interested in the literary history of Willa Cather. Retta (Ayre) Miner saved few of her letters, but she did save a packet of twenty-three letters written to her and her grandmother by her aunts, uncles and cousins, all written to them while they were traveling in the East. Though the letters contain only passing mention of Willa Cather, who was just finishing her senior year at the University of Nebraska and then traveling between Lincoln and Red Cloud, the letters still have their importance. For the first time we can clearly see, as Mrs. Bennett so aptly described it, “the world of Willa Cather”—at least her family circle. Here we see the extended family, many of whom were later to appear (greatly distilled) in her fiction, as she must have seen them (or seen them in part) through her discerning eyes. It is unfortunate that no letters from Caroline Cather are available for this period, for Grandmother Cather was a true matriarch, and she undoubtedly had much to say in reply to her children and grandchildren. The

burdens of travel would not have greatly interfered with her serving as mentor to her family. This very religious and energetic woman did not take the responsibilities of motherhood lightly.

The letters themselves have only come to light recently. They were found in a trunk of Mrs. Miner's (after her death in the summer of 1951) by her daughter, Mrs. Jennie (Miner) Reiher of Red Cloud. It was not until recently, however, that Mrs. Reiher examined the letters closely, and after so doing she kindly loaned them to the Nebraska State Historical Society for copying and publication, and thus made them available to the widening circle of Cather reader and scholars. It is particularly fitting that they become available during the year of Willa Cather's centennial.

The letters have value beyond Cather scholarship; Even if Willa Cather had not become famous, the Cather family letters are of interest in themselves. The role of the extended family on the frontier has too often been underestimated by historians. When thinking of the pioneer, we often think of the lone frontiersman, his wife, and perhaps a child or two. And, it is true, this is the way the Cather family began in Nebraska—with George and Franc Cather. Yet, within ten years all surviving members of the William Cather family were living in Nebraska. They were joined by cousins and neighbors until one portion of Catherton Township became known as "New Virginia," an appellation still used. Many of these other families were interrelated or became so through marriage after their arrival in Nebraska. Through the Cather letters we see members of the extended family reporting to Grandmother Cather not only their own activities but also those of the other members of the family.

The Cather family was important in the history of Webster County. George P. Cather, in particular, was a prominent pioneer, not only in his own community (where he and his wife were leaders in the founding of schools and religious organizations) but also throughout the county. He served as a county supervisor for many years, and when Charles Cather lived in Red Cloud, both brothers were on occasion members of the board of supervisors. Thus, the Cather family letters have an importance for future Webster County historians, just as they will have for agricultural historians. Nebraska was just beginning to recover from the great drouth and depression of the early



—Adapted from Mildred R. Bennett, *The World of Willa Cather*.
 This chart of the William Cather family shows only those children who grew to
 adulthood and came to Nebraska.

1890's and the letters give excellent detailed accounts of the summer of 1895.

Original spellings and paragraphing have been retained. Words in brackets have been added for clarity. A family chart showing the relationships of the various Cather family members will hopefully clarify name confusion. A short biographical sketch appears before the first letter written by each individual.

THE CATHER LETTERS

[Frank William Cather (1886-1927) and his twin brother, Oscar Edward, were the youngest children of George P. Cather. He was educated at Grand Island College and the Boston Conservatory. After homesteading in McPherson County in 1907, he farmed there and in Webster County until becoming a dairy farmer near Kansas City. He and his wife had one daughter. Oscar Cather also homesteaded in McPherson County. A retired minister, he lived in California until his death in September 1973.]

Bladen Neb.

[Tuesday,] April 23 1895

Dear Grandma

I hope you are well. We had a nice rain Monday, and Blanch⁴ and G P⁵ got vera wet coming home from school.

Blanch is going to have an exhibitation and she is going to have colored lightes There was a man stayed here and fixed a top on our stove. I have got in all to gethered 29 eggs [I] mean turkey eggs. Papa traided your colt off and got a full Blooded Holstien cow for you, And she had nice horns on But Papa sawed them off and she dont look as pretty as she did when she had her hors on We have twin lams and Carrie has to little lambes that she feeds milk. Papa has 7 calves that he feeds We have 5 milk cows and one that he only milkes in the morning Willella [Payne] came here to day Carrie cut Oscar and my hair to day

Papa has put in 60 acres of oats. Blanch is going to have 9 tableaus and 7 diloges and all of her boys and girls are a going to have apiece. Carrie is going to have a piece to nex wensday The last day of Blanches School.

Frank W Cather

[Francis Amanda Smith (1846-1922) was born in Boston and was a graduate of Mount Holyoke Seminary. After graduation she taught music at the Winchester Institute, where Jennie Cather was a pupil. Through her, she met George P. Cather, whom she married June 26, 1873. After a long honeymoon they arrived in Webster County, where they took land. She played an important role in the development of her community, apparently adapting with ease to life on the frontier. The following letter was written on the back of the preceding letter.⁶]

Dear Mother

This is only one of a Series of letters. The Exhibition did very well. There was a big crowd and it was so hot I thought B[lanche]. would be sick; but she wasn't. She visited Miss Faquhais school yesterday. Wilella is here, and every body is well as far as I know. We have had only the one letter from you. G.P. is just starting for Bladen, and will probably get one today. Geo. is still putting in oats. Everything is looking fine and the trees are full of bloom. I never saw them so full. Peach trees and all. Geo. got a dozen more little apple trees this spring and has done quite a lot of grafting. He has grafted several trees from a pippin tree Giles Smith sent. It is the only one live. Love to Retta and all

Franc [Cather]

[Charles Fectique Cather (1848-1928) was the second child of William and Caroline Cather. After farming in Virginia, he came to Webster County with his family in 1883 to manage his father's farming operations. Two years later he moved to Red Cloud, where for a time he edited a newspaper, though mainly he worked for R. E. Moore's Security Investment Company of Lincoln, which specialized in farm mortgages. Charles was an appraiser so that much of his time was spent away from home. Young Mr. Templeton in Willa Cather's story, "Old Mrs. Harris," seems quite closely based on her father's personality. The following excerpt is from a business letter of Charles' to his father's sister, Mrs. Sidney S. Gore, of Frederick County, Virginia.⁷]

Security Investment Company⁸
Lincoln, Neb.,
[Saturday,] April 27 1895

My Dear Auntie

I have been with the Security Investment Company of Lincoln Neb. since the first of January. I am one of the men



William and Caroline Cather were no longer young in 1877 when they came as pioneers to Webster County, but they played important roles in the religious and social life of their community. (Photographs for this article loaned by their great-granddaughters, Mrs. Jennie (Miner) Reiher, Red Cloud, and Mrs. Charlotte (Lindgren) Shaw, Franklin.)

who examine . . . and report the value of the securities on which they loan money. They have been doing a very large business and I have been quite busy. . . .

I suppose you have seen Mother before this time. I hope her health will remain good, and she will have a pleasant visit. I am in the city to day and have spent most of the day with Willa. She went to Chicago this Winter and came home quite sick. Has not regained her usual strength yet, but is much better.

