

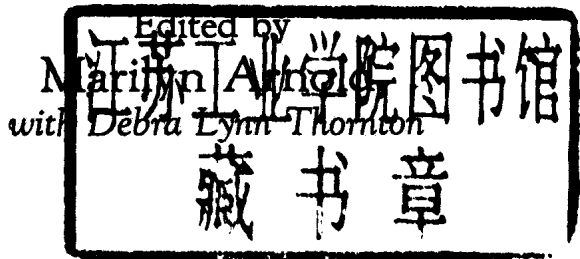
A Reader's Companion
to the Fiction
of Willa Cather

John March

Edited by
Marilyn Arnold

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PREFACE

The introduction to this volume indicates that it underwent something of a transformation in the hands of its editors. The longer we worked with it, the more we realized it had an important life of its own that probably should not be excessively tampered with. On the other hand, there was something to be gained from having someone with a little distance from the work exercise a bit of careful scrutiny in an effort to make it as useful and meaningful as possible to the reader.

We knew some things had to be done. Insofar as was possible, without retracing John March's steps entirely—and taking forty years in the process—my student associates made a gargantuan effort to verify those facts that are published in books and documents available in and through various libraries, archives, and public records. They also wrote letters and placed phone calls to potentially helpful sources of information. Where sources could be found, we checked all quotations and corrected any apparent errors in them. Where precise passages could not be traced, we deleted, substituted, or paraphrased quotations. In the pattern of encyclopedias, John March did not regularly include documentation in his materials, though occasionally he did. We had odd pieces of his correspondence and thousands of his notecards, however, and they sometimes provided helpful clues or documentary evidence. Rather than change his format and unduly lengthen his already long manuscript, we did not add source notations except where we verified and kept quotations, and in other rare instances where clarity seemed to demand it. All the March notes, as well as our source notations, are available at the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, Nebraska; anyone wishing to pursue a manuscript item in depth could begin there.

The largest liberty we took with the manuscript was in removing entries for Willa Cather's essays and poems. (We did, however, retain the code notations to the considerable number of items that are mentioned in essays and poems as well as in the fiction.) Since most of the essays have not yet been collected and the poems are less frequently read and taught than the fiction, with John March's concurrence, we elected to split the manuscript into two volumes and to prepare at this time only the portion dealing with the fiction. The hope, of course, is that before too long, someone will collect the magazine articles and prepare the second volume of the March handbook. It should also be noted that some of the short fiction that has been attributed to Willa Cather under a variety of pseudonyms does not appear in the March companion. As John March noted in his preface, he stayed with the known autographed canon when he was doing his work. For the most part, he omitted very early stories, pseudonymous stories, and stories of uncertain or collective authorship. In all, he omitted a dozen pieces, most of them slight and none of them well known.

As part of the verification process, we also checked, through a nifty software program called Indexetc (WordCruncher), to see that the textual references occurred where the codes in March's manuscript said they did. The reliability of the software

enabled us to verify his citations and, more important, to add the few citations that he did not find. In some cases, new entries were generated through the use of the computer. As a result, we can almost guarantee the accuracy of the citations. We became aware, however, that in spite of John March's efforts and our follow-up work, this volume could not possibly be 100 percent reliable. March made his notes by hand and transferred his handwritten notes to a typed manuscript. A computer scanned his manuscript for us, and we worked from that. Nevertheless, in the process of hand-checking thousands upon thousands of pieces of data, there are bound to be some miscues, for which we beg the readers' indulgence. We have been several years at the task, and, on occasion, we have simply had to make judgment calls, especially when sources have disagreed, as they frequently and inevitably do.

A word should be said here about the way in which the book is organized and presented for reader use. Obviously, the items are entered alphabetically, as in an encyclopedia or dictionary. Characters, unless they have no last name, are listed by surname. Works by and quotations from individual writers or musicians appear as alphabetical subheadings under the artist's name, but they are also listed alphabetically in the larger manuscript, according to their designation in Cather's fiction, and then cross-referenced to the artist's name. Where artists of any kind are the models for characters, they are discussed under the fictional name. In all instances, the name, work, or phrase is listed in the companion as it appears in the fiction, even if it is misspelled or misquoted in Cather's text. For example, the French architect (*Death Comes for the Archbishop*) Mouly is called *Molny* throughout the novel. Thus, we corrected errors in the descriptions but not in the initial listings.

