



The Nebraska Dispatches

Christopher Cartmill

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Standing Bear, a Ponca Native American chief, is best known for successfully arguing in U.S. District Court in 1879 that Native Americans are “persons within the meaning of the law” who have the right of habeas corpus.

When playwright Christopher Cartmill returned to his hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, to write a play about Chief Standing Bear, he unknowingly began a complicated adventure. As he followed the story of the Ponca chief who fought so hard to return from a reservation in Oklahoma to his homeland in northern Nebraska, Cartmill stumbled into the politics of identity, contested notions of homeland, and his own past. Chronicling these adventures in a series of dispatches to friends, he documented the transformation of a research trip into a three-year exploration of Nebraska, its Native community, the meaning of home, and the complex relationship we all have with history. These dispatches, originally presented in Cartmill’s celebrated performance and now gathered together in this book, offer snapshots of a New Yorker’s travels into the heartland, insights into a very personal journey, and glimpses into a history that critiques and continues the American story.

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