Jennie [his wife] was up here on a visit, with Willa & myself when Willa was sick which was fortunate, as she of course had good nursing. The only unpleasant feature of my present business is that I am away from home about all the time. Please excuse this short letter. I will try & write you soon again. My time is quite limited to day. With fondest regards

Your Nephew
Chas F. Cather

Catherton or Bladen
[Sunday,] May 5th 1895

Dear Mother

Your welcome letter was received last night. We were very glad to hear from you, and that you are having so good a time. I

judge you have not been over to Loudoun Co. as I have heard nothing of it.

Mrs. [Joseph (Sarah Ellen Boak)] Andrews [a sister of Mrs. Charles Cather] is here now and I let her have your letters to read.⁹ She came over last Tuesday. G. P. and Blanche went for her, and we shall send her home either this afternoon or tomorrow. Will [Andrews, her son] came up today. She was quite disappointed that he did not come up to the Literary on Friday night. He was down at the place at work, but hadn't his clothes and when the Ramey girls came they did not think to bring them.⁹ We had quite a nice time; but not as many here as usual. Abbie & Artie [Larrick] were up.¹⁰ The next meeting will be at their house. Albert [Marker?] came up by himself.¹¹

Mrs. A[ndrews]. went down to covenant meeting with us yesterday and we drove down to see Will in the field.

The girls and G. P. went to Bladen this morning. Mr. Buzzell was to preach at the Baptist Church, and they were to have memorial services. I am afraid it is going to rain and they will get their new dresses wet. Carrie made hers by the pattern Retta gave her and it looks very well indeed. Blanche is through her school and all. They have offered her the school for next year, and urged that she take it. They all seem pleased with her. She has not given an answer because she wants to go to school. I think myself she had better wait & go to school another year. They could not go down to the last [teachers'] examination but will go next time. Geo. has been in town twice since you went away. said there was a fence at your place so he could not get in, so he went down town and fed. G. P. took Mary down this week, and they went to the livery barn with the team. No one has seen any one about the place.

Wilella went with her father [Francis Edward Payne] last Sunday and I have not heard from her since.¹² She was [here] part of one week and went to Blanche's exhibition. Ed spoke about Bessie Ducker coming out and staying a week there. I told him perhaps Mrs. Ducker would rather have her where there was some one to look after her, and they had better come here; but I do not know what they will do. Perhaps I had better send an invitation to Mrs. Ducker directly.¹³

I hope you will be well, and that we shall soon see you back again. I want you to come and stay with us a good while after

you come back, before you get to housekeeping.

With love to yourself and Retta I am very gratefully

Your dau.
Franc S. Cather

[Kyd Clutter (1872-1928) was the son of J. J. Webb and Alverna Amanda (Cather) Clutter. He was born in Cooper County, Missouri, but as an infant his mother took him back to Frederick County, Virginia. They came to Nebraska in 1877, where, after his mother's death in 1883, he was raised by his grandparents. After his cowboy days he farmed in Webster County, where he was married to Mary Boudreau. It was said he was much like his uncle Charles F. Cather.¹⁴]

Otto, Neb.
[Friday,] May 10th 95

Dear Grandma:—

Your letter of April 30th at hand. Glad to hear of your safe arrival, and hope you are enjoying yourself. Things look rather gloomy here at present, it being rather dry. Most all the Winter Wheat froze out and the ground had to be planted to Oats or corn. We had a couple of pretty fair rains after you left, but night before last and last night there was a heavy frost that killed all the fruit and grass. There would have been lots of Plumbs and . . . other fruit had it not been for the frost. The grass on the prairie is all brown.

It looks very much like another failure and the farmers are very much discouraged. Mr.[Oscar E.] Ramey has turned Will Andrews off on account of the dry weather. I have been working for father [F.E. Payne] since you left but if it dont rain soon it will be to dry to plow. He has Will Andrews and I both plowing at present. He is trying to put out a big crop, but if it don't rain soon we will have to stop, but if it rains inside a week we may have a fair corn crop, but small grain can not amount to much anyway. Uncle George planted most of his wheat ground to oats and corn. Will Andrews and myself and perhaps Will Ducker will start for Wyoming in a couple of weeks, as the farmers here can't pay for work. Even Mr. Ramey couldnt pay Will A. I will write you when we start.

Willela [Payne] got her birthday presents all right she is staying at Georges.



George Cather's three eldest children (from left) G. P., Blanche, and Carrie, and their cousin, Wilella Payne, were photographed soon after 1895, when attending Grand Island Baptist College.

I havent been to R[ed]. C[loud]. since you left so I do not know how things are there. We are all well at present. As I do not think of any thing more to write I will close.

Your Grandson
Kyd

Bladen Nebraska
[Wednesday,] May 22d. 1895

Dear Mother and Retta

Your letters received to different members of the family. I felt sad to hear of Aunt Millicent's death.¹⁵ How fast the relatives seem to be going! We seem to be usually well here. Wilella is with us. Kyd was up last Sunday. He is working for Ed [Payne]. Will Andrews and he were together. Will is staying at Ed's. Mr. Ramey laid him off until it rained. It is getting very dry and it has been very cold. Oats and rye are suffering. Some pieces are too far gone for rain to help. One piece of Geo's is about dead. I hope it will rain soon. The frost did not kill all our fruit. There will be more apples and peaches than last year, but not quite as many plums and cherries. We are going to try and have a garden, for a wonder. G. P. fenced in a little piece by the windmill so we can run water on it. We all have a bed. Wilella and all. Have a good many things planted and Geo. has been running water on it for several days. Perhaps we may raise something. The children are all taking music lessons and all spell every day and Wilella writes a little on her history and studies

Arithmetic a little. As we get straightened out a little she will study more. She has been very much interested in the garden business and it has taken up some time.

The girls went down to Mr. Rameys last Thursday and staid all night. All went in to [teachers'] Ex[aminations]. last Friday. Our girls went to your house and staid all night. They took the team in by the hog-pen. Wilella told them how. They came home Sat. night. Said Carrie Lowter was real good to them. They had a jar of butter down, and they gave her two lbs. It was all she would take. I suppose they will go next month. They took feed along for their horses; but no hay. I suppose there was hay there. They did not go up to Charlies, but saw him on the street. Mr. Tyson was in town, and is to preach in Bladen tonight. The girls are going to Bladen in the morning. They may bring him back with them. He is trying to get us a supply for preaching on [*sic*, in] the field.

Blanche bought her a black silk that thin gloria silk. It was 75 and so wide that a dress comes very cheap. I don't know how durable it will be or how well it will look. Abbie [Larrick] had a nice black silk on last Sunday which her grandmother sent her from Va. It had sleeves and front of a kind of red changeable. She looked well in it. She was down to the Ex. both days and came up with the girls from town. We haven't been having much company Sundays, but last Sunday there were 35 with our own family here at one time.

We are hardly through ho[use] cleaning yet. Have only [to do] the parlor tho. I wanted it to rain first, but guess I cant wait. It has been quite cold. It nearly comes down to the freezing point every night. Nothing can grow; but perhaps as it is so dry it is better so. Geo. has planted 63 acres of corn and has 65 m[ore] about ready to plant.

