

RG6129.MI - Mixing Brains with Ink: 100 Years of Education in Nebraska (1967)

Produced for the Nebraska State Education Association and the Nebraska Centennial Commission by University of Nebraska Television.

[A survey of the history of education in Nebraska, with emphasis on the importance of free education in the frontier days as well as the centrality of education, at all levels, in the lives and ongoing prosperity of all Nebraskans.]

A young boy is seated in a one-room schoolhouse carefully practicing his penmanship. The narrator remembers practicing his own penmanship as a schoolboy, especially this sentence in the paragraph to be copied: "Mixing brains with ink leads to good writing."

The scene changes to a boy crossing a city street on his way to the first day of classes in a modern school. The narrator remembers only one "emotional dilemma" as he recalls this early years in school: his struggles with penmanship.

But then he remembers visiting a small museum when he was in 7th or 8th grade and having been shown a letter written, almost illegibly, by Horace Greeley in 1871; he now realizes that "mixing brains with ink" has as new meaning for him.

Rural scene, rolling fields of corn: narrator comments on his becoming aware of the power of education in his own life—and in the history of Nebraska, even before statehood.

The Free School Advocate, a periodical published in Omaha in January 1860, includes an article on ink stands written by Denise Barkalow. The publication also notes that Nebraska's proudest boast will be that its schools are free. The commitment to free schools was a priority with the earliest pioneers in Nebraska.

Photos of early schoolhouses: census figures in 1860 show that there were 87 schools, 96 teachers, and 3100 pupils in Nebraska; by 1870, there were 796 schools, 840 teachers, and about 17,000 pupils.

School District 13: What was it like to go to school 100 years ago? Different teaching materials were used (McGuffey's Reader, for example), but the students were much the same. Photos of schoolrooms, portraits of Washington and Lincoln.

One student in Webster County in the 1880s recalls a rattlesnake den that she passed on the way to school. She also remembers the "blizzard of '88" (January 12, 1888) and the story of Lena Webbeke, an orphan in Seward County who lost her way in the blizzard and collapsed only a short distance from her home; her foot had to be amputated. The *Lincoln State Journal* began a fund to assist her, and she eventually returned to school—another proof of Nebraska's enduring commitment to education.

View of a building on the University of Nebraska campus. In 1919, Professor Louise Pound noted that the University was founded only two years after statehood, when the total

population of the state did not exceed 100,000, and Lincoln had only about 1,000 inhabitants. The establishment of the University was a monument to the settlers' courage and vision.

Nebraska's oldest institution of higher learning is Peru State College, founded in 1866. The oldest high school in Nebraska is Central High School in Omaha (1869), built on the site of the second territorial capitol. The oldest grade school, founded in 1861, is in Cass County, southeast of Plattsmouth. This one-room schoolhouse symbolizes the determination and commitment of the first settlers of Nebraska.

Other facets of education in Nebraska: educational television (KUON-TV); adult education; programs for the deaf, the blind, and students with disabilities; programs for gifted students; driver education; classes in business, science, and flying.

Education in Nebraska remains just as important now as when the state was the nation's frontier; and that importance is seen in an ever increasing number of ways. Educators in Nebraska are experimenting with ungraded elementary schools and modular high schools. The expansion of education, at all levels, is a priority. The number of students taking classes in the evening is often higher than the number who attend classes during the day.

Job Corps Center provides education and training for students who had missed out on education earlier in their lives. Research in agriculture is also a priority because agriculture is the state's major industry.

There has also been growth in libraries and museums across the state (photos of Love Library and the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln and the Joslyn Museum in Omaha). The awareness of the importance of education is seen in the great variety of educational and enrichment opportunities available: the YMCA, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Jewish Community Center, etc. "It is a way of life [in Nebraska] to continue to learn."

Return to the earlier views of a boy returning to school after the summer vacation. The importance of education is still a priority and can be seen wherever we look in Nebraska. "Mixing brains with ink" can lead us to wherever we want to go.

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