

The Intentional Tourist
by Jarrod McCartney
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A new year is a great time to reflect upon how far we've come over the last 12 months. 2023 was a particularly productive year. It's impossible to adequately cover all the important things that happened in 2023, so I'm going to limit myself to a list. Here's the Top 10 Heritage Tourism Development and Red Cloud Community Fund (RCCF) stories for 2023:

10. Willa Cather's 150th birthday
9. Wayne Gerlach honored at Red Cloud Street Car Days Parade
8. Hardwick Park Restoration Plans unveiled
7. Red Cloud Creative District Certification
6. Red Cloud named one of the Top 15 Small Towns to Visit
5. RCCF raises more than \$96,000 during September Month of Giving
4. "Making a Place: A Long History of Red Cloud" exhibit opens at the Farmers & Merchants Bank
3. Willa Cather Childhood Home Reopens after 16 month restoration
2. 3rd story added back to the Potter Block at the future site of the Hotel Garber
1. Willa Cather statue unveiled in National Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol

Cather leadership held nearly 90 events nationwide and engaged with more than 50,000 people. Gerlach, 98, is the oldest living combat veteran in Webster County. Hardwick Park will honor all branches of the military and bring life back to a park that was originally established as a WWI monument.

The Red Cloud Creative District has already brought in \$260,000 in grant funding to the community. Red Cloud's "Top 15" designation puts it in the company of tourism destinations like Mackinac Island, MI. RCCF's fundraising prowess has exceeded \$110K for the year! The new exhibits at the Farmers & Merchants Bank and (eventually) at the Burlington Depot site dispel myths that Red Cloud is only interesting if you're really into Willa Cather as both sites cover a lot of ground with the region's railroad, business, and settlement history.

Restoration of the Childhood Home isn't flashy, but it will allow us to show the home to new audiences and the work also shored up the place that is the reason why we even exist as a tourism destination. Much needed repairs to the foundation and roof were made. Precious artifacts like the wallpaper in Willa's attic room are now better protected. The Hotel Garber is transforming the look and feel of downtown and will soon be a center of hospitality, creativity, and commerce. Finally, the elevation of Cather and by extension the Red Cloud community with her inclusion at the National Statuary Hall is impossible to quantify. It will have ripple effects for years to come in terms of continued interest in this community.

It's a testament to how busy we were this year that I couldn't find space on this list for Jeff MacGregor's feature on Red Cloud in the Smithsonian Magazine or RCCF's first November

banquet and awards ceremony. It will be difficult to keep up this pace in 2024, but you can rest assured that we will try our best and we would love for you to get involved.