He has 28 little pigs [and they] are doing so well. I am afraid there isn't going to be a corn crop.

Frank is learning to m[ilk]. Helps his father every nig[ht]. He wanted to sit up and write to Retta tonight; but was so tired I thought he had better write tomorrow.

Give our love to all, particularly Aunt Addie and family. Write as often as you can. With

much love to you both
Franc S. Cather

[Mary Virginia "Jennie" Boak (1850-1931) was the daughter of William Lee and Rachel Elizabeth (Seibert) Boak. Her youth was spent in Frederick County, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., where her father worked in the Department of the Interior. After his death the mother brought her children back to Virginia, where they were neighbors to William Cather. She married Charles F. Cather on December 5, 1872. Her mother came with the Cather family to Nebraska in 1883, where Mrs. Boak died ten years later. Mrs. Cather moved to California after her husband's death in 1928.¹⁶]

Red Cloud

[Wednesday.] May 22nd [1895]

Dear Grandma

We were very glad to get your letter. it came while Charlie was home for a short visit before going away. he expects to be gone on a long trip to Decota will go this week. he is well and looks splendid likes his work very much. Willa is not real well yet. The rest are all well. Roscoe is looking very thin and feeling quite tired out but it is just a few more days and then he will [be] through Pro[f.] Castor speaks very highly of him Douglas is doing very well attending to his papas affairs Jessie is studying hard for examination. Elsie and Jack are well and just as usual Bess [Seymour] and Marjorie [Anderson] just the same.¹⁷ Everyone inquires after you and Retta we miss you both very much I have not seen any of George's folks since you left I wish the girls would come and see us some times Annie Larrick has been here several times. I have very little news to tell except *dry, dust* and no rain. Every one is so low spirited it looks as if the good Lord has forgotten us entirely The poor country people do look so blue Indeed what will become of us all if it does not rain soon. Mrs Grice is always enquiring about you and Flave [Grice] after Rettie I have quite fallen in love with Flave he is so nice.¹⁸ Of course Hughie [Miner] knows more about you all than I do. Mollie Yertis is getting ready to go to see Anson Higby in Deadwood

I am very glad you and Rettie are having such a nice time Was sorry to hear of Aunt Milicants death I suppose Maggie will get the most of her property. I am glad that Dorthy and Giles [Smith] have not forgotten us and Laura and Perry [Gore] give them my best wishes and Aunt Addie and the children also.¹⁹

Yours with love
Jennie B Cather

R. E. Moore, President.
Security Investment Company
Lincoln, Neb., [Friday,] May 24 1895

Dear Mother

I received your letter of May 19th on my return from Red Cloud. I went down last Saturday and left on Monday. I had some work at Superior, and it made it very convenient to go home. I found them all well. Jennie got a letter from you while I was there saying Aunt Millicent was dead. We were very sorry to hear it.

My health keeps very good. I never felt better since I can remember. I leave here in a few days to attend to some business . . . for the Loan Company in North and South Dakota. I will go as far North as the Canadian line. Mr. Moore said I would be gone at least 3 months. It is a long trip, but as it is rather important business, and involves a large sum of money invested by the Company.

I feel somewhat complimented that the President of the Co. (R. E. Moore) selected me as the one to attend to it. I will write you on my trip. I hope you & Rettie are having a pleasant visit. It is very dry in Nebraska so far this year. Kindest regards to all friends & relatives in Va.

Affectionately your Son
 Chas F. Cather

Otto Neb.

[Friday,] June 7th 95

Dear Grandma:—

I received your letter last week, was glad to hear you were enjoying yourself. We have had plenty of rain since I last wrote you, and things look first rate here now, it look's as if corn would be a good crop, oats a fair crop and wheat about a half crop

We had several heavy rains in the last few days, all the draws are filled up, and the Republican is out of its banks, the dam at the mill is washed out, and [James] Miners farm is under water. So you see we have plenty of water at present and farmers are feeling good at present. There was a wreck on the road between here and McCook Sunday night and four men killed. it was

caused by a washout. The Commencement exercises came off at R. C. last Friday night. Mrs Ducker is going to Lincoln Thursday to see the commencement there.

[Robert] Bruce [Payne] came home last week and I had to give him my place.²⁰ Will Andrews and myself want to start for Wyo as soon as Will Ducker can get back from Lincoln which will be about the 15th of June. Mrs. Ducker seems to be very anxious to have Will go, so we will have to wait for him till the 15th. I suppose we could get work here since the rains, but wages are so much better out in Wyo. that I think it will pay for Andrews and myself to go, and Mrs. Ducker thinks it will be a good thing for Will after being confined at Lincoln so long.

If you happen to have 15 or 20 Dollars more than you know what to do with just send it to me and I think I can take care of it, and pay it back in a couple of months but if you can't spare it allright, do not stint yourself to do it, as I can go busted if needs bee. so if you can not . . . spare it do not worry as I will get along somehow.

Georges are all well. The lots Mr Martin is farming look very nice. I was at Red Cloud Saturday and stayed at Mr [Harry] Sowers, They are getting along nicely. I do not know any more news so I will close.

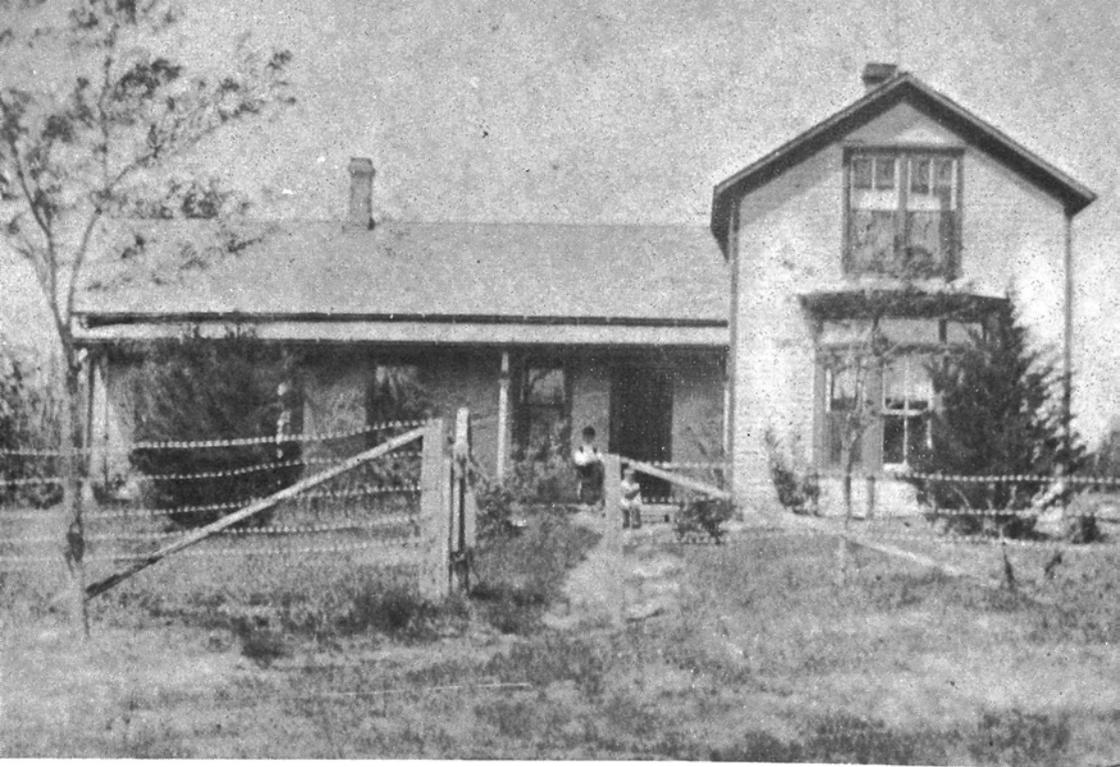
Hoping to hear from you soon I remain

Your Grandson
Kyd.