As John March noted in his preface, he coded each item to identify it by genre (N = novel, S = story, E = essay, and P = poem), title, book or chapter, and section. We preserved the codes. They provide a more specific location than the descriptions that link the entries to the fiction, and they indicate which items in the fiction are also in poems or essays. Therefore, the code "N:DC II, 3" means that the item appears in book two, section three of the novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. John March supplied the list of code identifications appearing in the companion's front matter. He also supplied an appendix of items that he elected not to include in the manuscript proper. In his preface, he explains that these items are readily found in dictionaries and encyclopedias and are, therefore, less crucial for the companion. We chose not to include his lengthy appendix. Again, the reader who wishes to pursue such matters can do so in Red Cloud.

Thus, in spite of its quirks and limitations, what the Cather reader has here is a valuable tool full of information that has been searched out from uncountable and far-flung sources. We strongly recommend that the companion be taken as just that, a companion and a beginning place for study and search. The material should be regarded, not as the final word on anything, but as the first word in a new direction that deserves exploration and further verifying research. Above all, for the perceptive reader this book can be a rich mine of ideas and suggestions capable of engaging Cather scholarship for decades to come.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a project this size, extending across several years, the debts run long and deep. Our greatest debt, of course, is to John March, who invested his life in this effort, and to the late Mildred R. Bennett, who aided and encouraged him in the work. It was also Mildred who twisted an editorial arm to move John's draft into publishable form. In part, then, the work is a labor of love, for and because of Mildred. The organization she founded, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation in Red Cloud, Nebraska, has continued its support of the project since Mildred's unexpected passing in the fall of 1989. Thanks go to Pat Phillips, foundation director; to John Lindahl, curator, and Sue Fintel of the Nebraska State Historical Society archives in Red Cloud; to Beverly Cooper of Hastings, who spent endless days verifying the Red Cloud materials; and to the other individuals who assisted in that effort—particularly Frankie Warner and Bonnie English, but also Marcylyne Krueger and Mary Lambrecht. Helen Mathew, director of the Webster County Museum, was very helpful in searching out information sources.

It is not an overstatement to say that without the immense support of Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, this project could not have proceeded at all, much less come to fruition. In addition to funding graduate students, providing office space and computer equipment, and supplying numerous day-to-day needs of such an undertaking, the university placed all its library and computer resources at our disposal. Sterling Albrecht, director of Libraries, literally opened doors for us, and his staff was splendid. There are almost too many people to name, but special thanks must go to Leila Lawrence in Humanities Reference and Kathleen Hansen in Interlibrary Loan. Mel Smith in the College of Humanities Research Center has assisted us with the computer work since the project's inception, and Linda Hunter Adams in the Humanities Publications Center provided the considerable expertise needed for preparing and formatting the final copy. Particular thanks go also to the graduate office staff, who, led by Christine Tolman, pitched in to help their dean, the senior editor, in countless ways. More recently, in the final days of the work, the Women's Research Institute generously provided space and support.

Several individuals also made significant financial contributions to fund the enterprise. They include John March, himself, and the following: Lucia Woods Lindley, Evanston, Illinois; Pam Drucker, Olueffe, Missouri; Helen and Philip Southwick, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Gerald Brown, San Diego, California; Don Connors, Huntington Beach, California; Frank Crabill, Riverside, Connecticut; Paul Cumberland, Elmhurst, New York; Father Charles Duman, Yankton, South Dakota, Frances Payne Evangelist, Forestville, Maryland; Greg John, San Francisco, California; Mrs. Frank Wiggs, Omaha, Nebraska; and Laura Winter, Morristown, New Jersey.

As always, however, the real heroes of the enterprise are the graduate students who gave not only immeasurable service, but total loyalty as well. They performed the immense labor of verification, both in tracking the sources of John March's

materials and in finding new routes to the information he collected. The first of the graduate students was Debra Thornton, who began the work several years ago, but stayed with it to become co-editor, working even after she left BYU for doctoral study at the University of New Mexico. A good many individuals have had a momentary hand in the work, including Patricia H. Malouf, Helen Dixon, Nathan Jackson, Patricia Lambert, Kyle Harris, Mark Olsen, and Traci Klein in the BYU Humanities Publications Center. Those who merit special mention, however, are Jennifer Miller, Mary Ann Olsen, Jennifer Hawes, Alison Craig, Diane Brown, Heather and David Sundahl, Lara Harris, and Milton Jones. All have been true colleagues in the work.

INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman said by way of introduction to his masterwork, *Leaves of Grass*, "Camerado, this is no book; Who touches this touches a man." Issued as both proud assertion and warning, Whitman's boast applies in at least some sense to this work of John March. Like *Leaves of Grass*, it evolved over a man's lifetime, changing as he changed and finding its shape as it went: "jagged, imperfect and lovely," to borrow a phrase from the late cartoonist Walt Kelly.¹ Like Whitman, who promised to wait for us somewhere in the future if we would wade faithfully through the lilt and lag of his verbiage, John March also waits for us. In spite of these similarities, John March is anything but Whitman's created persona: a self-proclaimed brawling, fleshy, effusive, insatiable singer of songs to himself, a man Emily Dickinson had disapprovingly assumed was rather disgraceful. John March's song was never to or of himself, but was, instead, for forty or fifty years, entirely to and of Willa Cather. What, I asked myself, would possess a man to spend half a lifetime tracing the proper nouns and other allusions in Willa Cather's work? Maybe, I concluded, it was the same demon that has compelled me to spend six years of my life following John March's tracks.

Characteristically, March called this work simply *A Handbook of Willa Cather*, revealing himself to be unpretentious, businesslike, self-effacing, and focused on the task. His aim was to exclude traces of his own personality and instead to explore, doggedly and untiringly, every character and allusion in Willa Cather's work that he deemed worthy of the search. Of course, he failed on all counts, and it is perhaps a blessing that he did. Not every allusion can be found, and not every character can have a living model; and sometimes one has to settle for an educated guess or confess to a dead end in the search. Then, too, time can prove one to have been entirely wrong. Moreover, no writer left alone with such a task, even an encyclopedia researcher like John March, can avoid stamping his or her work with an individual imprint and worldview. Furthermore, the very act of selection is a self-revealing process. As we note in the preface, John March consigned a great many items to an appendix, deeming them, he said, of insufficient importance to merit an entry in the main body of his work. His list for inclusion in the book proper would not with any exactitude match my list, or that of anyone else; it is his, personally. These are his leaves of grass, and this, in spite of himself, is his song.

John March, I think, saw his manuscript primarily, maybe exclusively, as a reference tool. In the beginning, I, too, was prepared to see it in only that way. Even in rough manuscript it is, indeed, a valuable reference aid, as the editors of the Willa Cather critical editions currently in preparation through the University of Nebraska Press have already discovered. However, the months—nay, years—I have spent working with the manuscript have shown me that it is much more than a reference tool. It yields an intangible point of view, a perspective that bespeaks authorial presence. John March has selected what suited him and told about it what he chose. The distinctive filter of his singular mind may not be obvious in the reading of individual

entries, but it is apparent in the cumulative effect of reading dozens of them. The book has a certain charm, a character that is almost tangible, and to miss that would be to miss a rare pleasure.

I confess to experiencing no small measure of frustration during the early months in trying to bring a mass of seemingly unwieldy material under the harness. Initially, there appeared to be no rhyme or reason to the choices for listing: A passing reference to jerked meat or a streetcar is included and explained, but the Ácoma mesa in New Mexico, the “Rock” we celebrate in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, was omitted (Debbie and I added that one, incidentally). There were few sources offered for documentation, and sometimes even quotations appeared without identification. A book of this sort is never wholly satisfactory because a reader of the primary texts has no assurance that a particular item will or will not be listed. Moreover, John March’s selections may well be more perplexing than most. Encountering the word *cocktail* in a story, for example, would probably not send me on a search for explanatory information in a reader’s companion. The term is familiar to me, and I ignore it. If I were scanning the March volume, however, I would run across a fascinating discussion on the subject. Likewise, in reading *One of Ours*, I would not think to consult a reader’s companion when I encountered a reference to the War Department’s notification of the Wheelers that Claude had been killed in action. Nevertheless, a person scanning the handbook would find information about such procedures. Furthermore, a reader who wanted to know where John March got that information could find in his correspondence (in the Bennett-March papers in Red Cloud, Nebraska) a carbon copy of a letter to the Department of the Army in which March asks about official government practice in notifying families of World War I casualties.

