

Willa Cather National Statuary Hall Selection Committee Meeting

May 21, 2021

1:00 p.m. – 2:05 p.m. CST

ZOOM & In-Person

**Dr. Don R. Gerlach Capitol View Room
1500 R Street
Lincoln, NE 68508**

At 1:04 p.m., Chairman Ron Hull called the meeting to order, stating that a notice to the press had been given, and that the Open Meetings Act had been printed.

Chairman Hull asked for a Roll Call Vote and a Motion to Approve the Minutes for the March 26, 2021 Meeting.

Motioned by Rod Bates, Seconded by Sara Crook

Roll Call:

Yes: Rod Bates, Sara Crook, Ron Hull, Trevor Jones, Aaron Wyatt

No: None

Not Present: Ron Naugle, Tim Heller

Guests: Ruth Haley Keene, Ashley Olson, Katie Brossy, Littleton Alston

Assistant to Committee: Anne Dorsheimer

Chairperson Hull moved to the first item on the Agenda.

Dedication Subcommittee: Chairperson, Ron Hull

Ron asked Ashley to comment on the contact made to former First Lady Laura Bush for a Cather reading at the dedication ceremony. The former First Lady is in official retirement and not traveling for speaking opportunities. However, her assistant asked Ashley to keep in touch as plans for the event develop, and as Mrs. Bush may be able to attend and participate.

Ron is working to contact the United States Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Bishop Curry. He noted that Willa Cather was Episcopalian, and that was her church of choice. Bishop Curry has expressed enthusiasm for the invocation and benediction, and has requested a tentative date for the event.

Ron asked Katie Brossy for input regarding a tentative date. Katie stated that she has reached out to Speaker Pelosi's office in Washington, D.C. regarding capacity for Emancipation Hall and a potential installation date. The Speaker's office responded that Emancipation Hall is able to hold several hundred people, but due to COVID-19 and the January 6th events, the U.S. Capitol is still closed, and there are no events. The Speaker's office asked Katie to relay to the Committee that the office wants to ensure the event is done well, but are unable to provide any dates or any indication of when they might be able to provide a schedule. Katie believes that early 2022 is realistic for the installation of the statue. The Joint Library Committee will not provide final approval of the statue until September 2021 at the earliest. Then, the next step will be to work with Leadership regarding the schedule. Given that security and attendance procedures at the U.S. Capitol are still in development, winter or early spring 2022 is the most likely time

for the installation. Ron thanked Katie for her input and stated that he will relay that information to Professor Bill Thomas and Reverend Scott Barker.

Ron stated that with regard to the Presentation of Colors, Speaker Pelosi's office can handle this for the Committee, and Katie confirmed this is accurate. The national anthem is important, and Ron mentioned finding a singer such as Lady Gaga due to her fabulous talent.

Chairperson Hull will call a Dedication subcommittee meeting again in June with members Rod Bates, Tim Heller, and Ashley Olson. Committee meetings will be every other month, and the Committee will meet as a whole again in July. Ron mentioned the Dedication ceremony is a good opportunity to show off Nebraska talent. Concerning the unveiling of the statue, all agreed that Laura Smith Camp's daughter, Abby, will be one of two people, as well as another member of the Willa Cather family. This topic of discussion will be on the agenda in June in order to make a final decision.

Ron reiterated that Speaker Pelosi's office will decide who will be there from Nebraska's nationally elected officials, but Katie stated that the Committee can provide recommendations or a preference. One U.S. Senator and one U.S. Congressman will be chosen.

This will be on the agenda in June for discussion, and then the Committee will submit a recommendation. Ron stated the subcommittee decided against a musical interlude, but hopes for a talented speaker to read a passage of Willa Cather. House and Senate leadership from both parties will be invited to attend and the invitation will come from Speaker Pelosi's office. Their schedule will be coordinated with that of Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, and this coordination of schedules will determine the date of the installation.

Invitation List Subcommittee: Chairperson, Aaron Wyatt

Aaron suggested that since the national anthem was originally composed as a poem that the Committee consider having it read, instead of sung. Ron affirmed that this is an outside-the-box idea and his committee will give it serious consideration.

Katie Brossy added that the U.S. Capitol will provide a color guard, but if the Committee wanted to provide its own, that is an option. Ron felt that the Committee does not have the funds to send four people to Washington, D.C., but he thanked Katie for the suggestion.

Ron asked if there were any other questions from the Committee regarding the invitations.

Aaron had reached out to Katie to get an idea on capacity and based on her response, he has not moved forward with the invitation list. He has asked Littleton Alston for a list of his recommended attendees.

Ron asked Aaron if the Committee should be sending him names.

Aaron responded, yes, if you have an idea. A database has been started and any names that are essential can be sent to Aaron. Aaron and Ashley noted that the Cather Center's administrative assistant worked on it and Ashley will give Aaron her contact information for guidance.

Katie added that invitations will be sent electronically, so an email address with the name is important. Ron will send Ashley a few names and emails, and she said she would have them added to the database. They've created a Google document that can be shared with the Committee or subcommittee.

Ruth mentioned the Committee would put them in categories, such as state government, Willa Cather family, UNL, etc.

Ron mentioned that Mike Zeleny, from the UNL Chancellor's office, will also contribute to the invitation list. Ron asked if there were any more questions for Aaron. Ron stated he hoped all three subcommittees can meet in June, and then the Committee will meet as a whole in July. Aaron stated he will get dates out to his subcommittee.

Ron moved to the next item on the Agenda.