COMMERCIAL HOUSE
MRS. J.M. PARKER, PROP.
Britton, South Dakota,
[Monday,] June 10 1895

Dear Mother

I have been thinking every day for a week that I would write you but did not get at it till today. The last week has been very rainy and cole [sic] here. The wheat crop here is looking very fine. Is all spring wheat. I hear we have had good rains in Nebraska. I have been feeling well and enjoy my work here. About half the time I am at work in the County Offices (Treasure's & Register of Deeds) and half the the time driving over the country. So you see I have a change, which makes it



William Cather built this house in Red Cloud about 1884, when he, his wife, and three orphaned grandchildren moved to town from the farm. After his death Mrs. Cather lived here until 1896, when she made her home with her granddaughter, Retta Ayre, and her husband, Hugh Miner.

rather pleasant. I am working north. Am in the North part of South Dakota & will go into North Dakota in a few days. I am going out to the Sioux Indian Reservation tomorrow. (The Sisseton Agency.) I have no business with the Indians, but I want to see some white men who live along the border of the Reservation. The Indians have just been paid their annuity from the Government, and the town here has been full of them for the past few days. They make money fly while it lasts, and nothing is too extravagant for an Indian when he has money. I hope your health is good, and that you & Rettie are having a pleasant visit. I can not tell you where to write me, as I change places so often. So I will have to hear from you through Jennie. My kindest regards to all our relatives

Very truly Your Son
Chas. F. Cather

[Carrie Cather (1876-1960) was the eldest child of George and Franc Cather. After country schooling she attended Grand Island Baptist College and taught in Webster County for several years. On Christmas Day, 1900,

she married Oscar Laren Lindgren (1877-1960), a neighbor who had also attended the same college. They moved to Bladen in 1907, where Mr. Lindgren was in business. He served as postmaster from 1921 to 1935, and she served as his assistant. They had five children.²¹

Bladen Nebr
[Thursday,] June 13th 1895.

Dear Grandma:—

I rec'd a letter from Retta yesterday. Was glad to hear that you were both well and enjoying yourselves so much. I hope you won't like it so well that you will be sorry to come back here. This is quite a nice place since the rain. We had two very hard rains and several nice showers. We had the worst storm that I can remember, a week ago last Sunday. A great many buildings were blown down, near Blue Hill. Trees were torn up by the roots and windmills were blown to pieces. We had two cherry trees broken off, but nothing else was hurt. That day they say the road through Bladen was lined with teams as far as they could see, coming home from the baptizing at Silver Lake. I think there were over sixty baptised. Blanche and I had expected to go but were afraid of the rain. It came very near washing out a great many gardens. Our garden is below the windmill and washed some. Mr [John M.] Marker had to drain the water off their garden the next day. He says this is a funny country, first drain on and then off.²²

I guess Kyd has concluded not to go West. He is at Mr Ramey's now. Will Andrews is at Uncle Ed's. Mr Ramey turned him off before the rain, (without a cent), and he did not go back again. Papa's corn is all planted but some small pieces, and most of it is up. Most folks are looking for a good oat crop. Papa will have some rye too, but it was pretty spotted before the rain. We will have some late cherries, quite a lot of apples, and few peaches, if they dont all blow off. We made some jelly from the dropped apples. There will not be many plums or grapes in the country. We will have a few. Didn't have any gooseberries, and but very few early cherries.

Papa went to Red Cloud this morning and G P went along, and took his woolf scalps. I expect he will be so big that he can't see the rest of us when he comes back. Blanche is going down to take the [teachers'] examination tomorrow. She has

gone down now to see if Abbie [Larrick] would like to go with her. I have been down twice and have passed in every thing I have taken. I have Civil Government History to take yet. I don't want to have to take any thing over if I can help it, and I think I can. Blanche has the same school again this term. Uncle Ed [Payne] spoke to me about their school and I may take it if all are willing. Cousin Gayton [Lewis] is Director, but he hasn't said anything to me about it.²³ Bruce [Payne] is going to teach this year. We saw him at the Commencement Exercises. He said he was going down to this examination. I am not going till next month. I have twenty three turkeys that are growing nicely, forty seven chickens and thirty two ducks. I have three pet lambs this year. The boys herd the sheep about five hours every day. They take it turn about two at a time so that one rests every day. Mary and John are still with us and Ed Doyle, stepson of the postmaster at Bladen. Mamma went to Bladen yesterday and took Frank.

My music scholars have not been very regular this summer. I expect they will do better now that it has rained. The ponds are both full and the grass is growing nicely. There were several fish about eight inches long washed out of the large pond. Blanche has her dress made but has not worn it yet. She and I made it. We took supper at Uncle Charley's when we were in town last. That was the first time I had seen Jack since he was learning to walk. We stayed at Mr Ramey's that night. They have organized a Sunday School at their school house. Mrs Ramey is Supt, Will Crabill Assistant, and Lillian [Ramey] is Sec. and Treasurer. The next Literary will be at Albert [Rust?]'s the 28th of this month.²⁴ The Last Literary at Mr [David H.] Larricks was just at the time of the big rain. There were only thirteen there. Their folks and our folks. I think Wilella is getting along very well with her music. She and the boys have a spelling lesson almost every day. Last Sunday was Ernest Grubb's birthday.²⁵ They had a dinner and ice cream surprise on Saturday. Our boys were down. There were eleven boys there. They think they had a very nice time.

We are expecting a student from Grand Island [Baptist College] to preach for us this summer. I expect he will be here pretty soon and stay during vacation I think there is a student going to preach in Red Cloud this summer.

