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THE SITES
Willa Cather spent her early life in Red Cloud, a former railroad town six miles north of the Kansas border. These were important and formative years for Cather: six of her twelve novels are at least partly set in Red Cloud and Webster County, including *One of Ours*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923. The town remained an important part of her life after graduation from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, though she never returned to live there again. She often returned to visit family and friends in Red Cloud. The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation oversees the town and Webster County, forming an extensive and dynamic creative movement. During the seminar, we will explore Cather’s childhood home, the sites where she gave her graduation speech, the homes of friends and neighbors that appear in the stories, and many other places that shaped her work.

Lincoln, a university town 150 miles northeast of Red Cloud, is the site of the seminar’s second half. Lincoln, population 250,000, is Nebraska’s capital city and is the cultural and educational center of the state. It is home to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the Nebraska State Capitol. Cather’s years in Lincoln (1904–25) were spent attending the University, working on her first novel, and miniature paper, and taking her first steps as a writer. During the seminar, we will explore the campus and explore places that were important to her and which feature in her fiction.

The focus acknowledges the topicality and continued relevance of violence to discussions of imagination and culture. How does an author ‘write’ violence? Is the representation of violence fundamental to our experiences of art, as commentators such as René Girard have engaged? To what extent, for example, did the nineteenth-century experience of violence and fear that might be present in the modern reader? Can we identify specifically American encounters with violence—in terms of representations, mythologies, and narratives? What does it mean to write about violence as a female author? Cather has always been implicated and engaged with these debates, ever since Hemingway castigated her portrayal of the Great War battlefields. We encourage participants to think widely and laterally about the topic, however, and to think about the myriad forms in which Cather explores (and sometimes fails to explore) the violence implicit in acts of discovery and collecting, the emotional violence of neglect or misrecognition.