

Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation Honoring Legacy Of Bob & Susan Childers

Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation will host a lunch and program to honor the lives and legacy of Bob and Susan Childers, Wednesday, April 26, at the Seneca Auditorium. Lunch will be served at noon CDT with a short program following at 12:30 p.m.

Bob and Susan Childers married in 1968 and lived and worked in the Nebraska Sandhills, raising hogs and cattle. By working hard and spending carefully, they survived some lean years and acquired land and other assets. During their lives they made generous contributions for worthy

causes. The overwhelming priority of their giving was to benefit friends and neighbors in the Sandhills.

Thanks to a bequest from Bob and Susan posthumously, Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation has substantially increased grants to non-profit organizations to benefit residents in Hooker, Logan, McPherson and Thomas counties.

Please join in honoring and remembering Bob and Susan and learn more about grant opportunities for nonprofit organizations to benefit Sandhills residents.



New Mystery: Remembering Nebraska's Forgotten "Whodunit Queen"

By Carson Vaughan
Flatwater Free Press

When reporter Eva Mahoney arrived in Valentine in the spring of 1930, bound to profile America's next great mystery novelist for the *Omaha World-Herald*, she found Mignon Good Eberhart in a "pleasant little home," struggling to visualize her next murder.

Bewitched by her new surroundings, the big skies and grassy dunes, the author had contrived a remote hunting lodge in the Nebraska Sandhills as the site for her fictional crime. It had log doors, rough-hewn tables, "a great, deep fireplace made of native, unfinished rock," Eberhart wrote, and a hodgepodge of antique pewter lamps, a quirk of the cabin's late owner, a prominent trustee of the fictional city of Barrington.

"Naturally they don't give much light, so I can employ darkened corners and shadows to heighten the horror," she told Mahoney.

None less than Gertrude Stein would later praise Eberhart's descriptive powers, insisting in the *Washington Post* that "she has the best sense of interiors - of presenting rooms," and crowning her "one of the best mystifiers in America." Before her death in 1996, Eberhart would publish a mind-boggling 59 novels, earning monikers like "America's Agatha Christie" and "America's Whodunit Queen." One of those books made it to Broadway. Nine others hit the silver screen. And, in 1971, she would win the Grand Master Award from the Mystery Writers of America in 1971, joining Christie and other titans of the genre. (She would have preferred the title "Grandmistress," she later joked.)

But just now, under contract with a major New York City publisher, half-finished with her third mystery novel and humoring a journalist her-

Am. Legion & Auxiliary To Meet

The American Legion and Auxiliary will meet on Monday, May 8 at 7:00 p.m. CDT at the Thedford Legion Hall. All members are welcome and encouraged to attend.



Mignon Good Eberhart, the Lincoln native and one-time librarian who wrote eight pages a day - every day - for roughly six decades while becoming one of the world's most famed mystery writers.

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

self, the floor plan didn't work - not quite.

"I don't know how I'm going to have it architecturally correct and still be able to obstruct the view from that balcony," she wondered aloud. "My husband has promised to come to my aid with a set of blueprints."

He did. Months later, she finished the book, her first and only set in the Sandhills, "the most extraordinarily desolate place I had ever seen in all my life," her narrator begins.

Now, 93 years after its original publication, the

Nebraska Center for the Book has chosen *"The Mystery of Hunting's End"* - blueprints and all - for its 2023 One Book One Nebraska program, which encourages Nebraskans to "read and discuss" a single book connected to the Cornhusker State.

Less studied than Mari Sandoz; less sentimental than Bess Streeter Aldrich; more playful than Willa Cather and Wright Morris, too; Eberhart landed somewhere beyond Nebraska's literary canon. Perhaps somewhere behind.

But if ever there was an

Alumni Reunion June 17

The Thedford Alumni banquet will be held June 17, 2023. The west gym doors will open at 4:00 p.m. CT with registration and social hour. This year's theme is "Small Town Nights Under Stadium Lights."

Classed ending in three will be honored. For more information contact Alea Ewoldt Tucker, 620-668-0044; Bill Hardy, 402-362-5333; Cathy Kenton Williams, 308-547-2355; Connie Edelman Elliott, 308-645-9059; or thedfordalumni@gmail.com.

Donations for the Senior Scholarship and door prizes are welcome. A prime rib meal will be served by The Double T. The Alumni will be raffling four tickets to the Nebraska Volleyball Day, to be held in August at Memorial Stadium

Spring Tree Planting

Spring is here and it is a great time to plant trees. Trees are important for the environment, they provide benefits such as producing shelter for livestock, supplying wildlife habitat, preventing soil erosion, increasing crop yields, and they help reduce heating and cooling costs. Bareroot trees and shrubs are available for purchase through the Upper Loup NRD. Please call our office at 308-645-2250 for species availability!

Eberhart revival, this is it. The University of Nebraska Press has since reissued *"The Mystery of Hunting's End"* for the first time in over a decade, in addition to five other Eberhart titles that had previously fallen out of print. And thanks to the One Book designation, readers from Omaha to Ogallala will soon curl up with her work.

"The selection came as a complete and wonderful surprise," said Clark Whitehorn, executive editor of Bison Books, the University of Nebraska Press' trade imprint. "Unlike Willa Cather or Mari Sandoz, Eberhart has been overlooked by most readers today, so we're delighted that (the pick) has helped to remind Nebraskans of this wonderful writer."