Mamma and Papa wish to be remembered to the folks back

there. Tell Retta I will write to her before very long. I will close now as I can't think of much else. With much love to you both, I am

Your Loving Granddaughter
Carrie Cather

Red Cloud Neb.
[Saturday,] June 22nd 95

Dear Grandma:—

I received your letter last Monday, and received the money all right and am much obliged for the same. Will Ducker and myself are getting the wagon ready to day and we expect to start by Monday or Tuesday of next week. Will Andrews has backed out, and there is a young . . . lawyer by the name of Johnson from Lincoln going along. Georges are all well so are Charleys folks. Crops are looking fairly well. And people in general are in good spirits. I will write you in a few days, and give you an address to write to. Hoping you are enjoying yourself I remain

Your Grandson
Kyd [Clutter]

[Wilella Payne (1882-1960) was the only child of Francis Edward and Alverna Amanda (Cather) Payne. After her mother's death in 1883, she and her half-brother, Kyd Clutter, were raised by their Grandmother Cather. About the time of these letters, she returned to her father's farm before going to Grand Island Baptist College. On March 15, 1910, she married Conley Martin Wilson (1872-1967), who had been brought to Webster County from Frederick County, Virginia, by his father, John C. Wilson, in April 1878. She was the mother of nine children.²⁶]

Bladen Nebr.
[Friday,] June 28, 1895.

Dear Grandma:—

It is raining to day. It rained some yesterday. One Sunday when Papa was up here Fido tore his pants just as he went to come in the door. Papa brought them up for Carrie to mend. Frank and I took them home.

Mr. Shattuck, the new preacher preached Sunday before last.



This is one of a series of photographs of Kyd Clutter posing romantically in his cowboy gear. It was taken during his 1895 trip to Wyoming and Montana or later in Webster County.

The literary is to night. It is at Mr. [John C.] Wilsons.²⁷

Carries Guese egg did not hatch. Four little chicken hatched to-day.

Aunt Frank and Blanche came home from Red Cloud yesterday. Willa [Cather] is going to come out here some thime this summer

Yesterday Carrie and I picked some cherries And I picked up some apples to make some pies. Some people say they never saw the corn grow so fast as it has in the last ten days.

I got my report cards. My daily grades are, Reading 92. Spelling 82. Arithmetic 100 Grammer 98 Geography 100 History 97. In examination, Reading 96 Spelling 66, Arithmetic 95 Grammer 92, Geography 100. History 94. Department 99.

Frank and Oscar are playing with my dolls. The gardens is growing nice. I will have to close now, for it is getting late. I hope you are well and having a nice time. Please write soon

Your Loving Granddaughter
Wilella Payne

Elm Creek, [Buffalo Co.,] Neb.
[Monday,] July 1st 95.

Dear Grandma:—

We have started for Wyo. Will Ducker George Johnson & myself. Have been on the road a couple of days. We are all well and are getting along nicely. Crops are looking fair through the country especially fall wheat and oats, and corn looks good. The weather is good for camping, and there is plenty of grass for the horses, so we are getting along nicely, so do not worry about me. but take a good long visit in Va. stay till fall by all means that is if you are not to home-sick. I will keep you posted as to where I am every few days. I expect to be at Torrington Wyo. by the 13th so if you write me there I think I shall get it. Hoping you are in good health and enjoying yourself, I will close. Love to Retta

Your Grandson
Kyd [Clutter]

Bladen Nebr.
[Sunday,] July 14, 1895

Dear Grandma:—

I thought I would write to you. Aunt Franc got Retta's letter yesterday. G. P. got Retta's and Frank got yours. I got Retta's letter a week ago.

We had a nice rain yesterday G. P. was at Bladen yesterday when it was raining. He went after Mr. Shattuck. They started home as soon as it stoped raining. When they got home it was almost dark.

[Uncle] Bruce [Payne] was at Bladen too. Bruce is going to teach the Bladen school.

Kyd, Will, and Mr. Johnson, a young man that goes to school at Lincoln started West a few weeks ago.

We went to Sunday School to day. Mr. Shattuck preached. They were talking about having a picnic.

The girls went up to Bladen last Sunday night to meeting. There is going to be a missionary lecture next Sunday night, at Bladen. Edd took Mr. Shattuck back a few minutes a go.

Carrie has 27 little turkeys, 37 little ducks, 13 big ducks, and 70 little chickens. Edd is bring your mule to ride.

Uncle George has a little mule not a week old. Uncle George gave each of the boys a pig. They pull weeds and feed them every day. Oscar has the smallest one, G. P.'s and Frank's are about the same size. Uncle George started to cut wheat last week.

Carrie Blanche, G. P. Frank Oscar and I have a newspaper We each write a story or two, and put in all news we know. Carrie writes the paper. The name of it is the Weekly Star. We made a croquet ground last week.

The garden is growing nice We had a mess of bean today G. P. and Aunt Franc went to Campbell last week. Aunt got some potatoes from Aunt Mary [(Payne) Cooper] last week.²⁸ G. P. fell off something, and hurt his toe so that Carrie had to cut off the nail.

To-day is the Boys [ninth] birthday. They got a pair of suspenders The boys and I have a spelling lesson every day. Aunt Franc most always hear it, but Blanche does sometime. Blanche made her three new dresses this week.

They are going to have a good many apples and some peaches. Mr. [Nathan W.] Snee was over here last week.²⁹

Papa took the girls and I down to North Star [School], to hear a lady preach. But she did not preach she read a serman.

*Retta (Ayre) Miner and baby,
1897. The baby is now Mrs.
Jennie Reiher, Red Cloud,
owner of the Cather
family letters.*



Blanche saw seven of the boys that went to school to her last year and one girl. We got back a little after twelve o'clock.

They are washing to day. I think that I will go down to Papa this week.

Mrs. [Edward M. F.] Grubb was up here yesterday.³⁰ Mrs. [George J.] Baker and Mrs. Kelso are here. The boys went swimming today The corn is growing nice.

I must close now because Aunt Franc want me to pick some beans for Mrs Baker Please write soon.

Your loving granddaughter
Wilella Payne

Bladen Neb
[Sunday,] July 14, 1895

Dear Grandma

I hope you are well. I got your handsome letter yesterday and felt very proud of it We are having preaching every two weeks and the house is so crouded that we have to bring in spring seats for the little girls. Gip had a little mule colt last Thursday night. It rained yesterday and washed the garden considerably

It is our birth day and mama give me a pair of suspenders

We are milking six cows now G P milks two and Oscar one and Papa one and me two. We get a bout a bucket full and a half now the cows dont give much now. Blanche is going to teach over there a gain and Bruce is going to teach at Bladen. We have 64 sheep now counting the lambs to. We have had two messes of beans and a mess of beets and turnips. We have had a good many messes of lettuce and radishes mama and G P went to the mill last Thursday and traded some wheat for flour. Papa began to cut wheat last thursday and he says some of it is thick. I can not think of any thing more

your loving grand son
Frank W Cather



The distinguished looking gentleman is George P. Cather, 74, as he looked in 1921 when visiting his old neighbor, George J. Baker (see Note 30). The photo of his wife, Franc Cather, was taken about the time of World War I. This handsome woman was an outstanding community leader.

Torrington Wyo
[Wednesday,] July 17th 95

Dear Grandma & Retta:—

I received your letter today, and was very glad to hear from you, as I did not expect to hear from you here. We just arrived here. We are getting along nicely.

Will [Ducker] seems to enjoy himself very much and is feeling much better than usual. Times do not seem to be as good here as they were when I was here before, wages have decreased some and work is scarser, but still times are better here than in Neb. and I do not think I will have any trouble getting work at good wages. I am glad to hear you and Retta are enjoying yourselves, and I hope you will continue to do so, and not worry about the rest of us.

