

# NEBRASKA TRAILBLAZER

Nebraska  
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



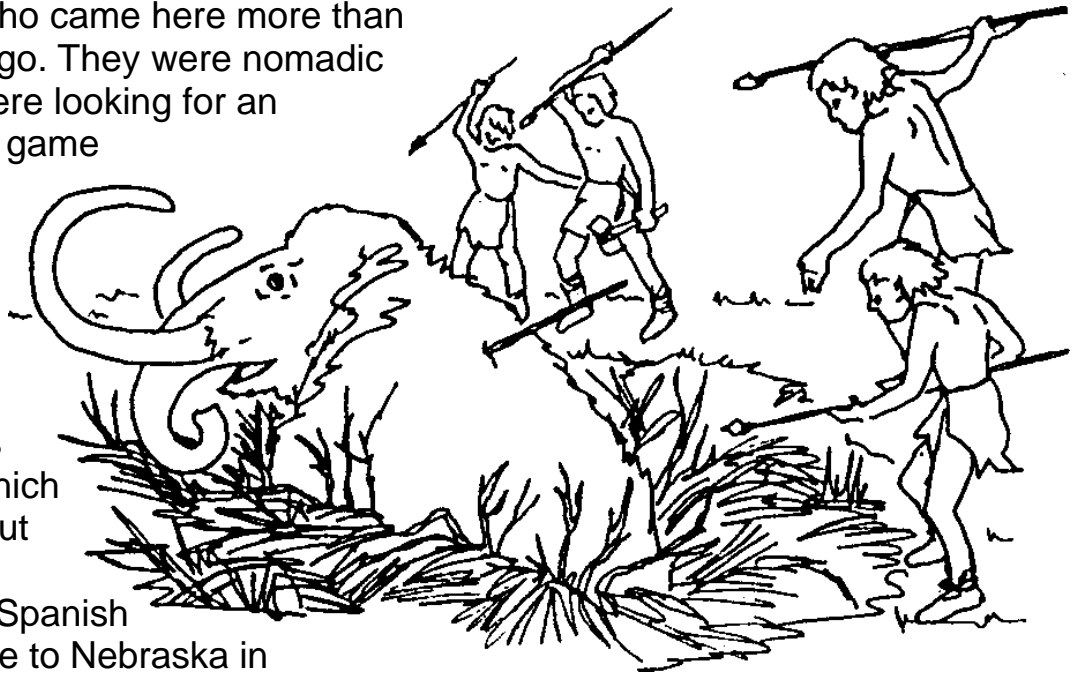
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**No. 7**

**Early Settlers**

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Many different groups of people have settled in Nebraska. The very first were Indians who came here more than 10,000 years ago. They were nomadic hunters who were looking for an area where big game animals were plentiful. Over the centuries there have been other Indian immigrants, such as the Oto tribe which came here about 300 years ago.



French and Spanish fur traders came to Nebraska in the 1700s. One company built a large fort and trading post in Thurston County in 1795. This fort, called Fort Charles in honor of the king of Spain, was the first European settlement in Nebraska. The company failed and the post was abandoned about 1796. Within a few years other companies succeeded.