Reception Subcommittee – Chairperson, Sara Crook

Dr. Crook stated that the Reception subcommittee met again and finalized a few items. She suggested talking to the various entities that will be in the program, and Ashley has volunteered to coordinate. The program booklet will include a half page summary about Littleton, as well as information on History Nebraska, the Willa Cather Foundation, and University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The subcommittee plans to invite former Senator Burke Harr as a speaker. Senator Harr introduced the legislation. Ron Hull will reach out to him, and the Committee will also wait to see if former First Lady Laura Bush will attend.

The subcommittee agreed that a playlist focusing on Nebraska songs/artists would be appropriate. A live musician may not be able to perform with the necessary breadth and depth of songs to be played with Nebraska, or with a connection to Willa Cather. A playlist that can be amplified over speakers is preferred to background music, so as not to overwhelm the event.

The Bison edition books of Willa Cather will be provided as decorations and party favors. Mike Zeleny obtained an agreement from the University of Nebraska Press to provide these free of charge. Dr. Crook remarked that these books will be given away to attendees.

Dr. Crook noted that decorations will wait before we know what the room is. Once the Committee decides on tables, chairs, table cloths, and flowers, does the Committee need to line up people to get this done?

Katie stated that if the reception is at the U.S. Capitol, there is a specific caterer. An event planner will oversee the event and provide tables, sign-in sheets, tags, gifts, and options for space with high top tables, and tables for senior guests.

Rod Bates asked Katie if it will be hard to have an event at the U.S. Capitol given current security concerns. Katie responded that they are still assessing liability and protocols. Security is present, but we do not know what that will look like. Rod asked if we should we have a back-up plan just in case. He remarked that everything has changed in terms of attitude toward protection of the building. Katie responded that she will reach out to event planners she knows to see what other options might be available near the U.S. Capitol.

Ron told Dr. Crook he would get a letter out to Senator Harr soon. Dr. Crook mentioned it is more probable that the event will still be at the U.S. Capitol, but having a back-up plan is a good idea. A lot will change between now and early next year. She thanked Katie Brossy for her help.

Ron asked for any questions for Dr. Crook. Ron moved to the next item on the Agenda.

Status of Willa Cather Statue: Littleton Alston

The statue is in process right now. The work has been molded and is going into wax. On June 1, he will do the final detail on the wax, including the face and hands. Littleton will have some samples made up of 2-3 options of the Patina to send to Dr. Cohen at the Architect of the Capitol's office. He will send small bronze samples to her and images of them to Ron, Trevor, and the Committee.

Littleton will be coordinating his selections around the same time with the coloration of the base. Dr. Cohen and he looked at and discussed different bases. Littleton is tending to go towards a granite with a darker coloration, because of smudging from visitors on a lighter base. He feels black granite would be nice with "Nebraska" engraved into it. Littleton has a meeting with the company that will be doing the base, and he asked for a confirmation on the text:

NEBRASKA Willa Cather AUTHOR 1873-1947

"The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman"

O Pioneers!

Ashley stated that yes, that reads correctly, and to make sure there is an exclamation point after Pioneers. Aaron asked if this is a single sentence, or part of a larger sentence, and she stated that it is a single sentence. Littleton mentioned that this text is already approved by the Architect of Capitol office. Also, he has specs that were sent to Architect of the Capitol and they have approved the design of the base and the granite. Littleton mentioned that he wanted to invite NETV out to film the casting.

Littleton should be done by September 10, 2021 with all the work. He will fork lift the base and the pedestal back to his studio and place into storage. He mentioned that we will also bring back the J. Sterling Morton statue, but he was not sure if we will bring back the base as well. Katie Brossy affirmed that we will bring the base back. Littleton also asked if he will be storing J. Sterling Morton or will it be going to a particular site? Trevor affirmed that Littleton will deliver it directly to Nebraska City. Littleton asked that as time gets closer, to give him more details, such as if there will be a loading dock and fork lift? Dr. Crook affirmed that she and Trevor will have those details ready.

Dr. Crook asked if we will be getting a sneak preview of the statue? Littleton invited the Committee to the studio to see the work in bronze when it arrives. He noted that if we unwrap and look at it, he asks that if the Committee takes pictures with phones, not to share them. The Committee agreed that they do not want to share images of the sculpture before the unveiling in Washington, D.C.

Ruth Haley Keene asked if Littleton will have professional photos taken at his studio? When the news breaks, the Committee will want quality photos of the statue. Littleton affirmed this. Ruth also asked if the black granite has been secured, and he stated, not yet. Ruth recommended to locate it and obtain it.

Katie spoke to Dr. Cohen and she will be back in mid-June in the office, and Katie suggested to send patina samples to her office at the U.S. Capitol soon. Katie recommended to get this to her as soon as possible.

Ron asked if we can set up a meeting through Anne in late July, and there was consensus for this. Aaron, Sara, and Ron, the three chairs of the subcommittees, will contact members to meet before that time.

Ron noted that we have a terrific committee, and he appreciates each participant.

Ruth remarked how lucky the Committee is to have Katie. She thanked Katie for being a part of this project. Rod Bates seconded that. Ron Hull thanked Littleton for his work.

Motion to Adjourn.

Motioned by Rod Bates, Seconded by Sara Crook

Roll Call:

Yes: Rod Bates, Sara Crook, Ron Hull, Trevor Jones, Aaron Wyatt

No: None

Not Present: Ron Naugle, Tim Heller

Adjournment at 2:05 p.m. CST.