We expect to go up the Platt river a little farther till we strike work. Prospects for crops along the road look very favorable and if they turn out as well as expected times will be better every where. Range cattle are looking fine, and the cowboys are getting from \$30 to \$40 a month. I thing *[sic]* I shall soon get a job. We havent had and *[sic]* trouble or accidents yet any more

than to break the double-tree of our wagon, and we got that fixed without much trouble I am well and hope this may find you the same. With love to both of you I will close

Your Grandson & cousin
Kyd

you can address me at Buffalo Wyo. with return to you in 10 days

Bladen Nebr.
[Friday,] July 19 '95

Dear Grandma:—

We have had several more nice rains, and have a good prospect for corn. Of course there are some fields of small grain that were hurt before the rains commenced. Papa has considerable wheat cut now, but they broke the binder yesterday, and will have to wait for repairs. Papa says that in some of the places where he put in oats, thinking the wheat was all dead, there is more wheat than oats now. Mr Rinkle was here the first of the week to see about getting papa's threshing to do. The rye looks pretty well but is not very tall. We didn't put up any cherries. Had quite a number of pies and [*sic*] to eat, but not enough to pay to can. We have had such queer weather this summer. There were several very cold days this month. I believe Foster predicts frost every month. Our garden is getting along nicely. Have more beans than we can use and will have tomatoes soon.

Papa has quite a number of cattle and some horses in the pasture besides his own, and one could cut better hay there now than could be found almost any where last year. Bob McCallum has been away and had a cancer cut out.³¹ It was on his face. It was pretty bad, but there were several others there that were worse. They were expecting him home the last of this week. We have two old geese and seven young ones. Gave Mrs Kelso a dollar and some meat for them. I suppose you heard of Kelso's before. They live on the old Bray place now. There will be at least two of them that will go to school to Blanche this year. Mr Grubb has just gone. Miss Arnold teaches our school this winter. She is the one Blanche and I went to school to two years ago. I

think I shall go to school this winter. I had decided not to teach before the teacher was hired. The boys are so pleased that they can't say quite enough for her and gainst Lizzie. Frank says "Carrie you have to go". I asked why. "Because Jessie Arnold teaches," he said. So you can see how we feel about it. We have a nice Sunday School now. I think I shall divide my class and keep the little ones that can't read and let Blanche have the others. I have too many. They divided the Bible Class last Sunday. I think Papa's corn is very good though most of the corn around here is larger. Albert [Rust?] was up the first of the week. Wasn't feeling very well and came after some medicine. Said Maudie was not very well. Mary's sister Lizzie is working there now. Mr Grubb said Mr McCallum was getting along very well. Said the cancer was burned out. When do you expect to come home? You have been gone almost four months now that seems a long time. You wouldn't think this was the same country if you could see it today. Every thing is green and growing.

Write as often as you can, and tell Retta I am waiting patiently for a letter from her. With much love to you both I am

Your Loving grand daughter
Carrie Cather

Red Cloud
[Saturday,] July 20th

Dear Mother,

I have been thinking for days and days why you have not written again, and just now I have solved the wonder to myself. It is this. You could not read that lead pencil scrawl and felt insulted as people do if you talk before them in a language they do not understand, is not that so.

I will write you a few lines today hoping you are well and enjoying your self. As for Rettie She of course is enjoying every moment of her time

And what do you think about Hugh [Miner]'s visit. are you not a fraid of loosing Rettie. It looks like something sure Every one here asks after you both and all seem anxious to see you



The George P. Cather home still stands south of Bladen. It is obvious why spring cleaning took until the end of May (see Franc Cather's letter of May 22). Most of the Nebraska portion of One of Ours takes place in and around this house, which Willa Cather described in detail. (Photograph loaned by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial).

again they wonder if you are coming back. The church has quite a nice little minister from the University and have very good congregations. I see Dick Fulton has your name down for two dollars. They do not forget you. We are all well at this time. Charlie is in North Dakota but was well when I heard a few days ago Willa is in Lincoln on some business matter. Roscoe is trying for a school. Douglas has been working for Shafer for some days Jessie is quite busy at her music and looking after the children She has begun several letters to you but I do not believe she has ever finished them Elsie wishes and wishes Grand ma was home so she could go to see her and have some fride chicken and Jim poor little Jim he misses you very much he often taks of you and Rettie both. Jack is growing. Bess [Seymour] and I talk of going up to see Carrie and Harry but have not gotten there yet. How do you find every one and every thing there in Va I mean, does it seem the same as it used to in the old times. That is all I envy you and Rettie is the Mountains and Springs and trees and mossy brooks where as children [we] had such good time I hope you []de continue will */sic/* and have such a nice time it will do you all of us */sic/*. I would like to see Dorothy and Giles [Smith] so much and some others I do hope you will go to see Sebirt and Kathy. Now Mother write us a good long letter when you can and think as kindly of us all as you can and now our best love to you both and all kind wishies for your good

Yours with Love
Jennie B Cather

Bladen Nebraska
[Tuesday,] Aug. 6th 1895

Dear Mother

We are right in the midst of Harvest; and as you from past experience know exactly what that means, I do not need to explain. I believe they are through cutting now except about 25 or 30 acres of oats. Had a good deal of trouble with the machine breaking or they would have been done before. Mr Phillips cut with his binder about 4 days. Don Dwyer is stacking for George Mr Phillips is now helping and Geo. has three regular hands. Rudy Streit helped last week and is going to help some

more when he gets through cutting his oats. They have the rye all stacked and about half the wheat. I think they have up nine or ten large stacks.

It is quite dry now and the corn is suffering for rain. The early corn is in roasting ear. George's is just beginning to be fit to use. The boys got the first mess today, from out by the timber claim. That by the house is a little later.

The garden grew nicely and we have already had a great many vegetables from it. Had any quantity of beans, beets, turnips, cucumbers, radishes & lettuce, spinach &c. Have a few tomatoes ripening. Will have a great many in a week or so, also carrots parsnips &c. I hardly know how I should have fed the crowd without the garden—

Geo. sold 8 cows last week which brought him nearly \$140.00. Oscar helped him drive to Inavale as G. P. was riding the lead horse on the binder. Frank was sick or I presume he would have gone. The boys do all the milking now. They have not shocked much as it seems a little heavy for them George has been hauling the grain without shocking. His grain is better than at one time was expected and now I hope he will not be disappointed when he threshes. He expects to thresh the last of the month—a part—so he will have seed grain.

I hope you keep well. We do not hear anything about how you feel or anything. Don't wait until it is too cold before you come back. The predictions are for a cold fall and winter.

The Literary was here last Fri. night. Mrs Andrews, Willie, Nan & Nellie were over. I was surprised. They expected Willa Cather up but she did not come. I see by the paper that she came home last week. She is to go on the [Lincoln] Courier staff this month and I suppose will be pretty busy. When I was down they were all talking about moving to Lincoln. Jennie said it would be decided when Charlie came home in Sept. She said that Charlie wrote he was in splendid health and liked his business. Weighed 160 lbs. He must have out grown his clothes. I thought Jennie was a little low spirited. Perhaps I was mistaken, as I thought I have a monopoly in the family of that particular disease. I am sorry Charlie has to be away from home.

