

Willa Cather Author, Pulitzer Prize Winner, Daughter of Homesteaders 1873-1947 Red Cloud, Nebraska

Willa Cather was born in Virginia in 1873, the first of seven children of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cather. When she was nine, her father decided to move the family to the great Nebraska prairie. Her father's parents had already migrated to Nebraska, so Willa's family was merely following in their footsteps. Upon arriving, the Cathers settled on their 160-acre homestead just outside the town of Red Cloud, which at the time had a population of about 1,000.

Like many families, the Cathers found homesteading to be a difficult and unrewarding life. They eventually gave up the endeavor before obtaining their 160 acres and moved into the town of Red Cloud. There, Willa worked delivering mail on horseback to many of the remote farms located outside the town. From Red Cloud she went on to the University of Nebraska, from which she graduated in 1898. She then lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she was a teacher and journalist.

In 1906, Willa Cather moved to New York City to be an associate editor at *McClure's* magazine. It was there that she also began to write her great novels, many of which were set on the Nebraska prairie she had so loved as a youth. Her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, was followed by several others, the best known of which are *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Antonia*.

By the time she died in 1947, Willa Cather was a Pulitzer Prize recipient and one of the most well known and critically acclaimed novelists of the 20th century. She was always quick to attribute her success to her formative years on the Nebraska prairie as the daughter of a struggling homesteader. Those years provided the basis for stories and characters that are still universally known and loved today, over 50 years after her death.