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Kathleen Danker

South Dakota State University, Kathleen.Danker@SDSTATE.EDU

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THE INFLUENCE OF WILLA CATHER'S FRENCH-CANADIAN NEIGHBORS IN NEBRASKA IN *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP* AND *SHADOWS ON THE ROCK*

KATHLEEN DANKER

You see, there are all those early memories; one cannot get another set; one has but those.

*Shadows on the Rock*¹

Will a Cather's high regard for French traditions and culture is reflected in many of her writings, including the novels *O Pioneers!* (1913), *One of Ours* (1922), *The Professor's House* (1925), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), and her last, unfinished narrative set in Avignon. Of these works, readers sometimes think of *Death*

Comes for the Archbishop and *Shadows on the Rock* as her French Catholic novels because of the heritage and faith of their main characters. Edith Lewis, Cather's long-time companion, recorded that, for Cather herself, writing the second of these two books served as a kind of continuation of the "Catholic feeling and tradition" of the first.²

French culture can be seen not only in the religious beliefs of the characters and the architecture of their churches but in the domestic life Cather portrays in these two works. The devotion of the main characters to their families and to the traditional arts of gardening, preparing food, and keeping well-ordered households, and the zest with which they share food, wine, stories, and celebrations with friends and neighbors, reveal the influence of their Gallic background.

Along with their descriptions of French Catholicism and culture, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* are similar

Kathleen Danker teaches at South Dakota State University. She has published on the works of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Linda Hasselstrom, and Willa Cather. Ms. Danker is currently working on translating the Winnebago trickster tales of the late Feliz White Sr. of Winnebago, Nebraska.

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in that both appear to be exceptions to Cather's well-known statement that "most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen."³ It seems that the subjects and settings of these novels derive entirely from sources Cather encountered and places she visited after leaving Red Cloud, Nebraska, in 1890 at age sixteen: from historical texts, from her study of literature, art, and music, and from her adult travels in France, Quebec, and the southwestern United States.

Therefore, it is something of a puzzle that Cather referred to writing *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as "like a happy vacation from life, a return to childhood, to early memories"⁴ and that Edith Lewis, in describing the genesis of *Shadows on the Rock*, recalled that at her first view of Quebec Cather was "overwhelmed by the flood of memory, recognition, surmise it called up."⁵ To what memories and recognitions do these accounts refer?

The architecture of Quebec no doubt reminded Cather of that of northern France, but there are other possible interpretations of Lewis's remarks. Cather biographers E.K. Brown and James Woodress have noted that both *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* reflect Cather's continuing interest in pioneer experience such as she first encountered in Nebraska, what Brown calls "the story of man's capacity to establish dominion over the immutable."⁶ Brown also feels that Cather's depiction of Quebec and its inhabitants in *Shadows on the Rock* is colored by her nostalgia for the family life she had known as a child, that the "novel in which Willa Cather traveled farthest from Red Cloud drew most of its emotional power from her memories of life there."⁷

Similarly, L. Brent Bohlke has written that "although [*Death Comes for the Archbishop*] is set in the American Southwest, it has many deep roots in the Nebraska of Cather's early years."⁸ In particular, Bohlke believes Cather's portrayal of Bishop Latour in the novel to be influenced by her admiration and affection for two Episcopalian clergymen: her bishop, the Right Reverend George Allen Beecher, and

her pastor, John Mallory Bates, the rector of Grace Church in Red Cloud.

However, Cather's experience of pioneer life in Nebraska during her youth was not confined to the town of Red Cloud. Indeed, it is likely that some of the childhood memories that informed her writing of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* were more directly French. Woodress characterizes Cather as "a Francophile since early childhood" and cites as sources of this early attraction stories she heard about France from Mrs. Love in Virginia and Mrs. Wiener in Red Cloud, novels she read by French authors, and "the *joie de vivre* of the French Canadian settlement north of Red Cloud."⁹

This settlement of immigrants from the province of Quebec was located only four miles northwest of the homestead where Cather and her family first lived in Nebraska, so Cather's acquaintance with it probably dates from her earliest years in the state. Considerably before the age of fifteen, she could have begun to acquire memories and material from this source about French Catholic pioneers and their church, clergy, community, and traditions on which she could draw to enrich her later writings about the French experience in North America.

Between the mid-1870s and mid-1890s, over sixty French-Canadian families, primarily from villages around Montreal, emigrated to homesteads in an area of south central Nebraska straddling the county line between northwestern Webster and northeastern Franklin counties, close to the head of the Little Blue River. Part of a widespread movement to the United States from the province of Quebec in the nineteenth century, they left their country primarily because of a scarcity of land and employment opportunities.¹⁰

One such early settler, Desiré Genereux, came to Nebraska in 1874 from the vicinity of St. Ambroise de Kildare in Quebec. He made the last part of the trip in a covered wagon in which he continued to live until he laid claim to a homestead south of the Little Blue River in Webster County's Harmony township.

Genereux's wife, Cordelia, and oldest child, Joseph, came to join him the next year, and he shortly thereafter built a blacksmith shop and a sod house. By 1883, when nine-year-old Willa Cather moved with her family from Virginia to neighboring Catherton township, Genereux had constructed a frame house for his growing family, and there were about thirty-five other French-Canadian families in the area. Many homesteaded close to Genereux in a settlement that came to be called Wheatland after the name of the nearest post office.¹¹

How well did Willa Cather get to know her French-Canadian neighbors? There is little direct evidence. She told an interviewer in 1915 that as a child she spent time visiting with the immigrant families in her area and would ride home in what she termed "the most unreasonable state of excitement," feeling as if she "had got inside another person's skin."¹² And in an essay published in the *Nation* in 1923, she wrote that on Sundays during her youth it was possible to drive to churches where services were conducted in Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, German, or Czech, or to "go to the French Catholic settlement in the next county and hear a sermon in French."¹³ When Cather died, the town newspaper in that settlement printed an announcement of her death that said she had been "well known by some of the pioneers in this community. As a young girl she visited many homes in the French, German, Bohemian and Scandinavian communities."¹⁴

Beyond this meager information, however, there is indirect evidence that Cather was quite familiar with the French Canadians living in Webster and Franklin Counties. This evidence appears in the picture she gives of the village of Sainte-Agnès and its inhabitants in her 1913 novel *O Pioneers!* Cather took the majority of the French names she used in this novel, including those of Amédée Chevalier, Xavier Chevalier, Hector Baptiste Chevalier, Moïse Marcel, Raoul Marcel, and Doctor Paradis, from a mix of first and last names of actual inhabitants of the area; and her use of phonetic spellings (e.g., "Alphosen" in the 1913

edition for "Alphonsine") indicates that she had learned at least some of them orally.¹⁵ There were also French Canadians around Wheatland named Uklid, Cecelia, Clutilda, Pierre, Jean Baptiste, and Alphonse, the same or variants of names that Cather used for fictional characters in *Shadows on the Rock*.¹⁶

One of the most striking aspects of Cather's treatment of the French Canadians in *O Pioneers!* is her picture of French community and personal life ordered around the Catholic Church—its faith, its celebrations, its buildings, and its clergy. Historical accounts, church records, newspaper files, and family stories about the French Canadians in Nebraska reveal the historical bases of this aspect of the novel. These accounts also depict religious values and cultural traditions similar to ones Cather portrayed again in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*.

Both of these later novels emphasize the importance of the church and clergy, especially French clergy, to Catholics in frontier societies. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Bishop Latour organizes a new vicariate in New Mexico, an area of the Southwest that has long been neglected by Rome. Similarly, Father Vaillant is called to serve the gold rush camps of Colorado where "young men were adrift in a lawless society without spiritual guidance" and "old men died from exposure and mountain pneumonia, with no one to give them the last rites of the Church."¹⁷ The two men succeed in laying the foundations of strong Catholic dioceses in these areas through tireless work and dedication and because, as a Spanish cardinal and an American bishop agree in the novel's prologue, French priests make the best missionaries, being "great organizers" (9).

In *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather symbolizes this French ability to create an ordered spiritual life for the faithful in an untamed environment in the person of Quebec's Bishop Laval. When he faithfully rises from his bed every day to ring the bell for five o'clock mass, the old bishop begins "an orderly progression of activities and [holds] life together on the

rock, though the winds lashed it and the billows of snow drove over it" (105).