Eberhart's childhood home still stands on North 48th Street in Lincoln, unmarked and unremarkable, newly inhabited by a young couple with four kids drawn not by its historical significance - neither their realtor nor the listing agent mentioned it - but its "old woodwork" and a buyer's market. No one seemed to know that within its walls, one of the world's top-grossing mystery writers learned to read and write and transpose her fertile imagination to the page.

Born July 6, 1899, Eberhart grew up in the Methodist clutches of University Place, then a Lincoln suburb named for Nebraska Wesleyan. She read Louisa May Alcott. She read Dickens and Cather, too. And with her older sister, she played with paper dolls. For Lou, the game was finished when she'd cut out and dressed her own, writes Rick Cypert in his 2005 biography, *"America's Agatha Christie: Mignon Good Eberhart, Her Life and Works."* But young Mignonette was just getting started. She had worlds to build. Backstories to fill. Futures to unravel in the pages of her father's old ledger books.

In 1915, following her sister's lead, she enrolled at Nebraska Wesleyan. She caught typhoid fever and spent part of her sophomore year convalescing at St. Elizabeth Hospital - an environment, Cypert says, that would figure prominently in several of her later novels.

She never graduated. She took a job at Lincoln City Libraries, instead, where she caught the eye of a "handsome blonde giant" named Alanson Eberhart. He was a civil engineering student at the University of Nebraska, he told her. He showed up again the next evening. And the evening after that. And by the time he graduated, she once said, "he had a degree and me."

Shortly after their wedding in 1923, they moved to Chicago, where Alanson accepted a job with the U.S. Steel Company. Before the decade's end, they'd relocate another two dozen times.

"Let no woman whose heartstrings are inextricably entangled around a hearthstone marry an engineer," she once wrote, "unless, indeed, it be a portable hearthstone."

By 1925, they were back in Nebraska again, chasing Alanson's work through the Sandhills. She tried to keep busy, but all those quiet hours in all those quiet towns - they fell like snow on the prairie, quietly accumulating until her spirit

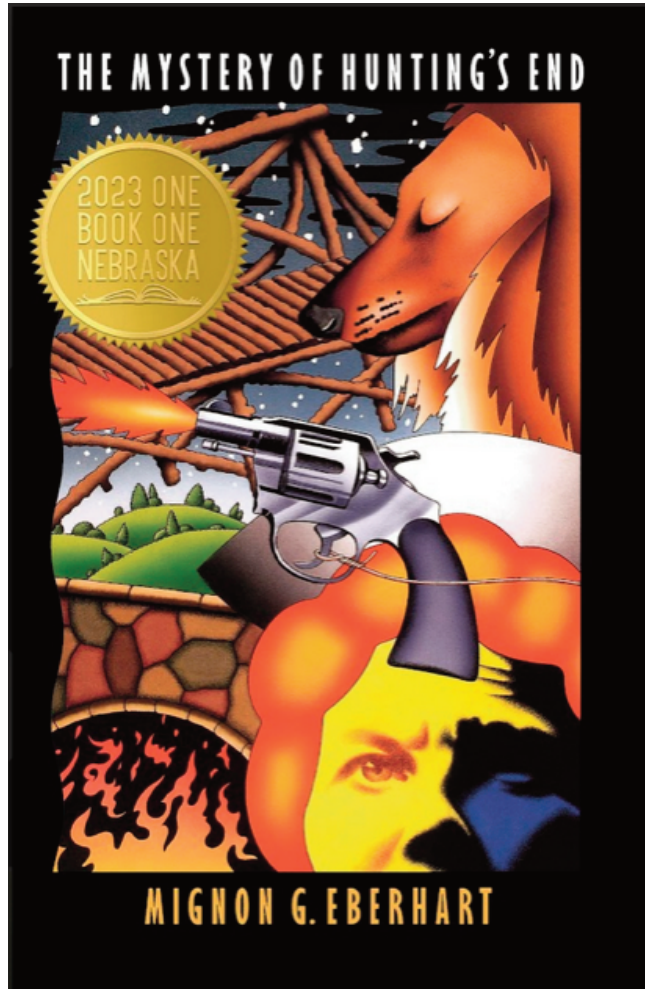
withered beneath. With no kids to rear, and nothing left to cook or clean - she emphasized her role as a housewife throughout her career - she finally turned her focus to the page.

She started her first novel while Alanson built a bridge in Niobrara; fleshed it out while he built another in Newport; and polished the final draft in Valentine, where he supervised highway construction. Doubleday quickly accepted *"The Patient in Room 18."* By the spring of 1929, Eberhart was a best-selling crime novelist, her portrait splashed across newspapers nationwide.

Hardly a sophomore slump, her follow-up, *"While the Patient Slept"* won the \$5,000 Scotland Yard Prize for "best detective story of the year."

But just now, perhaps shaken by the company of a journalist, Eberhart was despairing over her third, *"The Mystery of Hunting's End."* Triggered by what genre enthusiasts call a "locked-room murder,"

*See Whodunit Queen
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The new cover for "The Mystery of Hunting's End," the Eberhart novel being reissued by the University of Nebraska Press' Bison Books. The mystery novel, Eberhart wrote and set in the Nebraska Sandhills, is this year's "One Book One Nebraska" selection.

Cover courtesy of the University of Nebraska Press