In fairness, of course, there are many items in the fiction—particularly allusions to persons, places, literature, music, and the like—that a reader would expect to find and will find in the March book. However, the March companion can also stand fascinatingly by itself, almost as a primary text. More than that, it is very likely to send its readers back to Willa Cather’s works to see how she used a particular item. The book extracts references from the fiction, items that could easily be overlooked, and briefly casts the spotlight on them. In many ways, reading the March companion is like browsing in a good antique store. There is a lot of merchandise that might not appeal to a given browser, but there is always something for everyone and many things that can be found almost nowhere else; moreover, there are some rare, wonderful pieces tucked away in dark corners. All in all, the experience is interesting, holds much delight, and is well worth the trip. The doubter might sample entries such as CIGAR-BOX LID, CIGARETTE CARDS, CIRCLE, CUP FULL OF WATER, ELDERBLOW WINE, or EMINENT DEGREE OF THE FLOWERING TALENT as an introduction to the possibilities.

There were other frustrations, most of them associated with trying to verify as many of John March’s facts as we could. There were problems with apparent errors, differences between what our sources said and what the manuscript contained, sources that could not be found, the fact that history is constantly reinterpreted (see

ANARCHISTS, for example), and some questions about March's own interpretation of certain sources. Finally, there was the fact that many changes have occurred in the fifty years since March began his work. Buildings that stood may be standing no longer, cities have been reconfigured, businesses have gone under or started up, and so on.

Troublesome, too, was John March's habitual omission of first names, other than *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Miss*, or a similar title. Hundreds of historical figures, from artists to military leaders, and countless ordinary people, were identified by last name only, regardless of their particular fame or obscurity. The verification process was also made difficult by the sheer bulk of the work. We realized that we simply could not, in fewer than forty years, retrace all John March's steps. Consequently, some things we simply had to take on faith. Furthermore, we decided, if this was John March's book, it must remain his, and we must not unduly take liberties with it.

Thus, we discovered, in the very fact of his selection of certain items and omission of others, in his choice of what to tell and what not to tell, and in his decision about what was accorded two pages and what was given one line, John March was creating a subtext. That subtext not only represents what he was able to document amply and what he was not. It also constitutes, in a way, March's intellectual autobiography: his mental life and his way of seeing and interpreting events and other texts. In the early stages of editing, we used a heavy pencil and deleted freely. However, we ended by restoring some of the deletions and editing principally to make March's connections clearer, his assumptions plainer, and his prose smoother. Where we had begun by robbing March of a degree of the personal stamp that his work had acquired, we ended by restoring at least some of it.

Some things we did change, and I still have mixed feelings about having done so. March's invariable "Miss Cather" we changed to "Willa Cather" or just "Cather," mainly to avoid the distraction of the antiquated though once common form. We changed his use of titles like *Mr.* to first and last name (when we could find both) and then, after the first reference, to last name only. In so doing, we may have lost something distinctive in the process, an element of the good-humored gentleman who resides in John March's skin. We also undercut that gentleman in another matter: He nearly always listed women characters by their married names, regardless of how little or how much they might be identified in this way in the fiction. Thus, in the original manuscript, Clara Vavrika was listed under Ericson, Antonia Shimerda was listed under Cuzak, Nelly Deane was listed under Spinny, Cécile Auclair was listed under Charron, Enid Royce was listed under Wheeler, Alexandra Bergson was listed under Linstrum, and Constance Ogden was listed under Ellinger. In deference to the reader who is more accustomed to the maiden name, we shifted the listing accordingly and simply cross-listed the married name. In other ways, too, March unconsciously reduced women to a secondary role, identifying them mainly as they related to men, after the habit of his era. Children were typically identified as the offspring of their fathers, and women were described as the wives, daughters, sisters, or mothers of men. For example, March's entry for Margaret Elliot, of "Eric

Hermannson's Soul," identified her only as "the beautiful and talented sister of Wyllis Elliot," a character of much less significance than she. We exercised the editor's prerogative to correct some of these distortions, still conscious that in doing so we risked violating the sanctity of John March's authorship. The reader should remember, too, that John March had never heard of political correctness. A term like *Indian* is completely neutral in his text, and we seldom changed it.