Cather describes the church of Sainte-Agnès in *O Pioneers!* as giving similar meaning and order to the life of the young French-Canadian farmer Amédée Chevalier. It is "the scene of his most serious moments and his happiest hours. He had played and wrestled and sung and courted under its shadow . . . had proudly carried his baby there to be christened" (226). This depiction in the novel of the importance of the Catholic Church to the lives of the French Canadians in Nebraska is true to life. The church and missionary priests that served these settlers played an essential role in their community.

Like Father Duchesne in *O Pioneers!*, who comments in French on Marie Shabata's success at telling fortunes for a church fair, most of the priests who served in the early years of the parish spoke the language of their parishioners. When Wheatland became an independent parish in 1880, it received as its first resident pastor a French-speaking clergyman, Rev. Emmanuel Rhullier. Prior to that time, a missionary from Hastings, Nebraska had traveled to the area around twice a year to say mass in Desiré Genereux's sod house. With the coming of Father Rhullier, the families in the area built the first Saint Ann's church (originally spelled Sainte Anne) at Wheatland in 1880. A 20- by 30-foot frame structure, it was erected on a windswept prairie hill, part of five acres Genereux donated to the diocese¹⁸ (79).

This small church became the focus around which the French-Canadian community grew. In it, babies were baptized, first communions and confirmations were celebrated, marriages were performed, and funerals were held.¹⁹ In 1885, the post office was renamed St. Ann and transferred to a general store owned by Jean Baptiste LaPorte that was located near the church. In addition to this store and Genereux's blacksmith shop, the Wheatland/St. Ann community also boasted a doctor who practiced out of a small office on an adjoining farm.²⁰

Father Rhullier left in 1884, and St. Ann's reverted to being a mission. In 1885, its parishioners created a record of the importance they placed on the services of the clergy when seventeen of them signed a letter to their bishop requesting that another French-speaking pastor be sent to them as soon as possible. They pointed out that there were now forty-two Catholic families and eight single men (almost all of them French Canadian) in the parish, that they lived thirty-five miles from the nearest priest in Hastings without good telegraph or rail connections, and that "people in such a situation could die without the Sacraments."²¹

Like Father Vaillant, who as Bishop of Denver sleeps on a mattress of straw and takes his meals on oilcloth-covered planks (*Death*, 260), Bishop Latour, who discovers his episcopal residence in Santa Fe to be "an old adobe house, much out of repair" (*Death*, 33), and Bishop Laval, who lives "in naked poverty," having given away his possessions and revenues to needy people and parishes (*Shadows*, 73), the early priests of St. Ann's endured rough conditions and sacrificed their personal comfort and fortunes for the good of the parish.

Father Rhullier received a salary of around twelve dollars per month in 1883, lived in the tiny church, and ate his meals at the Genereux farm. His successor, Rev. O. M. Turgeon, also boarded with parishioners and lived in the church until he built himself a sod house in 1886. At the same time, he enlarged the church building, had a confessional made, and bought a bell. The next pastor, Rev. S. Arpin, was given a salary of approximately twenty dollars a month in 1888 out of which he paid church as well as private expenses. He also loaned the church \$100 of his own money which was never repaid.²² Similarly, around 1891, Rev. E. Cusson and his relative Francois Payette promised to provide what the parishioners could not raise to build a new frame St. Ann's church in the nearby town of Campbell. Father Cusson said that "he did not care whether the money was ever going to be paid back as it was well

employed for the honor of God in the Campbell church."²³

Moving the location of St. Ann's church to Campbell had been a matter of controversy in the parish since 1886. At that time, the Burlington and Missouri Railroad had bypassed the Wheatland/St. Ann settlement as a site for a depot as it expanded its tracks westward along the south side of the Little Blue River. Instead, it established a station just over the Franklin County line to the northwest of Wheatland and named the new village that grew up around it Campbell after a railroad superintendent. Campbell soon had a sizable number of French-Canadian residents but was never entirely French. From its beginnings, it was comprised of around a third French Canadians and a third German Russians, with the remaining third made up of Scandinavians, Irish, Czechoslovakians, Americans from back East, and others.²⁴ Nonetheless, it is clearly Campbell, rather than the predominately French Wheatland, that Cather used as the model for the village of Sainte-Agnès in *O Pioneers!*

After 1886, Father Turgeon and some parishioners living north of the Little Blue River (a bridge had been built at Campbell) came out in favor of moving the church to the new town, while those south of the river, including those at Wheatland, opposed it.²⁵ From the resulting dispute, Cather may have first learned that the establishment of the Catholic Church in frontier areas entailed disagreements and power struggles such as she later described in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*. She must have known about the controversy embroiling the French-Canadian community because it was reported in the *Red Cloud Webster County Argus* on 25 August 1887, which stated that the situation had "culminated in a small riot . . . when the priest had about a dozen of his parishioners arrested on the charge of assault."²⁶

Father Turgeon went ahead and built a new church in Campbell in 1887, but the majority of his parishioners refused to attend it, and he left St. Ann's before the year was over. His

successor, Father Arpin, did not say mass in this new building; it was used thereafter as a social hall, perhaps for functions like the supper, fair, and auction described in *O Pioneers!* as taking place in the basement of the church of Sainte-Agnès.²⁷

People from the Wheatland area, some of whom Cather likely knew, may have regarded Father Turgeon in the same way that she describes Euclide Auclair feeling about Bishop de Saint-Vallier in *Shadows on the Rock*: "He did not doubt the young Bishop's piety but he very much doubted his judgment. He was rash and precipitate, he was volatile. . . . He liked to reorganize and change things for the sake of change, to make a fine gesture. He destroyed the old before he had clearly thought out the new" (122).

Like Father Turgeon of St. Ann's, Bishop Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* encounters difficulties in enforcing his pastoral authority. When he first reaches Santa Fe, the seat of his diocese, "his flock [will] have none of him" until he goes to fetch his credentials from the Bishop of Durango (20). Later, when the Mexican priests Padre Martínez and Father Lucero form their own schismatic church rather than accept his reforms, most of their congregations follow them in defying the French bishop (159).

The cathedral that Bishop Latour builds in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was modeled on the French-style cathedral constructed by the historical Bishop Lamy in Santa Fe. But before Cather learned of the existence of this cathedral or of Bishop Laval's seminary in Quebec, she was aware, from the example of the parish of St. Ann in Nebraska, what a strong significance church buildings held for pioneer Catholic communities and clergy. She knew from her youth how much drama was involved in establishing the house of God in a new land.

The story of church construction in St. Ann's parish continued after Cather left the area to attend college in 1890, but it is clear from her description of the architecture of the church of Sainte-Agnès in *O Pioneers!* that

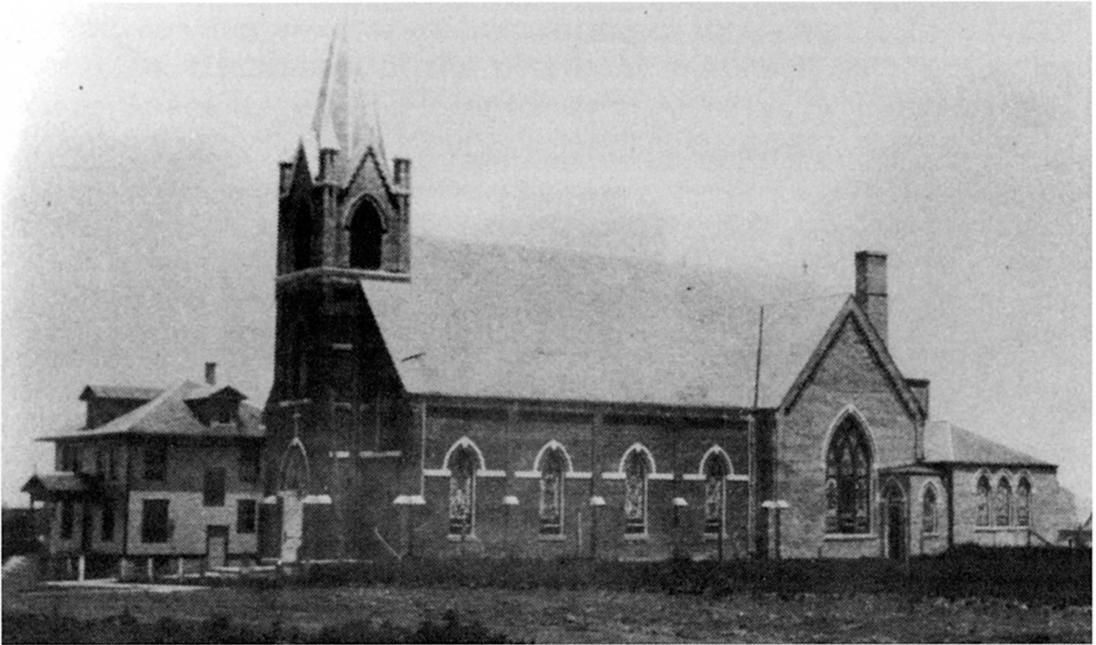


FIG. 1. *New Saint Ann's church and rectory, 1910.* From *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial Jubilee, 1883-1983.* Campbell, Nebraska: n.p., 1983, p. 6.

