

## I Hear America Singing: The Neligh Mills Jamboree



Portrait of Louis Armstrong painted by John Falter

### Falter's Armstrong, Chappell's Teagarden

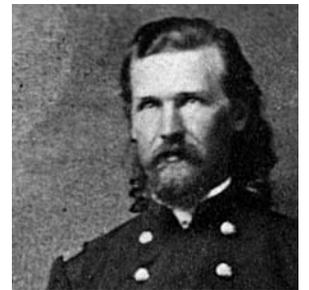
Why does the NSHS have a portrait of Louis Armstrong? The painting is part of our collection of work by Nebraska-born illustrator John Falter (see p. 9). Armstrong, by the way, had another link to Nebraska. Jack Teagarden was already a legendary trombonist when he joined Louis Armstrong's All-Stars in 1947, but years earlier he and his family lived briefly in Chappell, Nebraska. There, on January 24, 1920, the fourteen-year-old Teagarden had what may be his first public performance. Another small Nebraska contribution to the Great American Voice. ☞

Come to Neligh Mill State Historic Site on July 4th to hear Nebraska sing at the Neligh Mills Jamboree. From 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. the Elkhorn Valley will ring with the music of four Nebraska traditions. The title of the event, *I Hear America Singing*, comes from the Walt Whitman poem that celebrates America's many voices.

At Neligh you will hear those American sounds. The Kenaston Family, folks with deep roots in the Sandhills ranch country, is a country band known for their instrumental and vocal virtuosity. Mariachi Zapata will add the excitement and energy of Mexican music. You will hear the Plains once again resonate to the voices of American Indians with Young Generation, members of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska who perform at powwows and other gatherings. And the Nebraska Chapter of the Gospel Workshop of America, winner of the 2010 Governor's Heritage Arts Award, will have everyone moving to the soulful voice of gospel music.

This open air concert is free and family friendly. Bring your lawn chairs or blankets for a good celebration of our nation's birthday. The concert is part of Neligh's annual Old Mill Days, and there will be lots of other stuff going on. You may want to make a day of it. There will be food vendors, but feel free to bring a picnic supper.

The Neligh Mills Jamboree is sponsored by the NSHS and funded with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. ☞



*The Nebraska State Historical Society collects, preserves, and opens to all, the histories we share.*

Lincoln, April 2010

Whether our profession or avocation, history demands hard work. Even the most promising of sources will be filled with inferences, blanks, dead ends and more problems. We find more questions than answers. Given the “fog of the past,” the historian cannot expect to achieve a full picture of any subject.

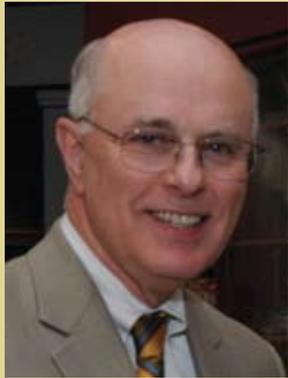
The very difficulty of the task has often led to the recitation of names and dates that has produced history’s reputation as the epitome of dullness. Genealogy, on the other hand, has a reputation for producing interesting results. History and genealogy most often split at the point where the focus is on the life stories of individuals. Human lives, past and present, are always interesting, a collection of people’s opportunities, difficulties, decisions, rewards, and tragedies. On p. 7, I offer five books whose authors have succeeded in linking us with real people whose stories offer us history’s true gift: the perspective to help us know how to live. Few if any of the people in these books will appear in the general histories of our states or our nation any more than will you or I. Yet every one of them lived and was as important in their places as we hope to be.

The historians whose books are listed could have given up, I am sure, and turned to easier topics for which there were less vexing sources. Thankfully they did not. Rather, they have cut through the fog of the past, enabling us to see some of what makes us human as exemplified in the lives of those who have walked this path before us.

Our colleagues at the Washington State Historical Society proclaim, “We don’t make this stuff up.” I join in their belief that the best history offers a level of credibility and meaning that is the reward of the discipline, and which produces authentic insights into the lives of even the most modest of women, men, and children. Let us always pursue the truth of history as found in everyday lives. There is no disappointment there.