The Margaret Elliot entry is an example, too, of another problem. Typically, John March entered extremely brief character identifications in his manuscript, even of major characters, and sometimes they were a bit cryptic. Thus, a character so prominent as Antonia might have been described simply as the Harlings's hired girl and Anton Cuzak's wife. For major characters, we enlarged on his descriptions and tried to give a clearer sense of a character's role and significance. Midway through the work we discovered that John March had kept a voluminous card file containing extensive notes on many characters but had not incorporated the notes into his manuscript. We began using his notes as we constructed character descriptions from the fiction. Determining early on that characters were not the only entries that needed to be described by their relevance to the fiction, we added information linking every entry in the manuscript with the fictional work from which it came. March had assumed that the reader would move only from the fiction to the handbook and thus would know how Cather had used each item. However, we were convinced that the March companion was going to be read separately, too, and we added the connections. Its wealth of information and insights and its illumination of one author's world make this a true reader's companion and inherently more than a reference guide to the fiction.

While John March was curiously brief on some items, notably the character descriptions, he was just as inexplicably lengthy on others. Some items that seemed of minor import to us were presented at great length. We tried to do some discreet cutting and condensing (this was necessary anyway to make the manuscript more manageable), but for the most part, we did not cut extensively for fear of taking the manuscript away from its owner. Then, too, sometimes the material was so interesting that its consequence to the fiction seemed almost a secondary consideration. We also deleted allusions to many unnamed characters with no prototypes who were accorded only passing mention in the fiction. Even so, most of the character names were retained, even for minor figures, because it was interesting to see the names that Cather used and to note that some were repeated in several texts.

In the course of describing some of the manuscript's limitations, a word of general caution might be appropriate: John March gathered his information from many sources, most of which carried their own particular slant. Whenever one is attempting to reduce mountains of information into a relatively brief representation of the whole, there is the danger of oversimplification and distortion. There is also a danger of misunderstanding the material or of rendering a rather personal interpretation. The graduate students who searched out facts and verified sources were sometimes perplexed at what was included in an entry and what was left out. We were similarly

perplexed at such things as a characterization of Louise Ireland ("Uncle Valentine") describing that exceptional being merely as the woman for whom Valentine Ramsay left his wife, or a statement indicating that ancient Native American cliff-dwellers lived in "caves." As one who has explored countless Anasazi ruins, I felt compelled to change "caves" to "recesses in canyon walls."

To describe the challenges of working with this manuscript is to create my own small distortion, perhaps suggesting that the flaws diminish the book's worth (which they do not) or that John March did not, in the end, win me over (which he did). If the truth be known, I actually began to weaken quite early, when the only way to deal with these challenges, short of abandoning the project, was to take them lightly and begin to see the personality of John March at work in the material. From this kindlier angle, what had seemed to be shortcomings became differences of opinion, oversights became matters of selection, and seeming flaws or distortions became charming distinctions. In other words, when I decided to let John March write the book he wrote instead of the one I myself would have written; when I realized that this was not just any book, but a record, too, of a man's mind and heart; and when I came to realize the priceless value of what he had done, and the fact that he had devoted his life to doing it, I forgave all, or nearly all. There was still this immense and impossible thing he had done, and now we had to get it ready for print.

From the beginning, in spite of my misgivings, I felt more than a little awe toward John March. He had searched out, and kept track of, thousands of items—and all without copying machines or computers (or graduate students, I might add). Moreover, I had some notion of what it had taken just to find the phrases from countless unnamed pieces of literature and song and to recognize and ferret out allusions that are sometimes buried to the chin. (In correspondence, Willa Cather confessed to planting some of her allusions very deep.) Nonetheless, at first I had no idea to what lengths he had gone to find the information he sought. That revelation came in June 1989 when I traveled to Red Cloud, Nebraska, where a few months earlier, the 84-year-old March had come with his many boxes of notecards and correspondence. Some notes and documents had not been saved, but many had, and he and Mildred Bennett sorted through the materials. What I found there transformed me into a believer.