she kept up her acquaintance with St. Ann's when she came back to Red Cloud for lengthy summer visits. When Father Cusson successfully accomplished the move into town in the early 1890s, the Wheatland church was dismantled and its lumber used to construct a parsonage beside a new frame church in Campbell. The site of the Wheatland church reverted back to Desiré Genereux, but most of it was purchased from him shortly thereafter to become St. Ann's Cemetery.²⁸ In *O Pioneers!*, Cather describes this cemetery, where Amédée Chevalier's friends see Pierre Séguin digging the young man's grave, as "the graveyard half a mile east of the town [where] the first frame church of the parish had stood" (227).

The next two French pastors at St. Ann's, Rev. Louis Poitras and Rev. F. X. Santerre, like Father Vaillant in Colorado, ran into difficulty over church finances. As a result of

this problem, attendance at mass fell off to the extent that in November 1896, Father Santerre locked up the church and parsonage and went back to Canada. Before leaving, he entrusted some of the church and household goods to the care of an area farmer, parishioner Alexis Forest. Four months later, Rev. August Rausch received permission from the Bishop to recover these articles from Forest.²⁹ This retrieval is reminiscent, in miniature, of the scene in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in which Father Vaillant "restore[d] to God" paraphernalia of the mass which has been kept for generations in the safekeeping of a family of Pima Indian converts in Arizona (207).

About 1902, Father Rausch convinced his congregation, which had grown to sixty-five families, nearly all of them French Canadian, to replace Father Cusson's frame structure with a large red-brick church, one intended "for the future," as Bishop Latour says of his plans

for his cathedral (*Death*, 244). Father Rausch apparently was like Cather's Father Vaillant in his ability to endear himself to his flock. Parishioners described him as a "kindly old pastor," who "left a good and enduring record of kind deeds and fine accomplishments." Like Father Rhullier and others of his predecessors, and like the priests in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*, he not only served his own parish but engaged in periodic journeys out to minister to missions without resident priests.³⁰

Misfortune seemed to plague Father Rausch's new church, however. In October 1903, its general contractor, Louis Soucie, was killed when he fell from a scaffold while constructing the steeple.³¹ Father Rausch himself died in January 1904 shortly before the church was completed and was buried within, like Bishop Latour in his cathedral. Also like Latour, who in his old age dictated information about the early missions of his diocese, "facts which he had come upon by chance and feared would be forgotten" (*Death*, 276), Father Rausch in 1898 wrote a history of St. Ann's which preserved a record of the early days of the parish for later generations.³²

In January 1909, five years after Father Rausch's death, fire destroyed the St. Ann church and parsonage. All that Rev. J. A. Sirois, the pastor at the time, was able to rescue from the flames were the blessed sacrament and some church records, perhaps including Father Rausch's history, which, at any rate, survived. The parishioners, aided by some of their non-Catholic neighbors, began at once to rebuild. Father Sirois announced, "Far from being discouraged, we look forward to the day when a new church, more beautiful even than the former one, shall rear its spire proudly above the town of Campbell."³³

According to a local history, "the rebuilding of the church began immediately on the same walls that remained and the sacristies, larger sanctuary and a brick tower were added. It was built on a French model and on the plan of a Latin Cross. A graceful spire circled by 4 smaller spires adorns the belfry. Beautiful

stained glass windows and stations of the cross, titled in French, adorn the walls."³⁴ This new building, inscribed "Eglise Sainte Anne" over the front door, was finished in 1910.

Cather could have used either the first or the second brick St. Ann's church in Campbell as the model for that of Sainte-Agnès in *O Pioneers!*, which she describes as a "high, narrow, red-brick building, with tall steeple and steep roof, [under which] the little town of Sainte-Agnès was completely hidden away at the foot of the hill" (189). She would have had ample time to visit the first church in either 1905 or 1907 during the summer months that she spent in Red Cloud.³⁵ She could have seen the second church in the summer of 1912 during the five-week visit to Red Cloud in which, watching a wheat harvest, she was inspired with the idea for the story of Emil and Marie's ill-fated love.³⁶

Although the church on which Cather modeled the one in *O Pioneers!* was not built until after she was an adult, some of what she describes happening in it dates from her childhood. The bishop's visit to Sainte-Agnès to administer the sacrament of confirmation is apparently based on an occasion that took place in 1881 when Bishop James O'Connor of Omaha, the Apostolic Vicar of the recently created vicariate of Nebraska, traveled to the first, frame church of St. Ann at Wheatland to confirm twenty-five French-Canadian adults and children.³⁷ This 1881 confirmation ceremony was a memorable event in the early days of St. Ann's, and it seems likely that Cather may have heard about it as a child soon after her arrival in Webster County in 1883.

Cather set her confirmation ceremony in the late 1890s in a red-brick village church, the prototype of which was not actually built until the twentieth century. Her model for the occasion probably was the 1881 confirmation ceremony in Wheatland because of the detail of the bishop's carriage being escorted into Sainte-Agnès. In 1881, Bishop O'Connor could have taken the train from Omaha only as far as Blue Hill, a village some seventeen

miles to the east and north of Wheatland. Railway service to Campbell was completed six years later in 1887, shortly after the town itself was founded, so an episcopal visit taking place after that date would not have required travel by carriage.³⁸

One of Cather's most vivid visual images in *O Pioneers!* is that of "the cavalcade of forty French boys who . . . out among the wheatfields in the morning sun . . . [on] galloping hoofs . . . five miles east of Sainte-Agnès . . . met the bishop in his open carriage attended by two priests. Like one man the boys swung off their hats in a broad salute, and bowed their heads as the handsome old man lifted his two fingers in the episcopal blessing. The horsemen closed about the carriage like a guard" (225-27). In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* she creates a strikingly similar scene. When Bishop Latour goes to make an official call on Padre Martinez in Taos, Cather writes that the padre and "a cavalcade of a hundred men or more, Indians and Mexican, [rode] out to welcome their Bishop with shouting and musketry. As the horsemen approached, Padre Martinez himself . . . rode up to the Bishop and reining in his black gelding, uncovered his head in a broad salutation, while his escort surrounded the churchmen and fired their muskets into the air" (141-42). Although each is specific to the narrative in which it appears, the two passages contain distinct correspondences that may have had their genesis in an oral account of Bishop O'Connor's 1881 visit to Wheatland told to Cather in her youth by parishioners of St. Ann's.

It is possible that Cather may have heard more than this one story from her Catholic neighbors concerning the learned, aristocratic, handsome Bishop O'Connor who in 1876 had helped found the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* in Pennsylvania before reluctantly accepting the vacant see in Nebraska. Of him it could be said, as Cather later wrote about Bishop Latour, that "it would have seemed that a priest with [his] exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome per-

son, and delicate perceptions all have their effect; and that [on the frontier] a man of much rougher type would have served God well enough" (*Death*, 253-54).

Like Bishop Latour's, Bishop O'Connor's vicariate was enormous. From 1876 to 1885, while he was Apostolic Vicar, this see extended from the Missouri River west and north to include both of the Dakotas, Wyoming, and Montana, as well as Nebraska. Bishop O'Connor not only frequently visited small rural parishes to administer confirmation, but in his first year as vicar, accompanied by a Jesuit priest, he made a hazardous 4000-mile round-trip journey by rail, stage coach, open wagon, and foot to the most remote part of his territory—the Flat Head Indian Mission of Saint Ignatius in western Montana. There he was visited by a continual stream of Salish-speaking tribesmen. One of the chiefs offered to provide an escort for his trip home but withdrew the offer when he was informed that the distance was over 2000 miles.³⁹

If Cather did hear stories in her youth like this about Bishop O'Connor, perhaps they helped engender her abiding fascination with pioneer Catholic churchmen. When later she read about the missionary journeys and experiences of Bishops Lamy, Machebeuf, and Laval, they would have seemed, in some ways, familiar. Perhaps Cather even drew on memories of stories about Bishop O'Connor's confirmation visit to St. Ann's when she created her description of Bishop Latour's sojourn in *Agua Secreta*, where he "performed marriages and baptisms and heard confessions and confirmed until noon" (*Death*, 30).

