Every organization has a coronavirus story to tell. The Neihardt State Historic Site’s story began the night of Saturday, March 7, when we decided to cancel the next day’s Sunday at the Museum program – a presentation by author Joel Green on his book “Robber’s Cave.” Nebraska’s first case of COVID19 was announced that day and it happened to be in the town where I live. We agreed it was better to be safe than sorry, but still I wasn’t confident that we weren’t over-reacting. A week later, we followed the advice of our lead organization, History Nebraska, and closed our doors to the public … for the next three months.

As a day turned into a week turned into a month, etc., it became clear that uncertainty is part of the new normal. If welcoming the public is a priority, that’s tough to accept. So, knowing that it would be awhile before we could have visitors again, what did we do? We got busy!

We asked ourselves what people would want to experience when they could walk through our doors again. What could we do for people who might not be able to visit in person? What partners were missing from our work? In short, we asked how this “great pause” could make us better, resulting in a better experience for our guests.

As a result of this self-reflection, the past few months have been exceptionally active at the Neihardt State Historic Site. (continued on page 4)
In a challenging year, isn't it time for a celebration? A free, fun, family-friendly outdoor celebration is planned for Sunday, August 2, 1:30-4, on the grounds of the Neihardt State Historic Site in Bancroft. This year’s Neihardt Day will kick off a centenary celebration of Neihardt being named Nebraska’s Poet Laureate.

Matt Mason, currently Nebraska’s State Poet and the 2019 recipient of JGNF’s Word Sender Award, will read his poetry and discuss his role as State Poet. Timothy G. Anderson, Neihardt’s biographer and JGNF board member, will share Neihardt’s experience being named Poet Laureate. The Hoop Dancer from the Many Moccasins Dance Troupe will dazzle the crowd with her performance to end the festivities.

We are thrilled that the porch of Neihardt’s historic study, which was filled with children when John was a Cub Scout leader, will once again be filled with children. Balloon animals and glitter tattoos will be provided (free!) by Shades the Clown from 12:30-2:30 on the porch of the study. Lunch will be available for purchase beginning at 12:00 noon.

Maybe best of all, NET personality, innovator, and friend of Neihardt, Ron Hull, will be the Master of Ceremonies. This is a cherished tradition and we’re thrilled to have him leading the celebration again this year.

COVID19 safety measures will be in place. Masks strongly encouraged. Social distancing spaces designated. Speakers and performers at safe distance from the audience.

Grab your lawn chair or a blanket and join us on the grounds of the Neihardt State Historic Site for an entertaining, relaxing afternoon!

"OUR POETS WILL ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE VIEW OF THE WORLD OF MEN AND THINGS -- AND IT IS OUT OF THAT VIEW THAT ALL GREAT ART, AS ALL GREAT LIFE, MUST GROW."

- JOHN G. NEIHARDT, LAUREATE ADDRESS
REMEMBERING A FRIEND: CHUCK 

BY WALT DUDA, JGNF BOARD MEMBER

Charles Trimble, former Director of the John G Neihardt Foundation, died March 2, 2020, in Omaha, Nebr. Chuck was an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and was raised in Pine Ridge, SD.

Chuck spent his life advocating for sovereignty and human rights for Native Americans. He founded the American Indian Press Association and served as executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians. He acted as mediator between the United States government and tribes in disputes involving tribal rights. Later, he started Red Willow Institute to provide entrepreneurial assistance to Native American non-profit organizations.

In 1991, Chuck was appointed to serve as a Trustee for the Nebraska State Historical Society. As president of the organization, he dissipated the controversy over the return of sacred objects to various tribes in accordance with the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act.

In 1998, the John G. Neihardt Foundation was seeking a director for our Historic Site in Bancroft. We had recently been notified that, due to state-wide budget cuts, our state funding was being reduced. We needed strong leadership, and Chuck agreed to be our director. He directed our organization for three years and developed many outreach programs.

Among his new innovations was a Young Writers Workshop to enhance writing skills among reservation youth, a spring literary conference that featured Pulitzer Prize winning author N. Scott Momaday, and our annual Laureate’s Feast which remains our main fundraising effort today.

Chuck will be greatly missed, but the lives he touched through his lifetime of service will ensure that he will never be forgotten.

PHOTO COURTESY OF INDIANZ.COM
THERE IS MORE

BY RANDY LUKASIEWICZ, JGNF BOARD MEMBER

It’s hard to believe I am actually doing this, but on the other hand maybe it’s part of the plan!

Recently, in conversation with Marianne Reynolds, the new Executive Director of the Neihardt Center at Bancroft, she extended an invitation to write a column for the quarterly newsletter. I was shocked, surprised, excited, and a bit overwhelmed. Gratefully and humbly, I replied, YES!