I had known that Carrie Miner Sherwood was an important source of Red Cloud information for March, and I had seen enough of the Miner family, Willa Cather's lifelong friends, in the entries to know that Sherwood's knowledgeable influence was strong. (For the sake of balance, I deleted a number of incidental references to the Miners.) What I had not known until I saw his notes, however, was that John March had pieced together the histories of people, businesses, and events in Red Cloud and Webster County largely by searching the pages of local newspapers, mainly the Red Cloud *Chief* and the Webster County *Argus*. And he followed these matters through many years of change, growth, failure, whatever else time brought. The small-town press cannot be counted on for absolute truth and accuracy (the local dentist was mentioned at various times in these journals as A.H. Baird, H.A. Baird, and

H.H. Baird, for example), but nonetheless, that press is a fascinating source of information and local color. Furthermore, its dates of publication are usually reliable. March was tireless in reading and making notes on everything from the local bus service to and from the railroad depot to the multitudinous business enterprises that started and failed on Moon Block and elsewhere.

John March's tireless labors in Red Cloud were only a fragment of his research. For the non-Webster County materials, he went beyond what was available in published sources even though, having served as an editor with Collier's Encyclopedias and as a librarian at the University of Oklahoma, he had ample resources at his disposal and knew how to use them. Still, everything he found had to be copied or noted tediously by hand. He had no secretarial help either, and John March wrote personally to any and every source that he thought might help him with information. He typed every letter himself and personally paid for and affixed the postage, and he responded to every reply, thanking his correspondents for their trouble. Below is a small representation of John March's correspondence as he sought information for his book. Among many other sources, he wrote to the following:

A physician, presumably a dermatologist, about whether or not a person's face could actually turn green with envy.

The Colorado State Medical Society and the U.S. Department of Health, inquiring about "mountain fever."

The Museum of New Mexico about the whiteness of Isleta.

Naturalists, museums, agricultural agents, and national and state park personnel to learn the species of every wild plant mentioned in Cather's fiction.

The librarian at Arizona State University, asking for information identifying, for example, a Navajo forest or a canyon near Flagstaff.

The American-Swedish News Exchange, for information about the expression, "as stubborn as a Finn." The exchange staff wrote back that they had sent his request on to their "Stockholm office."

The American Medical Association, New York University College of Medicine, Colorado State Board of Examiners, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin Registrar, Nebraska Department of Health, Oklahoma Board of Medical Examiners, Nebraska State Historical Society, and Webster County Medical Adviser for the records of, and information about, Gilbert E. McKeeby (the prototype for Doctor Howard Archie in *The Song of the Lark*).

The Smithsonian Institution, inquiring about the altimeters used in World War I German fighter planes.

A variety of people about quilt patterns mentioned in several novels.

Relatives and friends of the Lucius Westermann family (prototypes of the Erlichs in *One of Ours*), for information about various family members whom Cather would have known. In this effort, March wrote literally dozens of letters.

Sleepy Hollow [furniture] Restorations and the National Association of Furniture Manufacturers, asking about “willow rocking chairs” and “folding lounges.”

County clerks all over the country, for birth, death, and marriage certificates of numerous models for Cather characters. Where March listed a cause of death, it was usually taken from a death certificate, as with Emma Tyndale Westermann, who is said to have died of “lobar pneumonia.”

The Kent Library (South Missouri State College) and an attorney in Kennett, Missouri, about contract labor in the swamps of southeast Missouri in the late 1800s.

The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service, regarding the cleanliness of badger burrows.

The Winchester-Western Division of the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation, regarding the Winchester .405 rifle.

The U.S. Post Office, for records of an 1856 Post Office named either Back Creek or Gore, Virginia.

The American Dental Association, about Martin Colbert’s bluish false tooth, which was set on a wooden pivot in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

The Missionary Research Library and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, regarding “Band of Hope” temperance organizations.

The Metropolitan Opera Association, regarding the “steel curtain” said by Cather to be on its stage.

A variety of French sources in Canada and France, the replies to which are in French.