Why did Cather set her fictionalized account of Bishop O'Connor's confirmation ceremony in a building based on the early-twentieth-century brick church in Campbell rather than on the frame St. Ann's at Wheatland where it actually occurred? Perhaps she made this change because there was little either impressive or distinctively French about the earlier rude wooden structure, while the brick church was an imposing edifice based on a French design. She writes that Sainte-

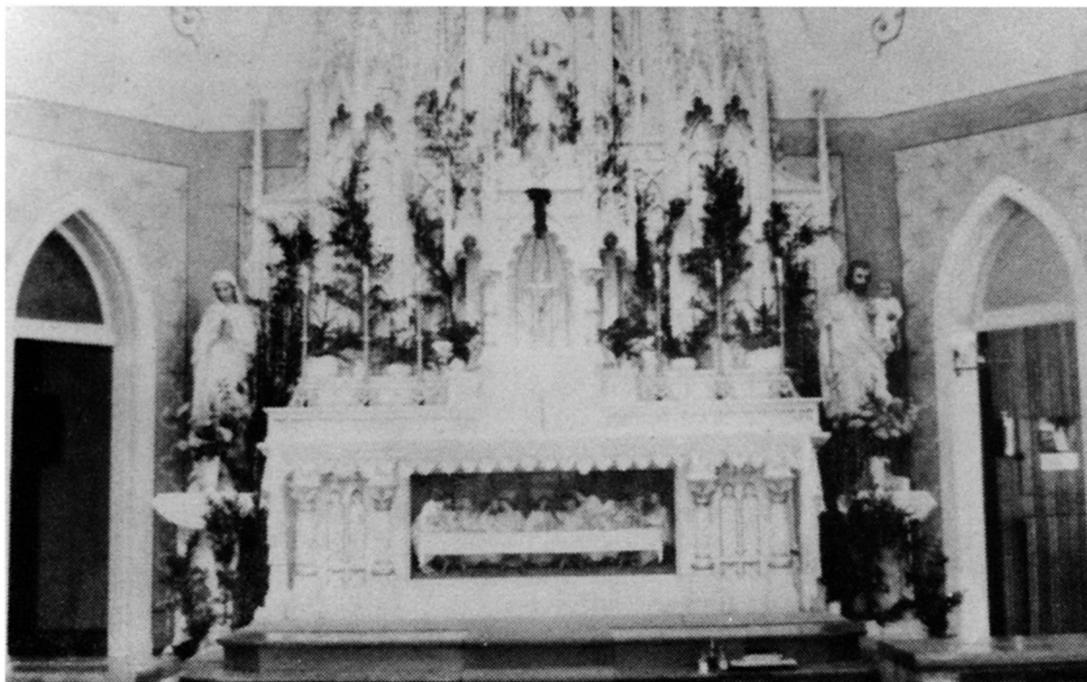


FIG. 2. St. Ann's altar, Christmas 1945. Top Center: statue of St. Ann with child Mary. Right: statue of St. Joseph with child Jesus. Left: statue of Mary. From *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial Jubilee, 1883-1983*. Campbell, Nebraska: n.p., 1983, p. 7.

Agnès “looked powerful and triumphant there on its eminence . . . and by its position and setting it reminded one of some of the churches built long ago in the wheat-lands of middle France” (211). In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather again celebrates the building of a French church in the New World by her positive portrayal of Bishop Latour/Lamy’s choice of French Midi-Romanesque architecture for his cathedral in Santa Fe. This was a preference that dismayed her friend and fellow writer Mary Austin, who advocated the local Mexican culture and architecture.⁴⁰

The church rebuilt in Campbell in 1910, which still serves the parish today, reveals a great deal about the character and beliefs of the community that created it. Previous divisions had been forgotten as parishioners rallied to contribute their time and money to rebuilding, expanding, and furnishing this

edifice. Cather could have used the generosity of the French-Canadian congregation as a model for that of the Mexicans who made donations to Father Vaillant’s church in Denver. Like them, dozens of St. Ann’s parishioners dug into their pockets to sponsor stained-glass windows. They held an ice cream party and a church fair like the one in *O Pioneers!*, netting some \$375. The altar society raised over \$650. Even the children in the Sodality of the Children of Mary and the Guardian Angel Society made contributions.⁴¹

The statues installed in the new church indicate how devoted members of this French-Canadian community were to the Holy Family, an extended Holy Family including the saint for which the parish had been named in 1880. A large statue of St. Ann with the child Mary was placed high on the center of the tall, beautifully carved white and gilt altar and, as

late as the 1940s, the priest and parishioners in Campbell “had great faith in St. Anne’s healing power and . . . were constantly praying the novena in her honor.”⁴² Cather may well have been reminded of this statue of St. Ann when she saw the one in the church of Notre Dame de la Victoire in Quebec, which she describes in *Shadows on the Rock* (65-67).⁴³

Below the statue of St. Ann in Campbell, on either side of the altar, were another figure of Mary and one of Joseph holding the infant Jesus. This grouping is reminiscent of the little chapel kept by Madame Pommier in her home on Holy Family Hill in *Shadows on the Rock* which she shows to Cécile and Jacques, explaining to them, “Monseigneur Laval himself has told me that there is no other place in the world where the people are so devoted to the Holy Family as here in our own Canada. It is something very special to us” (101).

It seems probable that it was among the parishioners of St. Ann’s in Nebraska that Cather first became aware of this French-Canadian attachment to the Holy Family and, especially, to the holy mother Mary, who plays such an important role in the spiritual lives of Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. There were two more large statues of Mary on display at the front of St. Ann’s in Campbell, one of them an almost life-sized pieta donated by Alexis Forest and his wife.

Versions of “Ave Maria,” the solo piece that Cather has Raoul Marcel perform at the confirmation mass in *O Pioneers!*, continued to be featured at St. Ann’s at midnight mass on Christmas Eve at least through the 1950s, when it was sung by Carmelita LaPorte Danker, the granddaughter of Louis Soucie, the general contractor who had lost his life building the original brick church. In the early to mid-twentieth century, just about everyone in town, Protestants included, would attend midnight Christmas Mass at St. Ann’s to hear the beautiful music.⁴⁴ The experience of going to this church on a cold and snowy Christmas Eve in Campbell was very like the Christmas Eve scene in *Shadows on the Rock* in which “black

groups were moving, families and friends in little flocks, all going toward the same goal,—the doors of the church, wide open and showing a ruddy vault in the blue darkness” (113).

Bernice Slote wrote that to the young Willa Cather “the music of organ and voices at the Catholic Church was art—beautiful and rich with the past.”⁴⁵ The architecture, altar, windows, and statues of St. Ann’s, as well as its music, may have been early sources of the connection Cather drew between art and religion, a theme she later elaborated in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* in her descriptions of the reactions of her characters to churches, statues, paintings, medals, and music. When Cécile Auclair and her friend Jacques study the altar of the Notre Dame de la Victoire, their “own church . . . the church of childhood,” they are comforted to think that “the Kingdom of Heaven looked exactly like this from the outside,” while the glow of candlelight on the painted flowers of the statue of Sainte Anne inspires Jacques to ask, “Cécile, all of the saints in this church like children, don’t they?” (*Shadows*, 63-67). Similarly, Father Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* gives the old Mexican charwoman Sada a silver medal of Mary to serve as a “physical sign of Love” and, kneeling beside her in church, feels “the preciousness of the things of the altar to her who was without possessions; the tapers, the image of the Virgin, the figures of the saints, the Cross that took away indignity from suffering and made pain and poverty a means of fellowship with Christ” (217, 219).