Little did I realize, 40 years ago, when I happened upon a copy of “Black Elk Speaks” and encountered a Native American person on a busy downtown Dodge Street noon-hour, that my life would begin a journey, creating a circle. I would not know until many years later the impact that making many regular trips to Bancroft and devouring the luscious and filling newsletters, would have, leading to contributing my thoughts to this valuable publication.

You must remember that it was the 70’s, an era that was pre-internet, iPad, eBay, Facebook. Something about the book “Black Elk Speaks” changed me forever and also saved my life. Over time, Neihardt’s works would restore life to my dormant, dry, searching being that was looking for meaning and yet not aware of it. As the book grabbed me, so did the village of Bancroft (referred as The Poet’s Town), along with the Neihardt Center, Study, and Prayer Garden. Perhaps it is because I grew up in a small Polish village in Central Nebraska, Farwell, that I felt a very strong sense of place. Besides, this was Bancroft, one of the few places in the world where someone is honored right where they did their work. I felt like this was heaven ... except it was Nebraska, but with no Kevin Costner or cornfield in sight. I kept wanting to go back. I did and still, excitingly, do! I invite you to do likewise.

In those early days, besides visiting Bancroft, I wanted and needed something more. Again, it was the newsletter, with the order form revealing the latest available books and publications, that was beginning to satisfy my inner being. Indeed, it did, as my bookshelves can attest.

Stay tuned for the next newsletter as I have a number of exciting Neihardt-related topics to explore and share. Until next time, Hold fast, Hold Fast ... There is More!

“ I KEPT WANTING TO GO BACK. I DID AND STILL, EXCITINGLY, DO! I INVITE YOU TO DO LIKEWISE.”

- RANDY LUKASIEWICZ

NEIHARDT NEWS

Continued from page 1

We spruced things up with fresh paint on the Neihardt historic cabin and the office. A virtual tour will be available to teachers and students this fall. We are working with our partners at History Nebraska to update signage on the grounds and in the museum. We met with the University of Nebraska Medical Center on an upcoming exhibit that will feature medical implements from our Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte collection. We are re-branding with a new logo to make our look more recognizable. A CARES grant from Humanities Nebraska is allowing us to schedule top-tier humanities programming and offer it on our web site. Art students from Bancroft-Rosalie schools will have an exhibit at the museum next spring. Classes at Wayne State will help us re-launch our annual poetry contest.

The thing that excites us the most is offering a memorable experience for visitors. We re-opened on July 8 and will hold Neihardt Day on Aug. 2. Humanities programs will be held throughout the year as long as it remains safe to do so.

So, come visit us. You are the reason we’re here. Whether visiting in person or online, you will leave with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Nebraska’s Poet Laureate in Perpetuity, John G. Neihardt.

VIRTUAL TOUR COMING SOON!

Chad Reischl of Mosaic Visuals spent a day at the Neihardt State Historic Site shooting a virtual tour. The tour includes the museum, statue, hoop garden, and historic cabin. It will be available at neihardtcenter.org when the school year begins.
One of the delights of living on the Great Plains is the arrival of spring and, with it, the dramatic spectacle of a spring thunderstorm. What begins as a dark streak on the horizon billows into thunderheads that pile high in the sky, accompanied by flashes of lightning and booming thunder.

John G. Neihardt used this flash of lightning as a metaphor for bursts of insight. Poets, with their gift for expanding awareness, are able to translate these flashes and reveal relationships that are normally concealed. In “The Creative Dream,” he explains:

"It is though one were walking in a cloudy night with a lantern, the glow of which is turned upon a single tree; and the tree is all that is seen. Suddenly, an inundation of sheet lightning reveals the landscape of which the tree was all the while an integral part. It is a thrilling vision, and how shall it be told to men who, for our purpose, may be conceived as knowing their world only as a lantern may reveal it? We know of course that men do not live wholly by our figurative lantern light. They only persuade themselves to believe that they do; and the effect of this persuasion upon the world is what we see. (109-110)

In his work as literary critic, Neihardt held the work of his contemporaries against this standard. Not all writers needed to meet this high level to have something worth saying, but he thrilled to stumble across works and workers of true artistry. Genuine art, Neihardt believed, must “be poetic, in the Greek sense of the word,” drawing connections, providing an architectural framework. In a review of the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Neihardt touches on his genius but withholds the label of poet:

"He was a seer. With him the momentary flash of vision was everything. Few men have seen more or seen more vividly than he. But the world revealed to him was as a world revealed by lightning – flash by flash. There was not the steady synthesizing glow by which lesser men than he have captured revealing beauty in the complicated net of relations that make a structure.” (186)

I don’t suggest that you go walking in a wild thunderstorm, but the next time you see lightning split the sky, think of Neihardt a century ago and imagine what he might have seen in a landscape briefly and dramatically revealed.