Michael J. Smith  
Director/CEO



*"Given the 'fog of the past,' the historian cannot expect to achieve a full picture of any subject."*



Photo of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House

### Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House More Than Just a Home

The NSHS is pleased to announce that the **Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House**, 100 Taft Street in Walthill, has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This two-story home was built by Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte (c. 1865 – 1916) in 1907 for herself and her two sons. The nomination recognizes Picotte’s contributions to the history of Walthill and the Omaha Nation from 1907 to 1911.

If you could travel back in time to October 3, 1910, you might see Dr. Picotte opening the door to welcome White Horse, in need of advice on building a new house, or “Theresa B.” wanting a telephone call placed to the Government Office about her daughter’s money. Later that evening, you might catch Picotte on her way out for a Tribal Council Meeting. Later still, you would see a light on as Picotte drafted a letter to the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., for Nedair Walker, who wanted the patent in fee to her heirship lands. Picotte’s journal entries from 1910-11 tell hundreds of similar stories.

It wasn’t just advice seekers and ill individuals who flocked to “Dr. Picotte’s.” Jump ahead to March 2, 1911, for what the *Walthill Times* described as a “strange meeting” at Picotte’s house between three Nebraska state representatives and around sixty Omaha tribal members. The Gallagher Bill, a measure intended to protect the inheritance of Nebraska’s Native American women and children, stirred heated debate until the voice of an Omaha woman

speaking confidently in her native language quieted the crowd. Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte had won their attention and their support.

Not all gatherings at the Picotte House were so combative. During September 1909 dozens of Omaha tribal members and local citizens stopped in to visit with renowned ethnologist Alice Fletcher, and on October 9, 1909, pianist Charles Cadman Wakefield played an arrangement of traditional Omaha songs for guests. Both Cadman and Fletcher were family friends.

The youngest daughter of Omaha Chief “Iron Eye” (Joseph La Flesche), Susan La Flesche Picotte and her siblings were encouraged to use their social standing and educational advantages to serve their people. Her older sister Susette (“Bright Eyes”) La Flesche Tibbles served as the interpreter for Ponca Chief Standing Bear during his famous trial in 1879, and her half-brother Francis was a well-known ethnographer. Susan became the first Native American woman physician upon her graduation from the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1889, but the events and day-to-day activities at her Walthill home illustrate how her importance extends well beyond her “first” status.

By 1912 Picotte’s activities had moved to the newly completed hospital just up the hill. Known today as the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital, this building was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1992 for its association with Picotte.

The Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte House is currently owned by Vida Stabler, director of the Culture and Language Center at Omaha Nation Public Schools in Macy. Stabler intends to rehabilitate the house for Omaha educational and cultural gatherings. 🏠

## Also New to the National Register

**Northern Natural Gas Building**, 2223 Dodge Street, Omaha. Built in 1951 (with a fifteen-story tower added in 1958), it is perhaps Omaha’s best example of Modern architecture in a corporate headquarters.

**Nelson Farm**, 1139 M. Road, rural Merrick County. Near Central City, two farmhouses, a granary, a silo, and a large gambrel-roofed barn illustrate the evolution of a farmstead from 1887 to 1960.

**The Anderson Building**, 701 S. 24th Street, Omaha. This 1924 building is one of Omaha’s best examples of late Sullivan-esque architecture, which used ornament to highlight the form and function of his buildings.

**Masonic Temple and World Theater Building**, 2318 Central Avenue, Kearney. Completed in 1927, this four-story, Neo-Classical building anchors the northern end of Kearney’s historic downtown.

**West Point City Auditorium**, 237 N. Main Street. Built in 1911 by the West Point Cadet Band, its noteworthy features are the flyloft, the proscenium and stage curtains, and a Jacobethan Revival façade.

**Wayne Commercial Historic District**, centered on Main and 2nd Streets. Forty-four buildings contribute to the district’s historic character, telling the story of Wayne’s evolution from a fledgling railroad town in 1881 to a commercial and transportation center.

—*Jessie Nunn, National Register Coordinator* 🏠





Scouts at a World War II scrap metal drive.  
NSHS RG2183:1943-811

### Boy Scout Exhibit at Nebraska History Museum

Boy Scouts and alumni should be prepared to experience a hundred years of Boy Scout history now on display at the Nebraska History Museum. *The Boy Scouts of America, 1910-2010: Celebrating the Adventure—Continuing the Journey* opened February 10 and will run through August 29.