Of Quebec, Cather wrote in *Shadows on the Rock*, “When an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country, the colony he founds will, from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit” (98). She could well have seen an example during her youth of this richness of tradition and spirit in the French-Canadian settlement she knew in Nebraska. United by a common language, religion, and culture, this family-oriented rural and village community continued many of its French ways into the second and third generations. According to

one local history, these settlers “retained much of their French-ness, the chic and poise of the Old Country, although their roots were several hundred years and many generations separated from France.”⁴⁶

Father Rausch’s account of his parish written in 1898 states that “the people of St. Ann receive the Sacraments often but all the Canadian French, young and old insist on making their confessions only in their French language. Many of the children do not go to school at all so do not know any English, and therefore the elements of the Catechism are held in French repeatedly, just as well as the sermons in French are as necessary as in English.”⁴⁷

Along with their language and religion, the French Canadians in Nebraska also clung to French traditions in their domestic and social lives: in their housekeeping, gardening, food preparation, generosity, and celebrations. They enjoyed singing, fiddle playing, dancing, making and drinking wine, entertaining, and other customs brought with them from Canada. Their love of tradition did not necessarily conflict with their pioneering spirit, however, and a number of them were known for their enterprise and openness to innovation. When Cather wrote about some of these same types of traits and customs in her depictions of French characters, culture, and beliefs in *Shadows on the Rock* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she may well have drawn on her knowledge of her Nebraska neighbors.

Veneration of the Holy Family among the Nebraska French was just one manifestation of a love of family that could also be seen in their secular lives. They were like Father Vaillant in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, who remained attached throughout his life to his sister in France, Pierre Charron in *Shadows on the Rock*, for whom “the family was the first and final thing in the human lot,” one “engrafted with religion” (174), and Amédée Chevalier in *O Pioneers!*, who extolled married life as “the greatest thing ever” and hoped to “bring many good Catholics into this world” (145). Many of the French-Canadian families

in the Campbell/ Wheatland area were large, close, and interrelated. Between 1895 and 1910, for instance, four of Desiré and Cordelia Genereux’s eleven children married four of the thirteen children of Isreal and Adelle Chartier, who lived three miles to the northeast. According to one of their descendants: “At that time, it was almost unheard of for the French not to marry French.”⁴⁸

Joseph Genereux and Eliza Chartier, the first of these couples to marry, were said to be “very devoted to their community, their church, and their family. Eliza was very proud of her French heritage. . . . [One of her sons said] that his mother always asked him if his girlfriend was French, and then asked if she was Catholic.”⁴⁹ When they started out their married life farming in the Campbell area, Joseph and Eliza Genereux lived in a lean-to with dirt floors and had to make do with meager resources. When other meat was scarce, they lived on quail, prairie chicken, and, like the Auclairs in *Shadows on the Rock*, doves. French Canadian families in this area preserved meat for the winter the same way the Auclairs did doves, by packing them in tallow or lard.⁵⁰

Eliza likely learned how to keep house from her mother, Adelle, who appears to have been similar to Cécile Auclair and her mother in *Shadows on the Rock* in the use she made of the tools of domesticity to create civilized family life on the frontier. Madame Chartier made all the family’s clothes, wove carpets, and served as a local midwife. She also helped preserve the family’s food. “A week before New Year’s, all of the family would get together to slaughter hogs. They scalded them in an iron kettle and scraped off the hair. The celebration began on New Year’s Eve and usually lasted for three or four days,” during which they would “sing their old French songs.”⁵¹

According to a history of the community:

New Year’s was the most important social holiday of the year. The French had parties and dances on New Year’s Eve, with everyone participating . . . families within the community provided music with their

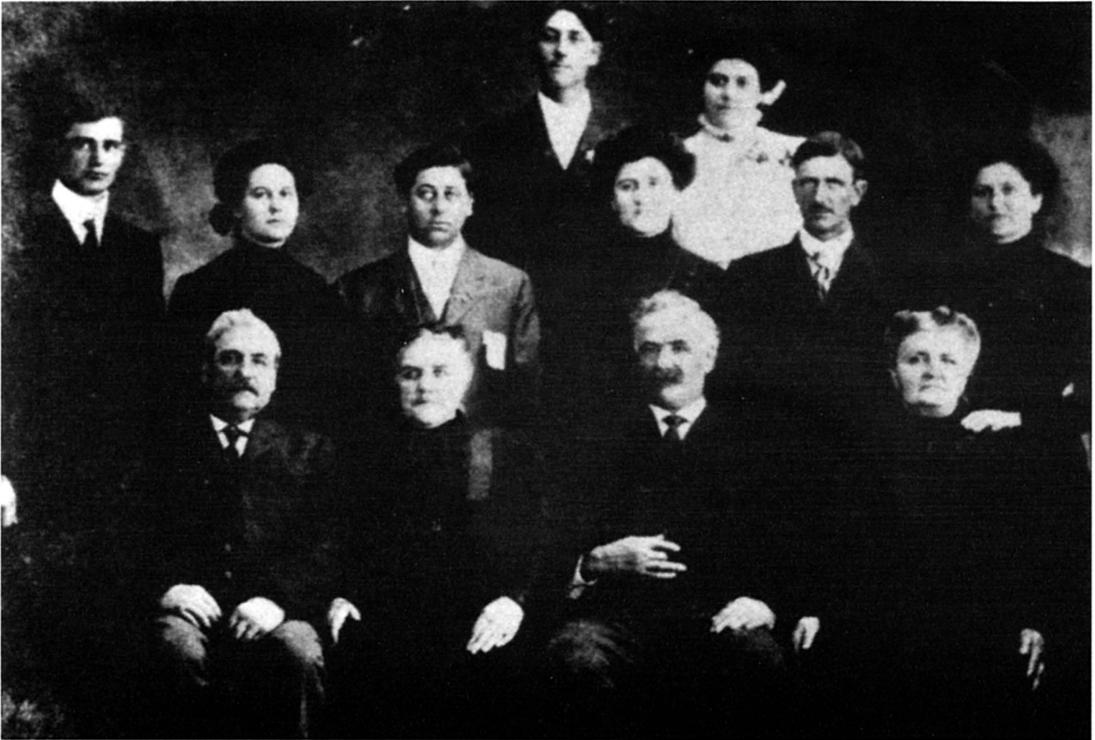


FIG. 3. Four members of the Desiré Genereux family married four members of the Isreal Chartier family. Back row (left to right): Charles Genereux and Aurore (Chartier). Second row: Alfred Chartier and Stephanie (Genereux), Pat Genereux and Mary (Chartier), and Joe Genereux and Eliza (Chartier). Front row, parents: Desiré Genereux and Mary Louise (Soucie) and Isreal Chartier and Adelle (Guillotte). From *Along and Beyond the Little Blue*, Campbell, Nebraska: Campbell Centennial Book Committee, 1986, p. 158.

fiddles and other instruments, spelling each other off during the evening so that everybody could dance, the performers splitting the pot of pennies the non-performing ones contributed. Although few of the French-Canadians had formal musical training, they had native talent and a love of music . . . [and were] enthusiastic, graceful dancers, so that dancing was an integral part of their non-working lives.⁵²

Dancing was a major form of entertainment on weekends and at weddings, as well as on New Year's. Like Giorgio Million's grandfather, who plays the flute at country weddings in *Shadows on the Rock*, local talent also pro-

vided the music for the French-Canadian wedding dances in Nebraska, which were "joyous occasions" sometimes lasting as long as two days.⁵³ In *O Pioneers!*, Marie Shabata badly wants her husband Frank to take her to such an occasion, the wedding dance of Amédée and Angélique Chevalier, and hopes that he will be tempted to attend the wedding supper because of the food provided by the bride and groom's numerous relatives (79).

Early mass on New Year's Day at St. Ann's was followed by family festivities including the exchange of presents and feasting on dishes such as tourakeya, a meat and raisin pie in a rich crust, well-seasoned with onion and garlic. Garlic, onions, celery, and many other

ingredients called for in their favorite recipes were grown in the families' gardens.⁵⁴ One cook who ranked highly in the memory of her family was Angelina Gangner, who on New Year's Day would prepare roast duck or goose, spiced "black" potatoes, filled cookies, and a red fruit salad served in a cut-glass bowl. The French Canadians in the Campbell area were also noted for their soups, especially pea soup, a staple made of cracked peas, onions, and a ham bone, that could, if necessary, be eaten cold and while traveling.⁵⁵

Cather uses soup as a symbol of French civilization in a scene in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in which Bishop Latour compliments Father Vaillant on a Christmas dinner of roasted chicken, sauteed potatoes, and onion soup that he has prepared:

"Think of it, *Blanchet*; in all this vast country between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean, there is probably not another human being who could make a soup like this."