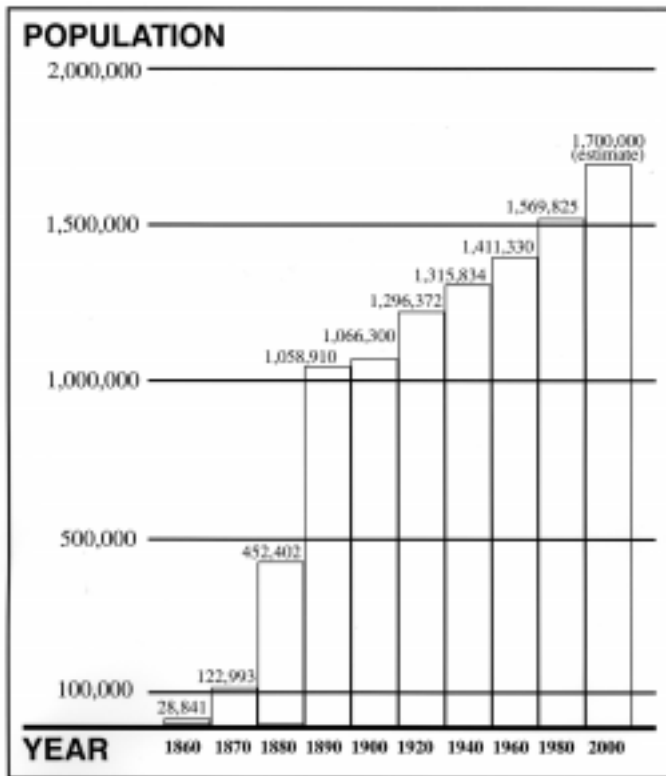
The largest number of immigrants came to Nebraska between 1870 and 1890. Nearly one million people traveled from eastern states and also from European countries.

Today new settlers still come from other states and foreign countries. These modern immigrants, like all of the settlers before them, come to Nebraska to find a better way of life.

In the early 1800s fur traders began to establish settlements in Nebraska along the Missouri River. They built trading posts with small farms nearby. The trader, his employees, and their families formed these small communities. This is the post of Lucien Fontenelle in 1833. Later this area became the city of Bellevue. It is the oldest continuous settlement in Nebraska.



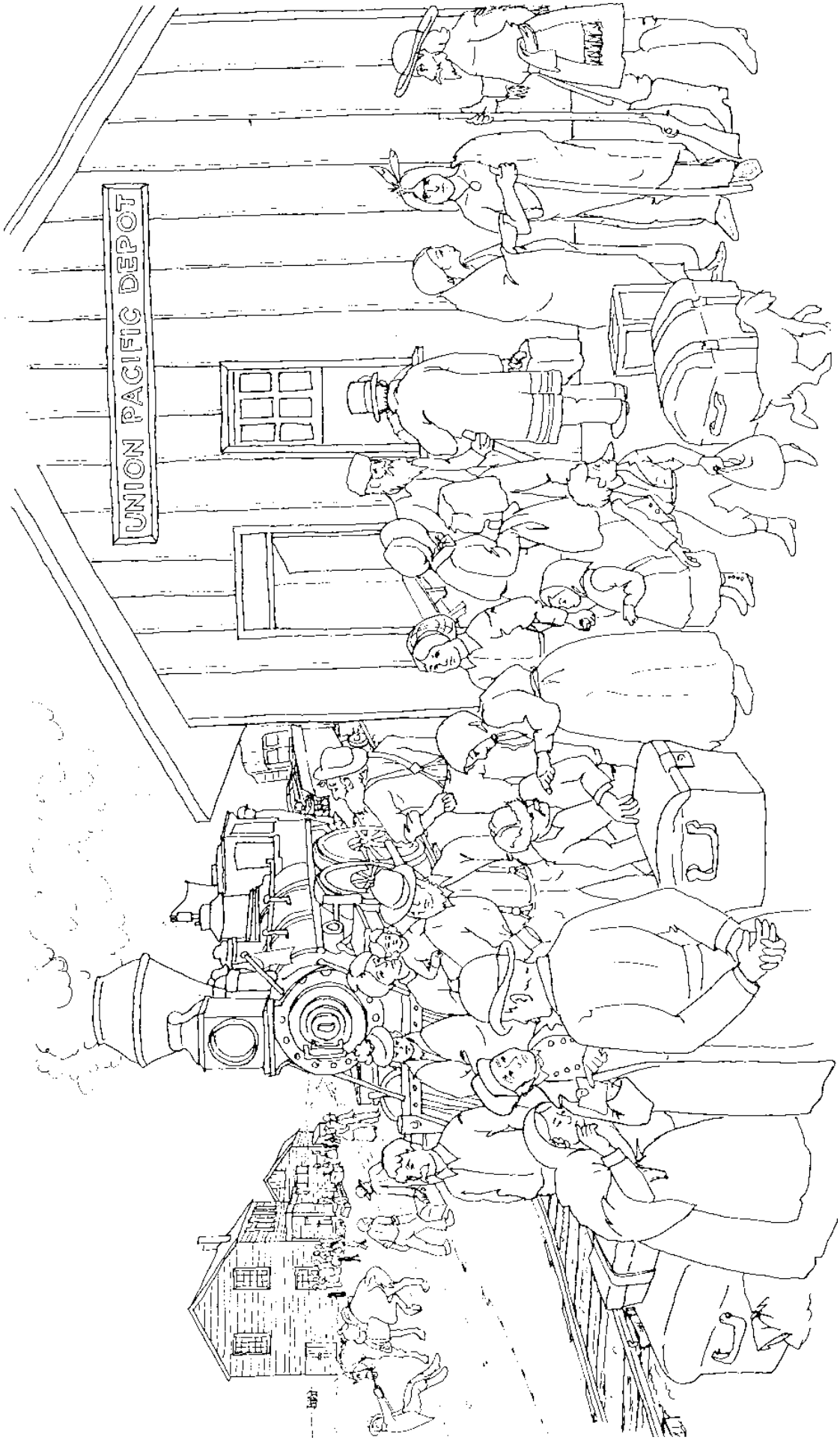
Another group of early settlers were missionaries who came to teach the Indians the Christian religion and the white people's way of life. The first missionaries came in the 1830s and opened a station for the Oto Indians in present-day Sarpy County and another for the Pawnee tribe in Nance County. The large mission school shown here was opened for the Omaha Indians in Thurston County in 1857.



