

WRITING OUR HERITAGE



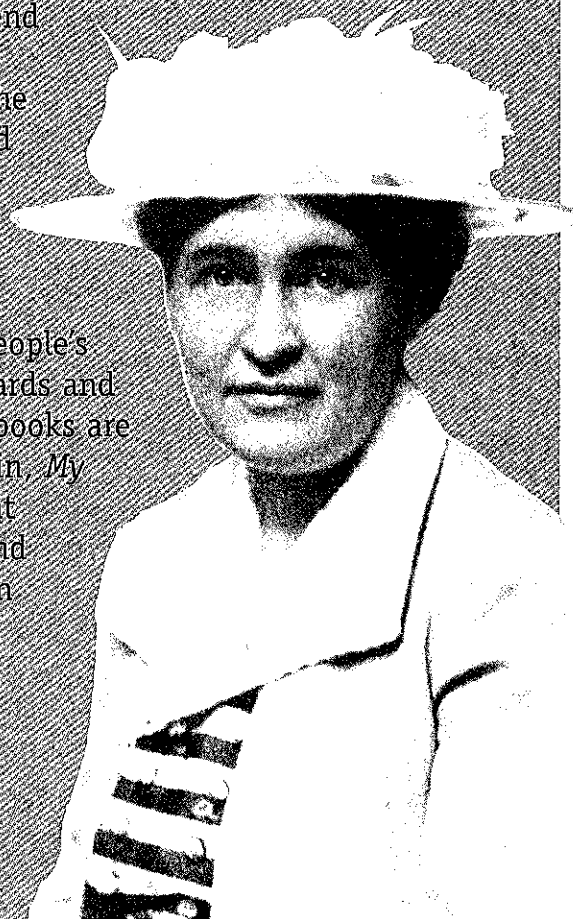
Do you remember reading about settlers and homesteaders? Some of Nebraska's best-known authors wrote about homesteaders and immigrants. Their books help people around the world understand more about what it was like to carve out a new life on the Nebraska plains.

Willa Cather 1873—1947



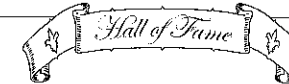
Willa Cather and her family moved to Nebraska when she was nine years old. They traveled from Virginia to Red Cloud on a train. As a young girl, Willa loved to ride the plains on her pony. She loved to visit with the immigrant settlers who lived nearby.

When she was older, Willa left Red Cloud to go to college in Lincoln. Few women had an opportunity to attend college at that time. Willa worked hard at writing. She wrote about the people and places she knew in Nebraska. She used Red Cloud and its people as the setting for most of her stories, but she changed people's names. She won many awards and honors. Her most famous books are *One of Ours* about her cousin, *My Antonia* about an immigrant girl she knew as a child, and *O Pioneers!* about settlers in the area around Red Cloud. To honor her contribution to our state, Willa Cather was the first woman chosen for the Nebraska Hall of Fame.



The Nebraska Adventure

Mari Sandoz 1896—1966



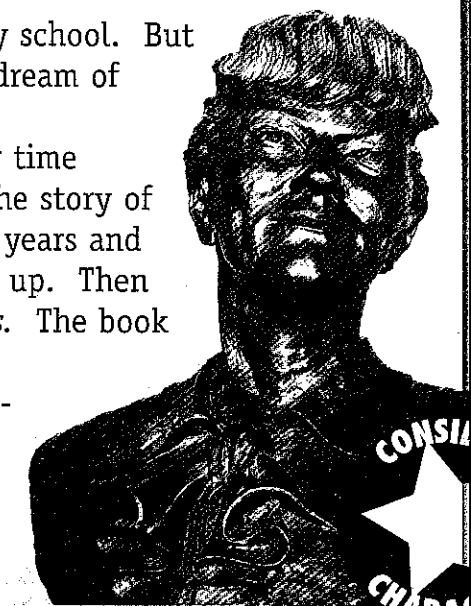
Mari Sandoz grew up on the high plains near Rushville and Gordon. She often took care of her younger brothers and sisters and made up stories to tell them. Mari also worked hard on the family homestead. Many people visited the Sandoz home. Mari loved to listen to old trappers, traders, and Plains Indians tell their stories. She wanted to write down those stories.

Mari spoke only German and French until she was nine years old, but she quickly learned English when she started going to school. She loved school and often stayed late just to read or write. When she was 12, she wrote a story that her teacher sent to a contest. It won second place, and the story was published in an Omaha newspaper.

When Mari was just 17 years old, she became a teacher in a country school. But she really wanted to be a writer. She moved to Lincoln to fulfill her dream of writing.

Mari was very poor, and she was often sick. She spent much of her time working at the historical society, reading at the library, and writing the story of her father's life. She called her book *Old Jules*. It took more than 12 years and many rewritings to get it published, and at times Mari felt like giving up. Then one publisher in New York gave Mari a chance and published *Old Jules*. The book was a success, and Mari won awards for it.

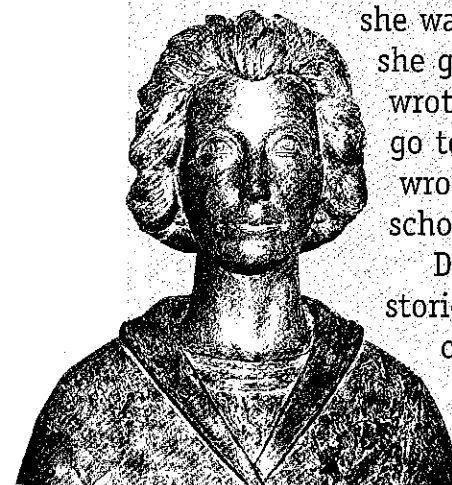
Mari wrote many other books. Some of them were *fiction*, or made-up stories. Others were history books about the Plains Indians, the cattlemen, and Nebraska. She often wrote about the people, places, and stories she had known as a child.