"Not unless he is a Frenchman," said Father Joseph. He had tucked a napkin over the front of his cassock and was wasting no time in reflection.

"I am not deprecating your individual talent, Joseph," the Bishop continued, "but, when one thinks of it, a soup like this is not the result of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup."

Cather also portrays this sense of a civilized French tradition of food in the importance placed on dining in the Auclair household in *Shadows on the Rock*. Like Vaillant, Cécile Auclair fixes a meal of soup and roasted chicken for her father, who regards his dinner as "the thing that kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman" (9-10,17). And like Vaillant, who misses the salad garden and vineyard he left behind in Ohio when he moved to New Mexico, the French Canadians in *Shadows on the Rock* value their salad greens and

wine. They grow lettuce in their cellars in the fall and winter and import the wine they drink with their dinners from France, or like Jean Baptiste Harnois, the smith of Saint-Laurent, make their own from wild grapes (47, 187).

Cather probably first became acquainted with French gastronomic traditions from the French-Canadian settlers of the Campbell/Wheatland area, who took pride in their cooking and, in spite of the hardships of the frontier, cultivated gardens of vegetables and salad greens. They also maintained the French tradition of drinking wine with their meals, a custom that, in the early twentieth century, set them apart from some of their "dry" Protestant neighbors.⁵⁶ One such settler, Arsene L'Heureux, who moved from Canada to a farm in the vicinity of Wheatland in 1879 when he was fifteen, was described by a descendent as "a true Frenchman [who] loved his wines. Each year he made several barrels which he allowed to age for a few years. He used choke-cherry, wild grape, rhubarb, or whatever could be found to make good wine."⁵⁷ Arsene L'Heureux was a strong influence in the lives of his grandchildren, remembered by them for being "an excellent cook" and for having "all the family in for large dinners at his big house a number of times a year—always on New Year's for the traditional New Year's merriment."⁵⁸

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, there may be a reflection of the New Year's celebrations of Cather's French-Canadian neighbors in the New Year's party that Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant attend at the home of Don Antonio and Dona Isabella Olivares. Although Don Antonio is Mexican and his wife an American born in Kentucky, Cather describes Dona Isabella, who had been raised in Louisiana, as French in culture: "She was pretty and accomplished, had been educated in a French convent, and had done much to Europeanize her husband. . . . She spoke French well, Spanish lamely, played the harp and sang agreeably" (176). Influenced by his wife to greater "refinement of his dress and manners," Don Antonio liked "French wine better than whisky" (178).

Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant enjoy visiting the Olivares “to be able to converse in their own tongue with a cultivated woman . . . to eat a good dinner and drink good wine, and listen to music. . . . Madame Olivares liked to sing old French songs with [Father Vaillant]” (177). On the night of the New Year’s party when Don Antonio announces that he will give Bishop Latour the money with which to build his cathedral, his wife wears “a French dress from New Orleans” and plays her harp and sings (181,186). Cather’s description of their house that evening as “full of light and music, the air warm with the simple hospitality of the frontier” could have been that of a French-Canadian family in Nebraska on New Year’s Eve (180).

The French settlers in Nebraska extended their hospitality and generosity beyond holiday celebrations. In the early days, some lent money to neighbors from their own pockets, and others opened up their homes to newly arrived families from Canada until they could find land and construct their own lodging.⁵⁹ Once Campbell was founded and some of the French moved there to become merchants, they welcomed the surrounding farmers when they came in to town. Cather provides a picture of this practice when the rural families come in to Sainte-Agnès for the confirmation ceremony at the church in *O Pioneers!*: “The housewives had much ado to tear themselves away from the general rejoicing and hurry back to their kitchens. The country parishioners were staying in town for dinner, and nearly every house in Sainte-Agnès entertained visitors that day. Father Duchesne, the bishop, and the visiting priests dined with Fabien Sauvage, the banker. Emil and Frank Shabata were both guests of old Moïse Marcel [the saloon keeper]” (229-30).

There were French bankers, saloon keepers, and other merchants in Campbell from its inception in the 1880s, some of whom quickly attained positions of importance in the town. It seems possible that Cather drew on their example, as on that of Red Cloud merchants, when she developed her portrait of Euclide

Auclair and of other tradesmen such as baker Nicholas Pigeon, shoemaker Noël Pommier, and blacksmith Jean Baptiste Harnois in *Shadows on the Rock*.

The first banker in Campbell, Mederic Catudal, was apparently a leading citizen in the early days of the village. He was chairman of the group that presented the petition to incorporate the town in 1890 and served as trustees until the first election was held. According to local legend, he began the Bank of Campbell in 1886 with only \$800 in capital in a small building with family quarters in the rear, a living arrangement similar to that of the Auclairs in *Shadows on the Rock*. This was a common form of housing among the early shopkeepers in Campbell.⁶⁰

A few decades later, the major bankers in town were Joseph Chevalier and Arsene L’Heureux, president and vice president of the First National Bank when they erected a fine new stone bank building on Main Street in 1909.⁶¹ Other early French-Canadian merchants included grocers, milliners, implement dealers, general merchandisers, draymen, well-diggers, and hardware dealers. Although there is no record of a French druggist or baker in Campbell, there was a French shoe repairman and a number of French blacksmiths and saloon keepers.⁶²

One main way in which Cather’s French-Canadian neighbors in Nebraska influenced her writing can be seen in her development of the personalities of some of her French characters. Cather gives to both Father Vaillant in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and Pierre Charron in *Shadows on the Rock* certain personality traits that she first expressed in the character of Amédée Chevalier in *O Pioneers!* All these characters share traits of courage, enterprise, zeal for new challenges, capability, friendliness, loyalty, disregard for bodily comfort, strong family ties, faith in the Catholic Church, personal or fiscal recklessness for a good cause, great vitality contained in slight bodies, and a type of passionate engagement with the world. Although Father Vaillant has a historical prototype, I think it

likely that Cather developed some aspects of his character, like those of Chevalier and Charron, according to impressions she had formed of French-Canadian pioneers she met in her youth.

Joseph Vaillant is a short, skinny man who 'like[s] almost everyone,' with a face full of "kindliness and vivacity" and a mouth "always stiffened by effort or working with excitement" (37, 38, 227). He is an excellent cook and companion and loved wherever he goes. He is a "truly spiritual" man who, in spite of several serious illnesses and injuries, performs arduous missionary labors and courageously travels "mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers . . . to carry the Cross into territories yet unknown and unnamed" (41, 226). He is also "passionately attached to many of the things of this world," including his "close-knit family," his garden and vineyard, good dinners, wine, and music—he has a "pleasing tenor voice" and sings old French songs (39, 177, 204, 228). A man of "fierceness, fortitude and fire," he is energetic and persistent, "with the driving power of a dozen men in his poorly-built body" (38). In his "hopeful rashness" and zeal for the church, he "borrow[s] money to build schools and convents, and the interest on his debts [eats] him up" (223, 287).

Cather describes Pierre Charron, like Father Vaillant, as a true pioneer, the epitome of a French frontiersman: "He was not a big fellow, this Pierre Charron, hero of the fur trade and the *coureurs de bois*, not above medium height, but quick as an otter and always sure of himself" (170). To Euclide Auclair and his wife, this "restless" young fur trader

who shot up and down the swift rivers of Canada in his canoe . . . seemed the type they had come so far to find; more than anyone else he realized the romantic picture of the free Frenchman of the great forests which they had formed at home on the banks of the Seine. He had the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New. He was proud, he was vain, he

was relentless when he hated, and quickly prejudiced; but he had the old ideals of clan-loyalty, and in friendship he never counted the cost. His goods and his life were at the disposal of the man he loved or the leader he admired. Though his figure was still boyish, his face was full of experience and sagacity; a fine bold nose, a restless, rather mischievous mouth, white teeth, very strong and even, sparkling hazel eyes with a kind of living flash in them, like the sunbeams on the bright rapids on which he was so skilful. (171-72)

According to Cécile Auclair, Charron has "authority, and a power which came from knowledge of the country and its people; from knowledge and a kind of passion" (268). He has a reputation for "courage and fair dealing" among the Indians of the Great Lakes and has friends among woodsmen, townsmen, and sailors alike. He gives a fine dinner party for the captain of a ship from France and cooks a haunch of venison for the Auclairs when they are short on supplies, drinking with them a bottle of French wine, since "good wine was put into the grapes by our Lord, for friends to share together" (267). Although the loss of his childhood sweetheart to a convent has embittered him somewhat against the clergy, he remains a good Catholic out of regard for his mother, visits his confessor regularly, and has yearly masses said for the soul of Madame Auclair (174-75).