On May 30, 1854, President Franklin Pierce signed a bill which created Nebraska Territory and officially opened it to white settlement. The population of the new territory grew very slowly at first. A census taken in November counted only 2,732 people. This did not include the thousands of Indians that lived in Nebraska then.

One of the first duties of the new citizens was to organize a government. There were bitter arguments about where the territorial capital would be located. Bellevue seemed to have the best chance because it was then the largest town, but Omaha was chosen when a ferryboat company donated a building to house the government offices.





**IMMIGRANTS ARRIVE IN NEBRASKA**



In the 1850s thousands of settlers were crossing Nebraska on their way to Oregon and California. A few stayed in the new territory and operated road ranches which were like truck stops along the trails. These road ranches formed a thin line of tiny settlements across Nebraska. Most of them were abandoned when the railroads were built.



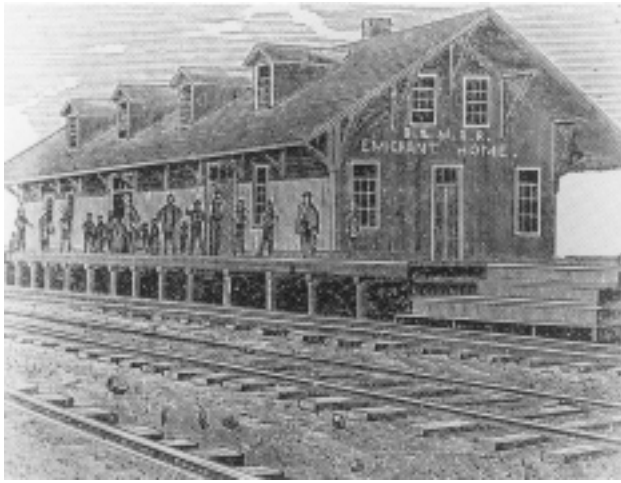
Many towns were founded after Nebraska became a territory in 1854. This 1857 photograph shows the main street of Brownville when it was one of the territory's largest communities. Founders always claimed their town was the most promising, but often these settlements became ghost towns in a few years.



Early pioneers traveled to Nebraska in covered wagons, but a great many more came on trains. The first railroad was completed across the state in 1867, and by 1880 there were 1,868 miles of track. Railroads were very important to the settlers. Farm products and other goods produced in the state could be shipped to eastern markets and sold there for higher prices. Manufactured goods and building materials shipped west to Nebraska improved the settlers' lives.