The exhibit includes the evolution of the Boy Scout uniform from the 1910s to present, various handbooks, badges, World War II posters and flags, and even a scout-made canoe. The canoe was designed by Windom A. Rosene, a leader of Troop 4 in Lincoln. His canoe plans were so successful that they were published in the April 1952 issue of the BSA's *Boys Life* magazine, which reported that Rosene and his troop could build eight canoes for the price of one store-bought canoe. Troop 4 took several canoe trips on the Platte River and even as far away as Canada. Photos of these trips, as well as the canoe's blueprints, are on display.

In true Boy Scout spirit, the exhibit also has a hands-on element. A working Pinewood Derby Track, on loan from Cub Scout Pack 48 of Holmes Elementary School in Lincoln, lets visitors race borrowed cars from the museum or their own Pinewood derby cars to race. Visitors can even buy a commemorative patch in the museum store that includes the BSA's 100th Anniversary logo and an outline of the state of Nebraska. With Pinewood derby racing, canoe building and even a badge, this exhibit is one that no scout, or scout at heart, will want to miss.

—Kylie Kinley 📷

### Hands-On Learning for Teachers at Fort Robinson

Educators from across the nation will gather at the Fort Robinson National Historic Landmark this summer for an innovative teaching workshop called “Shifting Power on the Plains: Fort Robinson and the American West.” Separate sessions will be held June 14-20 and July 7-13. Nebraska Wesleyan University is facilitating the workshop in partnership with the NSHS. Funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency.

The workshop will demonstrate how the use of historic places, artifacts, photographs, manuscripts, documents and the wisdom of elders enriches our understanding of the past. Educators will learn from master teachers, scholars, authors, and archeologists. They will visit historic places such as the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre and the Red Cloud Indian School, and immerse themselves in the history of Fort Robinson itself. At week's end, they will present the projects they will implement in their classrooms.

This year's focus is on stories of shifting power that occurred in the Fort Robinson region. The fort was the blending point between the region's indigenous population and the growing number of Euro-Americans. The area witnessed the events that forced the native people to give up their homelands, as well as the trials and triumphs of the Euro-Americans who settled that land.

Teachers will learn how to sharpen their critical assessment of film, interpret primary sources, and evaluate historical evidence. Workshop faculty will describe and model these skills, and then teachers will practice them. With these new abilities, they'll return to their classrooms and ignite their students' curiosity about history, creating a more knowledgeable and more capable generation of young people.

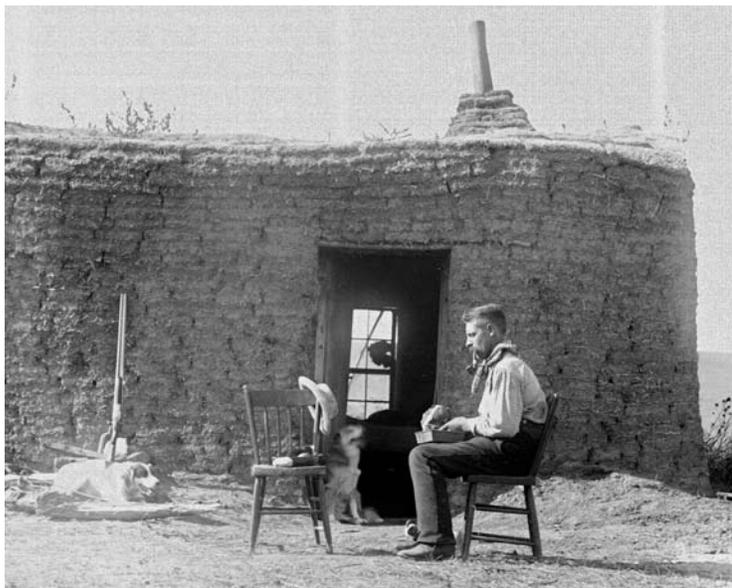
—Kylie Kinley 📷

## Country Editors Can't Stomach Corn Bread Day

In 1899 the *Omaha World-Herald* floated the idea of setting aside a special day to honor Corn Bread, which it called “the Yellow King in food form.” After all, corn bread had been a staple for many of the early pioneers, who ate it for breakfast, dinner, and supper, and in many instances it probably staved off starvation. The idea fell flat with Editor A. H. Holmes of the *Wilcox Herald*, who had grown up in the corn bread era. He thought the idea might be all right for those who were unacquainted with corn bread, “but for us old timers who in bygone years had our intestines rifled out with the rasping roughness because we couldn’t get anything else, it is entirely unnecessary. We know all about it. . . we are acquainted with it in all its forms: baked, boiled, fried and fricasseed we have eaten it until for years afterwards the sight of a corn field would give us the diarrhea. Yes, it is all right to bring the smooth bore bowels of anterior easterlings in touch with the rough edges of the rasping corn dodger but us old fellows have been there, thank you.”