Amédée Chevalier, the best friend of Emil Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, is similar in some ways to both Vaillant and Charron. Cather describes him as friendly, enthusiastic, energetic, and hard-working. He is "a little fellow . . . boyish in appearance; very lithe and active and neatly made, with a clear brown and white skin, and flashing teeth" (144). As a pitcher for the Sainte-Agnès baseball team, he is "renowned among the county towns for his dash and skill" (144).

In his love of life and passion for new experiences, be they marriage and fatherhood or the running of new farm equipment, Amédée

is like the rest of the “spirited and jolly” French boys in *O Pioneers!* whom Cather describes as “predisposed to favor anything new” (192). Similar to the way that these boys bid recklessly at a church auction, “once satisfied that their extravagance was in a good cause” (195), Amédée buys an expensive new header to cut his wheat, an implement that his wife hopes he will be able to rent out to their neighbors to help allay the cost. Watching his friend direct the harvest of his grain with \$3,000 worth of new machinery, Emil admires and envies “the way in which Amédée could do with his might what his hand found to do, and feel that, whatever it was, it was the most important thing in the world” (217).

Caught up in the press of the harvest, Amédée bravely, if rashly, ignores the pain of an attack of appendicitis until it is too late. After he dies, his companions remember how important the church of Sainte-Agnès had been to him throughout his life and do “not doubt that that invisible arm was still about Amédée; that through the church on earth he had passed to the church triumphant, the goal of the hopes and faith of so many hundred years” (226).

Records concerning the early French-Canadian settlers in the Campbell area show considerable similarity to Cather’s portraits of Amédée Chevalier, Pierre Charron, and Father Vaillant. The records cite these settlers’ pioneering spirit and accomplishments, their commitment to their church and community, their hospitality and generosity, their *joie de vivre*, their close family ties, their love of music and cooking, their skill at gardening and wine-making, and their enthusiasm for innovations in farming and merchandising, sometimes with unfortunate financial results.

A local history credits one early farmer and “progressive businessman” named Hilaire Gaudreault with introducing both alfalfa and wood-stave silos to the area and with donating a telephone system and other civic improvements to the town of Campbell. He also constructed its largest and most innovative store in 1900, the People’s Department Store,

which carried “a large inventory of dry-goods, clothing, shoes, groceries, furniture, carpets, and burial caskets” and “pioneered a new idea in merchandising by operating on a volume basis and selling for cash.” This store was best known, however, for its unusual “overhead cash and package carrier system which ran from the first floor to the office located at the head of the stairwell on the second floor.”⁶³ In later years, Gaudreault paid \$50,000 for a Texas bull and fifty-six purebred Hereford cows in a well-publicized transaction intended to improve his herd and to bring in favorable advertising and prestige. However, the bottom fell out of the purebred cattle market shortly thereafter and he lost most of his investment.⁶⁴

Like Pierre Charron who, after marrying Cecile Auclair, becomes “well-established in the world” and builds a “commodious house in the Upper Town” of Quebec (278), Hilaire Gaudreault, Arsene L’Heureux, and other French-Canadian pioneers prospered in their adopted land and eventually built large homes in Campbell for their families. During the first decade following their marriage at St. Ann’s church in Wheatland in 1886, Arsene L’Heureux and his wife Clara Choquette L’Heureux had lived in a two-room sod house and, when that became uninhabitable, in bins in their granary. From sod busting with one horse and an ox, Arsene L’Heureux went on to acquire “vast land holdings” and become president of two banks, two grain elevators, and a telephone company. While serving as Campbell mayor, he started a “massive tree planting program all over town” and established a park.⁶⁵

Along with his enterprise and energy, Arsene L’Heureux was similar to Cather’s portraits of Father Vaillant and Pierre Charron in his love of family, cooking, and wine, and in his skill at storytelling. Like them, too, he was known for his travels. He used to take his family to the mountains where they gathered rocks that they brought back to Campbell for a rock garden, and for a number of years he went on an annual camping trip to the Dismal River in western Nebraska with James Kinney, another

early Campbell pioneer. He toured Canada and much of the United States and went to Europe, where in addition to visiting France and Germany, he had an audience in Rome with the Pope, who blessed rosaries for him to take back to his family.⁶⁶

From families such as the L'Heureuxs, the Gaudreaults, the Genereuxs, the Chartiers, the Soucies, the LaPortes, and others in the Wheatland/Campbell area, Cather could have derived many of the attributes of French culture she later she used to bring to life the French characters and traditions in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*. Perhaps Cather's familiarity with the French-Canadian settlers in Nebraska reveals itself most clearly in the world view she espouses in these novels. It is a point of view grounded in a firm belief in French cultural values, as transplanted into the New World, and in a missionary Catholic Church through which the presences of God and the saints manifest themselves in that New World. Cather was not a Catholic herself, but the French Canadians she knew as a child could well have conveyed to her just such a view of life through their culture and stories. In a 1921 interview for *Bookman*, Cather herself acknowledges the formative impact on her art of the oral stories of her immigrant neighbors:

I grew fond of some of these immigrants—particularly the old women, who used to tell me of their home country. I used to think them underrated, and wanted to explain them to their neighbors. Their stories used to go round and round in my head at night. This was, with me, the initial impulse. I didn't know any writing people. I had an enthusiasm for a kind of country and a kind of people.⁶⁷

Early exposure to the stories and world view of her neighbors from Canada could help account for the cultural orientation in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*. Cather presents people and events in these novels from the point of view of her

French main characters, favoring their perspectives over those of other ethnic groups. As viewed through Latour's eyes, Father Martinez in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, for example, seems unrefined and nearly inhuman, a man whose "broad high shoulders were like a bull buffalo's" and whose "mouth was the very assertion of violent, uncurbed passions and tyrannical self-will; the full lips thrust out and taut, like the flesh of animals distended by fear or desire." Latour judges Martinez to be, like the buffalo, a man whose "day of lawless personal power was almost over, even on the frontier, and this figure was to him already like something picturesque and impressive, but really impotent, left over from the past" (140-41). Similarly, Latour finds the inhabitants of Acoma pueblo to be remnants from antediluvian times:

He was on a naked rock in the desert, in the stone age, a prey to homesickness for his own kind, his own epoch, for European man and his glorious history of desires and dreams. Through all the centuries that his own part of the world had been changing like the sky at daybreak, this people had been fixed, increasing neither its numbers nor desires, rock-turtles on their rock. Something reptilian he felt here, something that had endured by immobility, a kind of life out of reach, like the crustaceans in their armour. (103)

Although Latour is determined to bring the Mexican priests of his diocese under the control of ecclesiastical law, he generally seems to prefer Mexicans to some of the Americans in New Mexico, such as the murderer Buck Scales and the Smith family, people of "low habits and evil tongues" who oppress their old Mexican servant woman and are "leaders of a small group of low-caste Protestants who took every occasion to make trouble for the Catholics" (216).

Not all of Latour's judgments of people different in background from himself are negative, however. He forms an immediate

friendship with the American Kit Carson and values the hospitality of Don Antonio and Dona Isabella Olivares. For his Pecos Indian guide Jacinto and his Navajo friend Eusabio, Father Latour feels considerable affection and admiration, and he compares the Navajos favorably to Europeans in their greater respect for and harmony with the land (234). Speaking for Latour in third person, Cather writes that "travelling with Eusabio was like travelling with the landscape made human," and her imagery describing Zuni runners encountered by the two friends, although couched in terms of animals, is nonetheless positive: "They coursed over the sand with the fleetness of young antelope, their bodies disappearing and reappearing among the sand dunes, like the shadows that eagles cast in their long, unhurried flight" (232, 235).

Even more so than in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather presents the Native Americans in *Shadows on the Rock* through the eyes of her French-Canadian characters, since no Natives appear directly in the novel. The few mentions made of them occur in stories told by or about the French. The menial Blinker has been "warned in a dream that he would be taken prisoner and tortured by the Indians," and his fear of them, "one of the bywords of Mountain Hill," causes him to avoid the forest surrounding Quebec (16). In contrast to this avoidance, "an old story in Montreal" has it that Pierre Charron, after being disappointed in his love of Jeanne Le Ber, took to the woods to trade for furs with the native trappers. "He had learned the Indian languages as a child, and the Indians liked and trusted him, as they had his father" (173).