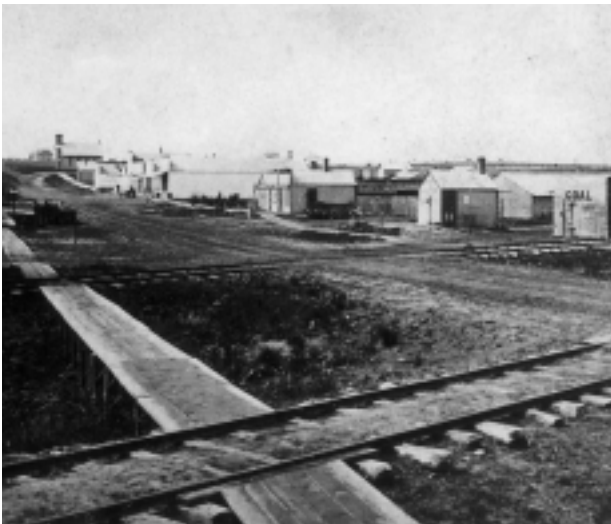
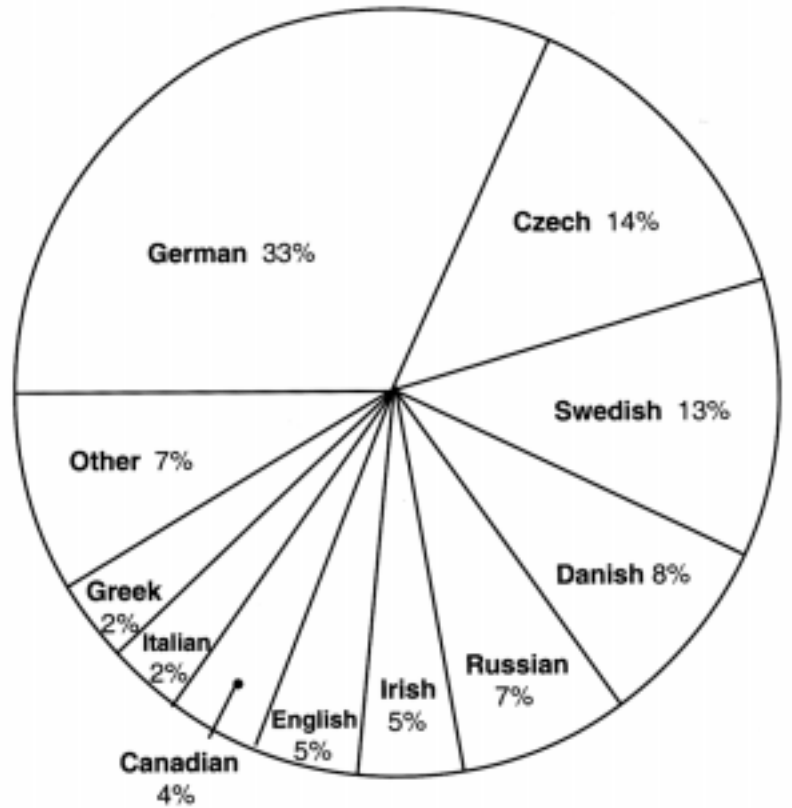


To increase their business, railroads and other companies advertised the good life in Nebraska. This advertisement, written in Czech (pronounced "check"), offered "land in eastern Nebraska for sale for cheap price and easy terms."



Railroad companies encouraged settlement in many ways. They provided inexpensive hotels or emigrant houses where the new settlers could stay until they were ready to move to their claims.

**Nebraska's pioneers came from many different countries.**



Organizations were founded that brought settlers from Europe. One of these was formed by Germans who had been living in Russia for generations, but who wanted to leave to avoid military service. In 1873 twenty-two families arrived at Sutton, shown here. Germans from Russia also settled in Lincoln, Scottsbluff, and Henderson to name a few communities.



After the Civil War many former slaves left the South. Some black families came to Nebraska and were among the first settlers in the central and western parts of the state. The Shore family settled in Custer County.