Alice Neihardt Thompson began her Great Adventure on Saturday, June 27, 2020. At the time of her passing, she was a resident of the Mexico Veterans Home in Mexico, Missouri. Her children Lynn and Erica and longtime personal caretaker Firehawk Warren were by her side. The family wishes to thank the wonderful staff at the Mexico Veterans Home for their special care every day and night.

Alice was born August 4, 1921 in Branson, Missouri. Her parents were John G. Neihardt, poet and writer, and Mona Martensen Neihardt, sculptress and great mom. Alice and her three siblings, Sigurd, Enid and Hilda, were raised in Branson because it reminded Mona of the Black Forrest where she grew up in Germany.

In 1939, Alice took ballet from Madam Cassan in St. Louis, Missouri. She and her troupe of dancers performed across the United States and Mexico. After a stint as a Navy WAVE during the Second World War, Alice and her family moved to Columbia, Missouri to her beloved Skyrim Farm. She began Skyrim Stables in 1951.

Alice dedicated her life to her love of horses and for decades, she infected others with that love. With the guidance of her friend and mentor, Uncle Dick Cook, she learned the craft of training and showing Saddlebred horses. She not only mastered the craft; Alice broke down barriers that set the stage for women in the show ring today. Fifty years ago, she was showing her beloved stallion Skyrim’s Bourbon Stonewall in professional classes against the best male trainers of the era. She pushed into the male dominated world of professional horsemen and never seemed to find a barrier that applied to her.

Alice always saw things her own way and she saw them clearly. Her enthusiasm was infectious. She brought many young people into the Saddlebred world as a result. Lessons were for everyone who wanted to learn and many did, including those who could not have afforded to be involved in any other barn.

If you ever talked with Alice, you could tell immediately how intensely and passionately she felt about horses and people and the arts that she loved. Where it was opera, dance, horses or spiritualism, she let you know it was important. There was always a twinkle in those blue eyes and an animation from her petite dancer’s form that energized the room. Whether she was talking about a horse or her father’s writings, you could feel something there that transcended normal interactions.

A celebration of life took place August 1, 2020, at Skyrim House. Alice’s loving family takes solace in the knowledge that she’s back in a ring of greats with her parents, Black Elk, Dick and of course, riding Bourbon once again. (Photo and obituary courtesy of Heartland Cremation & Burial, Kansas City, Missouri)

When I began the gift I bear
It seemed you weren’t anywhere;
But being younger now I know
How even fifty moons ago
The apple bloom began to seek
The proper tinting for a cheek;
The skies, aware of thrilling news,
Displayed the loveliest of blues
For whoso fashions eyes to choose.
And all that prehistoric spring
Experimental grace of wing
And tentatively shapen forms,
From crocuses to thunderstorms,
And happy sound and sunny glow
Rehearsed you fifty moons ago.
Why, even I was toiling too
Upon a little gift for you!
And now that we are wise and three,
And I love you and you love me,
We know the whole conspiracy.
-John G. Neihardt, dedication to daughter Alice from "Song of the Indian Wars"
The study on the grounds of the Neihardt State Historic Site is the smallest, oldest historical site in the country that has never been moved. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

Built in 1890 for August Hartman, Neihardt rented it from 1911-1920. Surrounded by trees and brush, it was a perfect for the author to escape distractions. However, when writing wasn’t being done the study became a place of adventure and learning. Neihardt’s children recalled listening to stories underneath a pine tree behind the study. As a Cub Scout leader, Neihardt had scouts on the porch of the study to read books, listen to him recite his work, and learn about western lore and the great outdoors.

A Bancroft garden club, led by Evelyn Vogt, set about restoring the study in 1967. Today, their vision has grown to include the study, a museum, a bronze statue of Neihardt and Black Elk, and a hoop garden.

In the museum visitors can view a charming photo of Neihardt peeking in the window of the study as restoration was beginning. The building is open to the public on Neihardt Day each year.

Welcome New Members!

Members of the John G, Neihardt Foundation help support our mission, keep our doors open, and offer free admission year-round. We welcome the following new members:

- Gregory Smith, Omaha, Nebraska
- Jeff Cochran, Plattsburgh, New York
- Paul Hedren, Omaha
- Myrv Christopherson, Decorah, Iowa
- Father Don Doll, Omaha
- Susan Radosti, Creighton, Nebraska, Lifetime Member

Membership benefits include receiving the Word Sender Newsletter, 10% discount on books and gift shop items, and early access to exclusive web site content.
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Dr. Marlyn Vogt

SUMMER HOURS
Through August
Wednesday-Friday:
10 a.m.—4 p.m.
Saturday:
10 a.m.—5 p.m.
Sunday:
1 p.m.—5 p.m.

Beginning in September
Tuesday—Saturday:
10 a.m.—4 p.m.

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The Neihardt Foundation is a
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