On a visit to the apothecary shop, the woodsman Antoine Frichette tells Monsieur Auclair how he and Father Hector were saved from starvation during a winter storm in the forest by a generous Indian hunter who shared his food with them and led them back to shelter (144). However, this positive portrayal of a Native American is overshadowed in the novel by tales of the martyrdom of Jesuit mis-

sionaries at the hands of the Indians, favorite stories of Cécile Auclair.

Shortly after Frichette speaks with Monsieur Auclair, Father Hector arrives at the Auclairs' home to enjoy a dinner of fish soup, wood dove and mushroom casserole, and wild rice, served with "a bottle of fine old Burgundy which the Count [Frontenac] had sent [the Auclairs] for New Year's" (147). After dinner, Father Hector tells Cécile and her father how he has been inspired to remain a missionary in Canada by the example of a Father Chabanel who was killed in an Iroquois raid but whose "martyrdom was his life, not his death." According to Father Hector, Chabanel was a highly educated Frenchman, "fond of the decencies, the elegances of life," who had not been able to accustom himself to the language, housing, customs, or food of the Huron Indians he was attempting to convert. Their boiled cornmeal nauseated him as much as the flesh of dogs. Contemptuous of his fastidiousness, the Huron converts amused themselves at Chabanel's expense by feeding him meat out of a kettle from which they later pulled a human hand (150-52).

This Huron soup stands in striking contrast to the one Cécile has just served Father Hector. Undoubtedly prepared from an old French recipe using the saffron her father packages and sells to flavor fish stock, Cécile's soup is part of a meal that stands for French civilization and home to the priest. Thanking Monsieur Auclair for his hospitality, Father Hector says:

Yes . . . these are great occasions in a missionary's life. The next time I am overtaken by a storm in the woods, the recollection of this evening will be food and warmth to me. I shall see it in memory as plainly as I see it now; this room, so like at home, this table with everything as it should be; and, most of all, the feeling of being with one's own kind. (148)

What is said about Native Americans and other non-Frenchmen in *Death Comes for the*

Archbishop and *Shadows on the Rock* is filtered through the voices of Cather's French characters who perceive them, whether friends or foes, to be people other than their own kind and somewhat peripheral to the main story of their civilization of the New World. It seems likely that the point of view from which Cather wrote these novels reflects some of the "basic material" that she "acquired before the age of fifteen," that she may have developed the voice of some of her most powerful stories, at least in part, from memories of the voices of the French-Canadian neighbors she listened to as a child. Apparently, early exposure to oral stories told by such neighbors, as well as by friends and family, had a lifelong effect on Cather's creativity.

Most of the content of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* derives from historical sources Cather read concerning the southwestern United States, Quebec, and Europe. However, before Cather became acquainted with this history or the distinctive landscapes in which she would set her novels, she already was familiar with the type of story those sources and landscapes would reveal. Memories from her youth, including ones about her French-Canadian neighbors in Nebraska, helped her to imbue the characters and history in these novels with passion and a sense of immediate humanity. They formed an essential part of the mix of experience, research, and imagination that she transmuted into the gold of her art.

NOTES

1. Willa Cather, *Shadows on the Rock* (1931; New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 181. Further citations to *Shadows on the Rock* are given in parentheses in the text.

2. Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 155.

3. L. Brent Bohlke, ed., *Willa Cather in Person* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 20.

4. Willa Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 11.

5. Lewis, *Willa Cather Living* (note 2 above), p. 153.

6. E. K. Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 261; James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 404, 426.

7. Brown, *ibid.*, p. 286.

8. L. Brent Bohlke, "Willa Cather's Nebraska Priests and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," *Great Plains Quarterly* 4 (fall 1984): 264.

9. Woodress, *A Literary Life* (note 6 above), p. 160.

10. Campbell Centennial Book Committee, *Along and Beyond the Little Blue* (Campbell, Nebr.: Campbell Centennial Book Committee, 1986), p.5.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 11, 206.

12. Mildred Bennett, *The World of Willa Cather* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 169-70.

13. Willa Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," *Nation* 117 (1923): 237.

14. *Campbell (Nebr.) News*, 2 May 1974, p. 1.

15. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), pp. 79, 148, 158, 177, 206, 268, 269, 289. Also see "Notes on Emendations" in Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, ed. Susan J. Rosowski and Charles Mignon with Kathleen Danker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 378. Further citations to *O Pioneers!* are given in parentheses in the text.

16. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), pp. 148, 149, 268, 281.

17. Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927; New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 247. Further citations *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are given in parentheses in the text.

18. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 79.

19. Father August Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell and Missions from Earliest Times" [1898], in *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial Jubilee, 1883-1983* (Campbell, Nebr.: n.p., 1983), pp. 2-4.

20. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 11, 33.

21. *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial Jubilee, 1883-1983* (Campbell, Nebr.: n.p., 1983), p. 9.

22. Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell" (note 19 above), pp. 2, 3.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

24. Donald Danker, interview by author, Campbell, Nebr., 28 May 1995.

25. Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell" (note 19 above), p. 3.

26. *Webster County Argus* (Red Cloud, Nebr.), 25 August 1887, p. 8.

27. Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell" (note 19 above), p. 3.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
30. A. J. Gaudreault, "Some Early History of Campbell, Nebraska," typescript, p. 14, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
31. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 366.
32. *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial* (note 21 above), p. 4.
33. Gaudreault, "History of Campbell" (note 30 above), p. 15.
34. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 80.
35. Woodress, *A Literary Life* (note 6 above), pp. 181, 198.
36. See "Historical Essay" in *O Pioneers!* Willa Cather Scholarly Edition (note 15 above), p. 285.
37. Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell" (note 19 above), p. 2.
38. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), pp. 13, 80.
39. Sister Loretta Gosen, C.P.P.S., *History of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, 1887-1987* (Lincoln, Nebr.: The Catholic Bishop of Lincoln, Inc., 1987), p. 38.
40. Woodress, *A Literary Life* (note 6 above), p. 395.
41. *Eglise Sainte Anne Centennial* (note 21 above), p. 8.
42. Annette Balthazor, letter to author, 21 September 1995.
43. The charm of St. Ann's church was greatly spoiled by the dismantling and removal of its original altar in the early 1980s by the pastor at the time., Rev. Philip Rauth—an alteration that dismayed many parishioners as it doubtless would have done Cather had she lived to see it.
44. Donald Danker (note 24 above).
45. Bernice Slote, *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 24.
46. Dorothy Weyer Creigh, *Tales from the Prairie*, vol. 4 (Hastings, Nebr.: Adams County Historical Society, 1979), p. 45.
47. Rausch, "History of the Catholic Church of Campbell" (note 19 above), p. 4.
48. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 206.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
52. Creigh, *Tales from the Prairie* (note 46 above), pp. 43-44.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 44; Gaudreault, "History of Campbell" (note 30 above), pp. 23-25; Donald Danker (note 24 above).
55. Donald Danker (note 24 above); Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 144.
56. Donald Danker (note 24 above).
57. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 275.
58. Clayton Heinrich, interview with author, Blue Hill, Nebr., 28 May 1995; Donald E. L'Heureux, "Family Record of Arsene (Rameald) L'Heureux and Clara (Poulin) Choquette L'Heureux and Descendants," typescript, pp. 1, 4, Clayton Heinrich, Blue Hill, Nebr.
59. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), pp. 144, 158, 270.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 27.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 51-52, 340; Bessie Danker, "Campbell History," in *Bicentennial History Book and Alumni Directory of Campbell, Nebraska* (Campbell, Nebr.: n.p., 1976), p. 12.
63. Campbell Centennial, *Along and Beyond* (note 10 above), p. 32; "Settlers Roamed Campbell Area," *Hastings Daily Tribune*, 20 April 1972, p. 12.
64. Gaudreault, "History of Campbell" (note 30 above), pp. 23-25.
65. L'Heureux, "Family Record" (note 58 above), pp. 1-4.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 5; Donald Danker (note 24 above).
67. Bohlke, *Willa Cather in Person* (note 3 above), p. 20.