Mary Bergman has been here practicing for the picnic all the afternoon. She would like to work here. We are to have Miss Arnold as teacher this year. She will board at her sister's.

Oscar and Frank Cather were twin sons of George and Franc Cather. This photo was taken about 1895, when they received suspenders for their birthdays.



Wilella has been a very good girl She is getting along very well with her music; but I have not had time to do much with her studies, especially lately. Carrie has not been well this summer. I hope she will be better when the weather gets cooler. The girls want to go to the Institute if Carrie is able—She has her marks for a 2d Grade Certificate; but it does not seem the thing for her to teach, and I do not think she wants to.

George had a letter from Kyd. They were in Wyoming. He said there was plenty of work where he was, did not say whether he expected to work or not.

I suppose you heard that Rob't McCallum went to Lincoln for treatment for his cancer. Last week he sent for his wife, and it is supposed he is in a very dangerous condition. John McCallum told Geo. he didn't think he would ever get over it. Ole Ivison is doing the work for him. Some one told Geo. that the mortgage on the place was about to be foreclosed. It will leave her in a bad fix. He got \$300 insurance money on his barn, or he couldn't have gone to Lincoln. It is a very sad thing.

I had a letter from Mother Chandler last week. I suppose

Albert was married last week to a widow lady in Conn. She had two children—boys—one 12 & one 9.

I was in hopes you would come back and stay with us awhile before you went to house-keeping. You will have had such a good time that you will need to see the prosaic side of life awhile to balance up things. I am getting a great desire to see you once more. A great deal of love to you and Retta both as well as all others I know

Very truly Your dau.
Franc. S. Cather

Grand Forks, North Dakota
[Saturday,] Aug 10 1895

Dear Mother

Jennie sent me a letter from you that was written July 19 in Loudon County [Virginia]. I was pleased to hear that you were well and were having a pleasant time. I have been very busy since I have been in the Dakotas. Have been over all the Eastern part of both States. I am now near the North line of North Dakota. Will go tomorrow or next day to the very North line of the State as well as the North line of the United States. This City, (Grand Forks) is the largest city in North Dakota. It is quite a city, has quite a few 6 story buildings, and all the furnishings of a Western City; including the Salvation Army that is now parading the Street with their usual noise and bluster. There are two Indians with them, who sing and shout as loud as any of them. For the past 3 or 4 weeks I have been in the great Red River Valley. It is a great wheat country and the crop is very fine this year, the best since 1891. There is also a great crop of barley, oats and flax. I went to see a very large wheat farm, (The Dalrymple farm) I suppose it is as large as any farm in the U.S. (except possibly in California) He has 52 sections which is a little more than 33,000 acres in wheat, beside he has several thousand acres of oats & barley. I do not know just how much of the latter. There are several farmers near here who have from 2000 to 10,000 acres of wheat. Wheat harvest will not be ripe here for a week yet (from the 15 to 20 of August). They are now harvesting barley & rye. The Country is full of harvest hands. The roads are lined with them and the towns are

thronged with them. They are generally from the large cities, Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Duluth, and some from Milwaukee & Chicago. They are a tough set, and the sooner the country here is rid of them the better.

I hope to be home by Sept. 1st or before. I will send you the Amick papers. I got a letter a few days from Mr. R. E. Moore the President of the Loan Company. He said they were well satisfied with the way I had concluded their business in the Dakotas. Of course I was pleased to have him say so as I had tried to do my work as well as possible and was glad to know it was appreciated. While this is a great wheat country when they have a crop, the crops are not more certain than they are in Nebraska. They have about as much dry weather besides they have frost here every month in the year. The heavy frosts in June sometimes kills the wheat down so low that it will not make a crop. It is quite cold to day. I slept under a pair of heavy wool blankets and a heavy comforter last night and was by no means too warm. Some days it is quite hot from 12 to 4 o'clock but always gets cold at night. I suppose you know more about people and things in Red Cloud than I do. My kindest regards to Rettie and all our friends & relatives.

Yours truly Your Son
Chas. F. Cather

Billings, Montana
[Thursday,] Aug 29th 95

Dear Grandma & Retta

I received your welcome letter to-day and was very glad to hear from you. am glad to hear you are having a good time and are enjoying yourselves.

I heard from Uncle George to-day he says times are very favorable at present, and that He will have quite a crop, and I am certainly glad to hear it. Will and Johnson got layed off at the ranche yesterday, and Johnson took the train for Butte, Mon[tana], and left Will by himself with his two horses. Will traded his wagon to the Indians for a pony so he has two horses. I have two horses too, Pet and a pony.

When they layed Will off and left him by himself away out

here without a saddle I called for my time too, and will help Will to find a saddle and fix his pack horse so he can go home or go to work on some other ranche. I could have had a good place on the Custer Cattle Co. (7-7) all winter, but I could not desert Will, and I think we can get work up on the Mussleshell about 60 miles north on the ranches at \$35 or \$40 a month. we start for there in the morning.

Will did very well for a greener but Johnson was a poor stick. If Will can get work we will winter here if not he will go home, but I will stay if I can. I will write as soon as we locate. hoping this will find you well I will close

Your Grandson & Cousin
Kyd

we are both well

NOTES

1. The following biographical data on the Cather family is gathered from obituaries of the Cather family, from interviews with Mrs. Jennie Miner Reiher, Red Cloud, and from Mildred R. Bennett's book, *The World of Willa Cather* (2d edition: Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1961.

2. E. K. Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 1.

3. *Bladen Enterprise*, December 16, 1927.

4. Blanche Chandler Cather (1878-1964) was the second child of George P. Cather. She attended the Grand Island (Nebraska) Baptist College and taught in Webster County prior to her marriage in 1902 to William Wallace Ray (1876-1956). He taught at the Grand Island Business College and later was a wholesale lumber dealer. *Daily Independent* (Grand Island), December 20, 1956; July 22, 1964.

5. Grosvenor Phillips Cather (1883-1918), always known as G. P., was the third child and eldest son of George P. Cather. He attended the Grand Island College and the University of Nebraska. In 1905 he homesteaded in McPherson County, where he lived three years before he joined the U.S. Navy in 1908. On June 8, 1910, he married Myrtle Bartlett and farmed in Webster County. Always interested in the military, he belonged to the Nebraska National Guard. He was called into the service in June 1917 and was commissioned in August. On May 28, 1918, he was killed in France. It was his letters to his mother, it is said, that inspired Willa Cather to write *One of Ours*, *Bladen Enterprise*, June 14, 1918.

6. *Bladen Enterprise*, May 5, 1922.

7. *Bladen Enterprise*, March 9, 1928.

8. The Security Investment Company was founded in 1886 by Robert Emmett Moore (1849-1921), first in partnership with his brother Thomas W. Moore. The latter lived at times in Red Cloud, and this is probably how Charles Cather joined the organization.

