

## *The Intentional Tourist*

by Jarrod McCartney

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Red Cloud was recently selected as one of the Top 15 Small Towns to Visit in 2023 by the *Smithsonian Magazine*. My column this week is inspired by being selected for the list. Sometimes I hear people claim that there's nothing to do here. I'd like to dispel that myth by listing 15 of my favorite things to do, eat, and see in Red Cloud. Please note that this list is not comprehensive, is entirely subjective, and lots of cool things got left off. I'm skipping all of the major Willa Cather sites because you probably know about those (go to [willacather.org](http://willacather.org) to learn more if you don't).

### ***Baseball Room at the Webster County Historical Museum***

Learn more about Red Cloud's spectacular baseball history in this room that includes artifacts from and articles about Cy Young, Dazzy Vance, Clarence Mitchell, and other local legends.

### ***Boards at On the Brix***

Red Cloud's wine & craft cocktail bar also has food. S'mores boards. Charcuterie. Chips & queso. I shouldn't need to say more.

### ***E-bike rentals at Back Alley Bicycles***

I'm fibbing here as I haven't actually rented one of these yet, but I think they're pretty dang cool. And so is the whole store, which features outdoor adventure gear and locally produced products.

### ***Fall/Harvest***

There's a buzz in the air with harvest traffic, hunters, and the beautiful foliage. Simply the best time of year to be in Red Cloud in my opinion.

### ***Friday Night Lights & First Fridays***

All local sporting events are fun, but there's something special about being outdoors on a crisp Friday night at the football field. As Jeff MacGregor put it in another *Smithsonian Magazine* article about Red Cloud: "On Friday night, the high school football game is an island of light in a sea of darkness." Fridays are getting even better now because of "First Friday" art and food events connected to shows at the Red Cloud Opera House (see below).

### ***Lions' Club Pancake Feed/Fly-In Breakfast***

Located at the Red Cloud Airport, this is my personal favorite event during the weekend full of fun that is Street Car Days (Aug. 4-6 in 2023!). When the Lions break out their giant oval grille, stuff gets real.

### ***Red Cloud Opera House Shows***

There's a lot of great talent that has graced the Opera House stage where Willa Cather gave a high school graduation speech way back in 1890. Now, it's a great time for locals to unwind, listen to

great music from cover bands, learn about different cultures, and get exposed to more highbrow offerings like original plays and sometimes actual opera singers (like my aunt Sally—Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>!).

### ***Pop-up Chinese food at McDole's Kitchen***

I begin to salivate as soon as I see a social media blast announcing they'll be making General Tsao's Chicken, Beef & Broccoli, and more. The McDoles don't short-change you either—if you can restrain yourself, you'll get enough for multiple meals.

### ***Raspberry Cream Honey from Abundant Life Honey***

Being able to buy locally produced honey is a blessing in and of itself, but this special concoction is on another level.

### ***Rural Roadtrippin'***

Take the Republican River Road from Road 43 over in Franklin County all the way to just south of Guide Rock and you'll get to take in some beautiful scenery and, if you know where to look, some great history connected to the Pawnee & Zebulon Pike. There's also a lot of history and beauty to be found along Road 1600 from US Hwy 136 at Amboy (near the Starke Round Barn) and on up into the Village of Cowles. On this route you'll find the Latta Mansion, home of the former Onion King of Webster County, as well the Elm Creek Wildlife Management Area, a gravel pit and—if you know where to look—the Malick Park WPA Fountain ruins and the field where Cy Young once played. Veer west at Road L and you can drive by the enormous feedlot run by the Gottsch Cattle Company. My personal favorite route? Get off the River Road southwest of Inavale and take the Walnut Creek Rd (aka Road 300 in Nebraska) all the way into Smith County, KS (turn east at Road 630 to get back to US Hwy 281. Head back north to check out the vistas and native prairie flora and fauna at the 612 acre Willa Cather Memorial Prairie, right on the state line.). A road trip out to Wagner Cemetery is also pretty great.

### ***Shopping Extravaganza***

The Red Cloud Chamber of Commerce's annual holiday shopping event occurs the Tuesday before Thanksgiving every year. Red Cloud's beautiful historic downtown lights up as local businesses hold special hours and the Chamber organizes special experiences like horse-drawn carriage rides.

### ***Starke Round Barn Manure Trough***

Red Cloud's one and only rollercoaster ride. Not really. But it's a cool feature in a building full of them. The Round Barn is also one of the largest round barns in the world and likely the largest still being used for agricultural purposes (luckily manure transfer is not a part of the Round Barn experience these days).

### ***Summer Ball Programs***

It's remarkable that the volunteer groups who organize these schedules can put them together and still retain their sanity. But I'm supremely thankful that they do, not only so Red Cloud youth can play t-ball, softball, and baseball, but so that I can enjoy several evenings at beautiful Illian Field subsisting on a diet of sloppy nachos and red Gatorade.

### ***Tacos Al Pastor, Beans, and Rice at Juan's Bar & Grill***

This is my go to meal when I go to Juan's—which is not often enough. The beans are particularly excellent. MacGregor also gave Juan's his seal of approval, noting their "A+ Cheeseburger and fries."

### ***Willa Cather's Writing Desk***

There are about 500 Cather related items I could have put on this list across multiple locations, but this is the one that moves me the most. Perhaps it's because I still consider myself a writer, first and foremost, but it's just cool to see where Willa might have written some of her best known works. Come see the desk and other artifacts and displays in the FREE *American Bittersweet* Museum exhibit next to the bookstore in the National Willa Cather Center.

***Bonus:*** 3 Pig Pizza at Fat Fox's; Red Cloud Cemetery (Donald Stratton, Silas Garber, and Cather Family gravesites); Indian Princess Hill, Indian Creek and Narrows WMAs; WPA Murals at the Red Cloud Post Office; Corrina Hubl's grain bowls at Hometown Market; Munch baskets and memorabilia at the Palace Lounge & Steakhouse; Silas Garber's Civil War Sword at the Webster County Historical Museum; Mark Dahle's Stoplight paintings; Christmas parties at Red Cloud Animal Health Clinic; conversations with Lila Rupperecht at Guys & Gals Hair; thunderstorms; sunsets; frozen hot chocolate at The Corner Nook; Village Pharmacy's retro coffee/ice cream shop; Twisted Petal's storefront; everything that you like that I forgot.

***Coming soon:*** the Red Cloud Golf Course once I actually use the new clubs I got for Father's Day; The Hotel Garber; new streets and sidewalks downtown!