Holmes’s views resonated with Cash Martin, editor of the *Alma Journal*: “Colonel Holmes . . . kicks on having to put any more baked, boiled, fried, or fricasseed cracked corn into the interior of his corporeal system and we see where the colonel is right. We remember in the days of our childhood we had fried mush for breakfast, boiled mush for dinner, milk and mush for supper, and for dessert, it was milk de mush, mush on de milk, and on rare occasions, corn pone on the side. Oh, it was tough on the intestinal part of our anatomy and we think it would be detrimental to the best interests of Nebraskans to have a Corn Bread Day, except perhaps, for the few citizens of our fair state who fail to swallow their per capita of Early Risers.”

—James E. Potter



Andy Howland, south West Union, Custer County, 1886. NSHS RG2608-1093

## Czech-American Genealogy Programs in Lincoln

Check out the NSHS Library/Archives’ excellent collection of material relating to Czechs who settled in Nebraska and the Midwest. If that’s your heritage, consider these programs:

The Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI) is holding its 2010 Symposium at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, April 30 and May 1. It includes ten speaker sessions at the Nebraska Union at 1400 R Street (next door to NSHS headquarters). [www.cgsi.org](http://www.cgsi.org)

The Center for Great Plains Studies will host an international conference, “Czech and Slovak Americans: International Perspectives from the Great Plains,” April 7-9, 2010, in the Nebraska Union. [www.unl.edu/plains](http://www.unl.edu/plains)

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This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Republican River Flood. After a day of torrential rains, a wall of water—variously estimated at from three to eight feet in height—came roaring down the valley. The rising water soon filled the valley bluff to bluff. More than a hundred people died in the flood, which is among the deadliest natural disasters in Nebraska history. This image from near McCook is one of a series of photos recently acquired by assistant curator Linda Hein, and which are being donated to our collection.

### Nebraska Indian Nations Add Historic Preservation Officers

Because Indian nations are their own sovereign governments, they have both the right and the responsibility to identify and preserve historic places on their traditional lands. In Nebraska, the Ponca and Santee have recently achieved certification as Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). THPO status allows tribes to assume duties under the National Historic Preservation Act, such as nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places, review of federal projects, survey of significant historic, archeological and cultural properties, and planning for the preservation of important sites. The National Park Service administers THPO status, which also allows tribes to qualify for historic preservation grants.

Both the Ponca and Santee tribes requested technical assistance to establish THPOs. The Nebraska State Historical Society contracted with a Native American consulting firm to facilitate the process. This included an extensive training workshop for the THPO council and development of the application to the National Park Service. The new Tribal Historic Preservation Officers are Gary Robinette for the Ponca and Thelma Thomas for the Santee. 🍷

### Cather and Neihardt Spring Conferences

Two of our historic sites preserve the legacies of Nebraska authors, and are hosting spring conferences. The John G. Neihardt State Historic Site in Bancroft will host its conference April 24. This year's theme is "Neihardt and the Short Story." [www.neihardtcenter.org](http://www.neihardtcenter.org)

"Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing" is the theme for the Cather Foundation's conference at the Willa Cather State Historic Site in Red Cloud June 3-5. A day of scholarly papers and discussion will be followed by two days of events related to the conference theme, including kitchen tours at Cather-related sites, food and wine tastings, and other events. [www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org) 🍷

### In Memoriam: Grace Carmody, 1909-2009

The NSHS and NSHS Foundation lost a longtime friend recently with the death of Grace Carmody of Trenton on December 13, 2009. She was a passionate supporter of Nebraska history for more than seventy years. Her husband, Arthur, served as a state legislator and NSHS board member. Last fall, Mrs. Carmody was honored with the Nebraska Preservation Award for her work in preserving the Stolley House of Grand Island, a local landmark built in 1858-59 by her grandfather, William Stolley, one of the city's prominent early settlers. 🍷