9. Sarah Ellen Boak was an elder sister of Mrs. Charles F. Cather. Her first husband was Joseph D. Seymour, and they were the parents of Elizabeth (Bess) Seymour (note 18). After his death she married Joseph Andrews, and they were the parents of William Lee, Nan, Katherine, and Mary Josephine Andrews. After the death of Mr. Andrews she moved to Nebraska and lived with her son. William Lee Andrews (1865-1960) came to Webster County about 1880, before his mother and sisters, where he farmed in the Catherston area. *Bladen Enterprise*, April 3, 1925; *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), February 14, 1950.

10. Oscar E. Ramey (1851-1925) and family were among the first Virginians to follow George P. Cather to Nebraska. He and his wife, Sallie Bean (1850-1922), were the parents of six children and one adopted son. The daughters were Elma, Lillian, and Franc. *Argus* (Red Cloud), March 26, 1925.

11. David H. Larrick (1843-1927) and wife, Annie Elizabeth Richard, came to Webster County in 1876 from Frederick County, Virginia. They had three children, Abba, Arthur Richard, and Percie H. *Bladen Enterprise*, August 19, 1927.

12. There were two Alberts in the Cather neighborhood, Albert Washington Rust (1865-1941) and Albert H. Marker (1877-). The John Marker (1841-1901) family had come to Webster County from Frederick County, Virginia, in 1878. Albert was the fifth child of their ten. Albert Rust, who married Mary June McCallum in 1894, came to Webster County from Ohio in 1885. As he was possibly living in Rawlins County, Kansas, at this time, the reference is probably to Albert Marker. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud) February 19, 1941, September 19, 1950.

13. Francis Edward Payne (1850-1917) came to Nebraska from Frederick County, Virginia, in 1877. He was the son of Richard T. Payne (1828-1898) and Sabrina A. (Sarah) Scribner (1825-1891). They were the parents of six children, and most of them, including the parents, followed Ed Payne to Nebraska. In July 1881 he married Alverna Amanda (Cather) Clutter, and they were the parents of one daughter, Wilella Payne. *Bladen Enterprise*, May 18, 1917.

14. Mrs. E. J. Ducker and her son, William, lived in Red Cloud, and they were close friends of the Cather families.

15. *Bladen Enterprise*, March 9, 1928.

16. Mrs. Millicent Cather was a sister-in-law of William Cather. In 1880 she was 49 and a widow living with her niece, Ada Cather, in Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia. *U.S. Federal Census, 1880*, Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia, 36.

17. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), August 31, 1931.

18. Elizabeth (Bess) Seymour (1857-1934) was the daughter of Joseph D. and Sarah (Boak) Seymour (see note 9). She lived with the Charles F. Cather family for many years, later living with her half-brother, William L. Andrews. Marjorie Anderson (1854-1924) came from Virginia with the Charles Cather family and spent the rest of her life working for them. *Bladen Enterprise*, December 21, 1934; *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), October 8, 1924.

19. D. G. and Matilda Grice came to Webster County in 1871. He was a Civil War veteran, and they settled in Batin Township northwest of Red Cloud. The eldest son, Herbert (1867-1931), entered the drugstore business as a youth, finally owning his own store. His younger brother, Flavius J. Grice (born ca. 1870), started to work for his brother in December 1893. He later became his brother's partner and was in business in Red Cloud for over fifty years. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), July 27, 1931, December 1, 1944.

20. Giles Smith was a nephew of Mrs. Caroline Cather. Perry Gore was the son of Sidney S. (Cather) Gore and a nephew of William Cather.

21. Robert Bruce Payne (1872-1937) was the youngest son of Richard T. Payne and younger brother of Ed Payne (Note 13). He and his parents joined Ed Payne in Nebraska in 1883. He attended the University of Nebraska, graduating with the class of 1898; with many of his classmates, he served in the 1st Nebraska Volunteers in the Spanish-American War. In 1904 he married Bertha Wisecarver, whose parents had also

come from Virginia. After several years of teaching he worked in the Omaha post office for sixteen years. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), November 10, 1937.

22. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), February 25, 1960; July 21, 1960.

23. R. Gayton Lewis (born ca. 1854) settled in Harmony Township, Webster County, prior to 1880, having come there from Illinois with his uncle, William Lewis. He was not related to the Cather family.

24. Lloyd M. Crabill (1851-1948) and William Marquis Carbell (1855-1931) came to Batin Township, Webster County, from Frederick County, Virginia in 1876. Lloyd later moved to California. William had been a noted woodsman in Virginia; after he came to Nebraska he was known for his ability at digging deep wells on the divide. In 1880 he married Anna Rust and they moved to Red Cloud Township. They had two sons. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), June 3, 1931; February 3, 1941, August 6, 1948.

25. Edward Ernest Grubb (1883-1971) was born in Catherton Twp. and spent his life in Webster and Hitchcock counties. He married Mary Louise Zastrow at Culbertson in 1908. He was the son of Edward M. F. Grubb (1855-1910), a native of West Virginia, and Ella M. McCallum (1858-1947), a native of Iowa. The father was orphaned as a child and raised in Frederick County, Virginia, by James Howard Cather (1833-1879), a younger brother of William Cather. He came to Webster County in 1876 with the Larrick and Ramey families, and was married in 1878. *Bladen Enterprise*, November 25, 1910; *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), August 11, 1947; *Red Cloud Chief*, May 27, 1971.

26. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), March 3, 1960.

27. John C. Wilson (1850-1922) and wife, Mary Catherine Wisecarver (1852-1942), came to Webster County from Frederick County, Virginia, in 1878, settling in Catherton Township. They were the parents of nine children. Their eldest son, Conley Martin, married Wilella Payne. *Webster County Argus* (Red Cloud), November 9, 1922; *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), June 22, 1942.

28. Mary Elizabeth Payne (1854-1943) was the daughter of Richard T. Payne and sister of Ed Payne (note 13). She was born in Frederick County, Virginia, where she was married to Allen Augustus Cooper (1857-1948), and they were the parents of three sons. They moved to Webster County in 1886. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), February 4, 1948; October 20, 1943.

29. John R. Snee (1815-1897) and his wife, Mary Smith (1815-1904), came to Webster County from Illinois in 1878. They were the parents of six children. A son, Nathan W. Snee (born ca. 1844), and wife, Georgiana (born ca. 1851), also lived in Webster County. Either one might be the Mr. Snee referred to in the letter. *U.S. Federal Census*, 1880. Harmony Township, Webster County, Nebraska, 4, 10; *Hayes County Republican* (Hayes Center), April 21, 1904.

30. Mina Frame (1869-1961) was born in Henry County, Iowa, the daughter of James and Deborah Frame; they moved to Webster County in 1885, where she was married to George J. Baker (1862-1941), the son of Quincy and Savillia Baker, and they moved to Webster County from West Virginia in 1885. They were married in 1889, and they were the parents of seven children. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), May 16, 1941 November 9, 1961.

31. Robert and John McCallum and their families came to the United States from Scotland in 1856. They came to Webster County in 1874, settling in what is now Glenwood Township. *Commercial Advertiser* (Red Cloud), July 3, 1936; March 3, 1944; August 11, 1947.