Some of March’s correspondence led to continued exchanges and eventual meetings and conversations, as with Henri Esquerré, whose father was probably the model for Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor’s House*. Willa Cather knew the Esquerrés because they were friends of the McClungs, and Henri Esquerré’s epistolary characterization of both Cather and Jan Hambourg, the violinist whom Isabelle McClung married (which characterization March adopted and we modified), is anything but flattering.

It is obvious, too, that John March and Mildred Bennett collaborated in the search, sharing some materials while working on their separate projects.² I found other incredible things in John March’s boxes. In addition to his labors with the handbook, he was working on a bibliography of the primary Cather works, a vast enterprise that Joan Crane later undertook and completed, possibly without knowing that John March was on the same track. In addition, March has boxes of interpretive notes on the novels and short fiction: his summaries, ideas, and insights about the works. What he has done is simply staggering, and I returned from Red Cloud humbled, to say the least. Plans are currently afoot for the cataloguing and indexing of the voluminous March materials as well as those of the late Mildred

Bennett so that they will be accessible to scholars. One day, students of Cather will be able to explore in depth the underpinnings of many subjects that tickle their fancies as they read the March companion.

The manuscript took some getting used to. It was marked by phrases such as “born at” and diction that describes Nell Emerald’s prototype as a “flossy-looking procurer” and the elevateds as having been “enlarged, improved, and electrified”; textual identifications of persons only by occupation, such as “druggist”; a protective bias toward Cather; and required trips to the dictionary to learn meanings of words no longer current (such as *brevet* or *sutter*). What John March was probably not aware of, either, is that in addition to shaping a personal subtext, he was creating an historical subtext and a rather specialized, but more subtle, Willa Cather subtext. One could almost piece together a history of Quebec, the New Mexico territory, or pioneer Nebraska from the March volume, and one can learn a good deal about the way Willa Cather’s mind worked and how much she knew.

We have always known that Cather was exceptionally well read and well versed in the arts. I was not prepared, however, for the stunning enlightenment, delivered through the March manuscript, that beyond her impressive renaissance experience and accumulation of knowledge lay the fact that mountains of information stayed immediately accessible in her memory. She retained in copious detail not only places where she had lived and people she had known, but also things she had read, heard, and seen. As March identified allusion after allusion and corrected small misquotations or other errors, I may have thought to fault Cather for a misspelling, a careless misquotation, or an inaccuracy in a reference to a place, a painting, or a person. I soon swallowed my criticism, however, in the realization that she was working from memory with many of these things and had not gone to sources. Except where she clearly worked from historical documents, as in *Shadows on the Rock* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather carried her allusive materials in her head. Henry James defined the artist as one on whom nothing is lost, and it appears to me that Cather lost almost nothing, ever—except, of course, her patience. True, she should have been more fussy about her sources, but I remember reading her response to someone who had complained about a misquotation in one of her novels. Cather’s reply, which was so typical of her, was that she assumed that editorial staffs were paid to check such things.

There are other things to be learned about Cather in the handbook. For example, she seems to have been interested in mines and mining, for her western novels and stories are full of references to that industry. In preparing his book, John March summarized the history of many a mining town. Finally, I cannot resist adding one more little piece of trivia. As I worked with the manuscript I became pointedly aware of just why one of the first matters of business in any newly organized town is the establishment of a fire department. I have not made a count, but there must be several hundred buildings whose burnings are chronicled in this volume. It appears that in the periods in which Willa Cather’s fiction is set, scarcely a building escaped the flames, and some went up in smoke two or three times. It gives one pause.

All in all, in spite of the blood, sweat, and tears that my associates and I have invested in the work, this is essentially John March's book; we have tried to aid the reader without intrusively altering the product. March is not the same man for me that he was when I began the project. What has happened along the way can perhaps best be described as the growth of respect, admiration, and yes, even love. With characteristic candor March made this observation about the process that had already absorbed more than a few years of his life: "Everyone has their own ideas how to do research. I'd say our methods have paid off pretty well. Just takes patience and determination and guts."³ Without question, John March had all three qualities in abundance.

Marilyn Arnold

NOTES

1. "The Estate of Our Independence," in *The Incomplete Pogo* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 191.
2. Mildred Bennett may have been the one who hand-verified hundreds of fictional citations on John March's notecards, modifying a good many of them.
3. Letter to Mildred R. Bennett, May 13, 1960.