Bess Streeter Aldrich 1881—1954



Bess Streeter Aldrich was born in Iowa. She always loved to write, and she won her first award for writing when she was 14 years old. She moved to Nebraska after she got married. After her husband died, Bess wrote stories to earn money for her children to go to school. She was a busy mother, so she wrote while her children napped or went to school.



20th Century Nebraskans

During her lifetime Bess wrote over 100 short stories and nine books. She wrote about the courage and strength of pioneers in the Midwest. Her best-known book is *A Lantern in Her Hand*.

What do you think

How did Mari Sandoz show perseverance?

rs and Entertainers

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—A. E. Sheldon

ENTERTAINERS



In the 20th century many actors, singers, entertainers, and television stars were born or lived in Nebraska. Here are just a few of them.

Darryl F. Zanuck 1902–1979

Do you want to see a movie that had no sound? The first movies were made, none of them had sound. Usually played music on a piano during the movie. The audience would know when to laugh, cry, or be sad. The audience had to read written words on the screen to see what the actors were saying. A boy born in Omaha helped change all that. His name was Darryl F. Zanuck. He went to Hollywood and helped make some of the most famous movies in the world. His movies with sound were very popular. He became one of the best-known producers in the world. Some of his most famous movies are *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Sound of Music*.



This photograph shows the filming of one of Darryl F. Zanuck's famous films called *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was a film about the Great Depression. Henry Fonda starred in it. He is the man on the left.

Marlon Brando 1924–2004

Marlon Brando was born in Omaha. He was involved in acting from an early age because his mother worked with the Omaha Community Playhouse. As a young adult, Marlon went to New York City. He studied drama and became a famous actor. He performed in many movies that dealt with social issues and problems. One of his most famous roles was in *The Godfather*.

Henry Fonda 1905–1982

Henry Fonda was born in Grand Island. The house where he was born is now part of Stuhr Museum. When he was a baby, his family moved to Omaha. As a young man, Henry began acting with the Omaha Community Playhouse. From there he went on to act on stage, television, and in the movies.

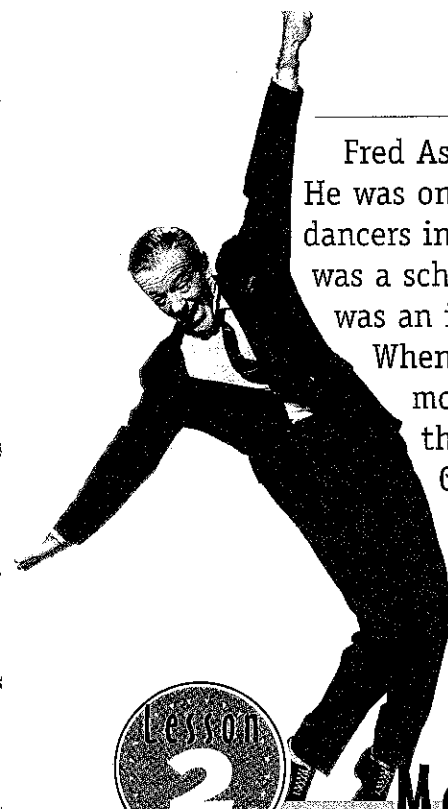
Johnny Carson 1925–2005

Johnny Carson's family moved to Norfolk when he was eight years old. He liked to entertain people with magic tricks. At night he sat and listened to radio shows. When he was older, Carson got a job at a TV station in Hollywood. One day he got a call to fill in for his favorite comedian, Red Skelton, who had just broken his arm. Carson filled in so well that he was later given his own TV show. He became the talk show host for "The Tonight Show."

Fred Astaire 1889–1987

Fred Astaire was born in Omaha. He was one of the best-known dancers in early movies. His mother was a school teacher, and his father was an immigrant from Austria.

When he was a child, his family moved to New York City, but they often came back to Omaha to visit. When he was older, Fred became a world famous dancer. He performed in many movies.



Memory Master

1. What town did Willa Cather use as the scene for many of her stories?
2. What did Mari Sandoz write about?
3. Before movies had sound, how did people know what was happening in a movie?

Preston Love 1921–2004

Preston Love was born and grew up in Omaha. He began playing the saxophone when he was 15. Preston loved to listen to all the big bands come through town and play what he called, black music. It was also known as jazz. By the time he was 22, Preston was a member of the famous Count Basie Orchestra. Later, he was the band leader for many famous groups and stars. Some of them were The Supremes, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, and Ray Charles. Over the years, Preston not only played with big bands. He also taught college music classes, wrote books, wrote for newspapers, and owned a restaurant in Omaha. His talent on the saxophone made him a legend.



John Beasley 1943–

John Beasley is one of the most successful black actors in Omaha's history. He has acted on stage, on television, and in movies. He has starred with Morgan Freeman, Robert Duval, Danny Glover, and Oprah Winfrey. While his work takes him all over the world, John still lives in Omaha. He runs a workshop for people who want to learn acting skills. He especially likes to help young people. A theater in Omaha has been named after him.