

The Intentional Tourist  
by Jarrod McCartney  
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“Making a Place: A Long History of Red Cloud” is an exhibit that has been, well, long in the making. Now you’ll get a chance to see it in person during a free Open House at the Farmers & Merchants Bank on Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup> from 3pm to 6pm. If you’re reading this after that date, then simply contact the Cather Foundation at 402-746-2653 and ask to take a tour or book a tour online at [willacather.org/tours](http://willacather.org/tours).

Why am I taking up precious space talking about this exhibit? Because it gives Red Cloud another striking tourism destination and a tasteful museum. It also gives locals another great opportunity to be a tourist in their hometown. It should make just about anyone visiting it proud to come from or be in Red Cloud.

“Making a Place: A Long History of Red Cloud” invites visitors to explore Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Lady*. The exhibit includes Pawnee culture; Silas and Lyra Garber—in life and as portrayed as Captain and Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady*; town-making and homesteading; banking and the Panic of 1893; and early preservation efforts led by the National Willa Cather Center's founder, Mildred Bennett.

Together with the recent completion of restoration work on the Cather Childhood Home, Red Cloud has made a significant leap forward in terms of the quality of its tourism attractions. But it won’t stop there. Grant funds and donations have enabled work on a variety of buildings, including the Pavelka Farmstead near Bladen and my personal favorite, the Burlington Depot.

Ashley Olson, Executive Director of the National Willa Cather Center, explains the importance of the forthcoming Depot exhibit: “The Burlington Depot is a crucial backdrop to telling the story of Willa Cather’s initial encounters with the Nebraska frontier and its people.” She provides the following preview: “through this exhibit, the railroad's role in the development of Red Cloud and the settlement of the Plains will be explored. The exhibit will incorporate audible soundtracks, vivid imagery, and hands-on activities for students and family groups.”

In short, it will be a cool place that you can take your kids. We lack places like that, frankly. The improvement of these sites helps ensure that Red Cloud will be a viable tourist destination for years to come. If you’re a local, I strongly recommend that you check them out and help us spread the word about how great they are.

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Though successful in gathering attention and tourist dollars, Nebraska Tourism’s “Honestly, it’s not for everyone” slogan fell flat with most locals. It was an objectively great marketing campaign that lifted us from being ranked #50 for states visitors considered vacationing all the way up to #41. That’s actually a pretty remarkable breakthrough in a world that’s oversaturated with advertising. But it’s just not a slogan Nebraskans can get excited about. It’s what you would

say about something that's an acquired taste, like anchovies or lutefisk. No one wants to think of themselves as being like lutefisk. It can also play into stereotypes about rural states not being welcoming. We're better than lutefisk and we welcome everyone! I have some more in depth [thoughts about this slogan over on Substack](#) if you want to check it out. Send me your ideas for a new slogan too: [jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com](mailto:jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com)