The Homestead Act became law on May 20, 1862. It provided that a citizen could own 160 acres of government land if he or she paid a \$10 fee and lived on the land for five years. Many settlers came west to claim this free land. The first homesteader was Daniel Freeman who filed the first claim under this act for land west of Beatrice.



The life of Nebraska pioneers was not always pleasant. Many were poor and could not afford lumber for a house. Some lived in man-made caves called dugouts. The only expense was for a few rough boards to support the roof. Sometimes they added a window. An old blanket might be used for a door. This dugout was near McCook.



Although most of Nebraska's early settlers were farmers, some were pioneers in business and industry. Flour mills, saw mills and brick yards were established in nearly every town. Skilled craftsmen also had opportunities on the frontier. These wagonmakers had a shop near Merna in Custer County.

Advertisements never mentioned the hardships pioneers faced. Prairie fires were common, and if they were not put out they destroyed farm crops and buildings and were even a threat to towns. Blizzards, drought, and grasshoppers were also serious problems. Some pioneers became discouraged and left Nebraska.

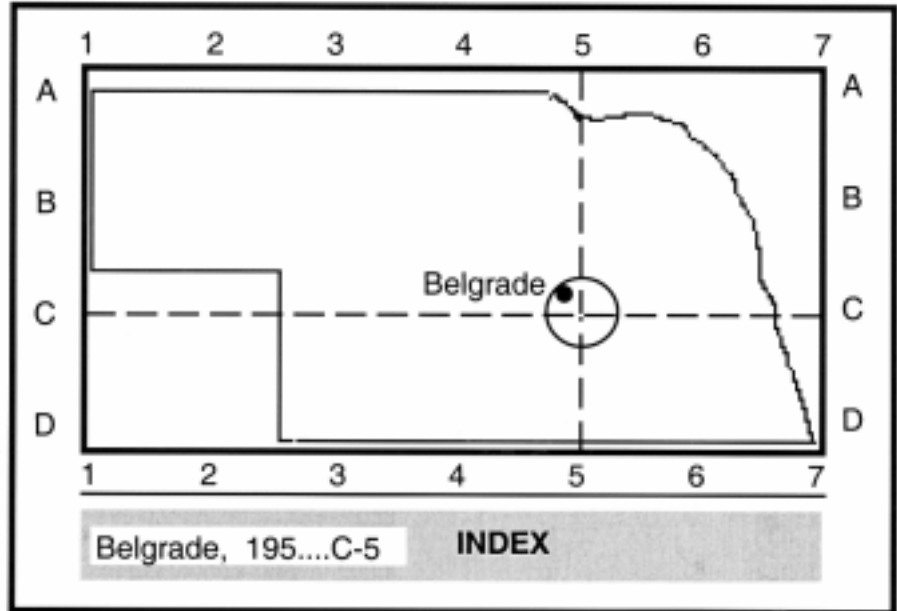


# MAP SEARCH

(For this activity you will need a Nebraska road map.)

Some people who settled in Nebraska named their new communities after towns in their homelands or for cities in foreign countries. A list of these towns is printed below. You can locate these towns on a Nebraska road map. At the bottom of the map is an index which lists the name and population of each town. Each town also has a letter and a number after it.

On our example to the right, Belgrade has a population of 195, and is followed by a "C" and a "5." Around the edges of your map there are letters and numbers. You can find Belgrade on the sample



map by following across from the letter "C" and up or down from the number "5." The town is near where the imaginary "C" and "5" lines cross.

Find the following foreign-named Nebraska towns on your map, using the index and location letters and numbers. (An additional project – find the foreign cities in a world atlas.)

Antioch (Palestine)

Brunswick (Germany)

Gothenburg (Sweden)

Minden (Germany)

Odessa (Russia)

Stromsburg (Sweden)

Belgrade (Yugoslavia)

Cairo (Egypt)

Hemingford (Canada)

Norden (Germany)

Prague (Czechoslovakia)

Bruno (Czechoslovakia)

Dorchester (England)

Madrid (Spain)

Orleans (France)

Ravenna (Italy)

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