## Old is the New Green!

National Preservation Month is May 2010 with the theme “Old is the New Green!” “Green” building and “sustainable development” have become current watchwords. But did you consider historic preservation in their definitions? We know that historic preservation is good for communities and the individuals that preserve historic buildings, but we can also say with confidence that preservation is more environmentally and economically sustainable. By giving Preservation Month the theme of sustainability, the National Trust for Historic Preservation hopes that communities and organizations will spread the word that preservation is inherently “green.”

Want to celebrate Preservation Month? Want to learn more about historic preservation? Join preservationists from across the state as the Nebraska State Historical Society joins with Heritage Nebraska in its first annual meeting, May 21, in Fremont. Watch for details at [www.heritagenebraska.org](http://www.heritagenebraska.org) 📄

## Five Recommended Books

In his column on p. 2, NSHS Director Mike Smith referred to five books by authors who overcame challenges in finding and/or using resources to show us people and places that are often missed by general histories. Here they are:

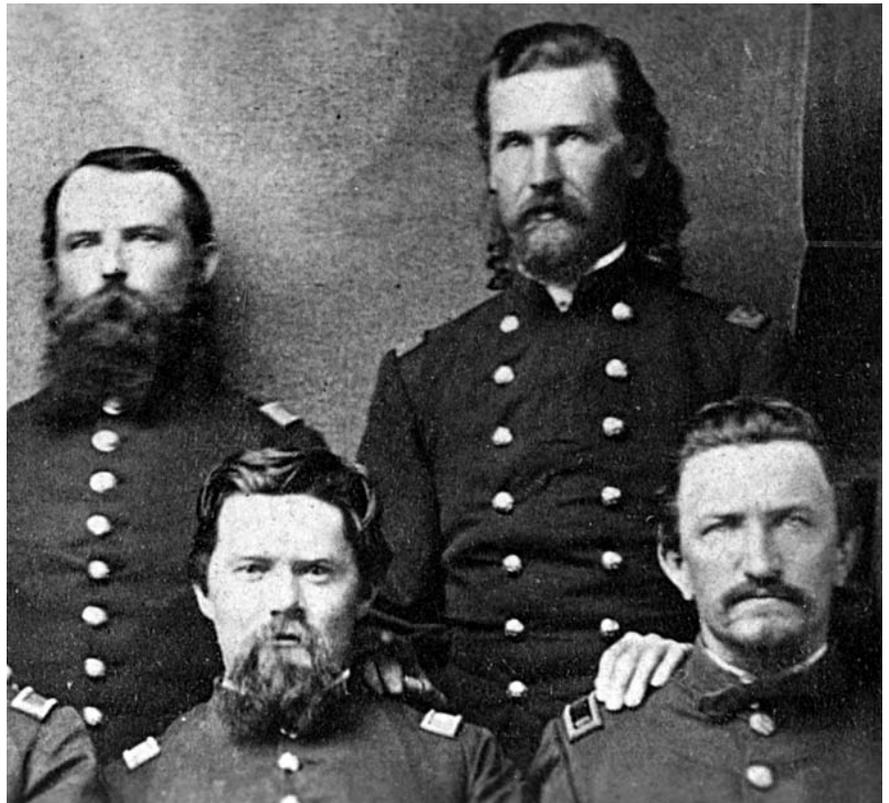
**Faragher, John Mack.** *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

**Schake, Lowell M.** *La Charrette: A History of the Village Gateway to the American Frontier Visited by Lewis and Clark, Daniel Boone, Zebulon Pike.* Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005.

**Theim, Jon.** *Rabbit Creek Country: Three Ranching Lives in the Heart of the Mountain West.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

**Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher.** *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990.

**Vossberg, Dennis.** *Hector's Bliss: Black Homesteaders at Goose Lake, Nebraska.* Kearney, NE: Morris Press, 2006. 📄



Officers at Fort Kearny, 1865 NSHS RG2189-05

## Coming in Nebraska History

A bullet fired carelessly from a comrade's gun threatened to end Pvt. August Scherneckau's enlistment as a Union soldier and perhaps his life. He was wounded in the leg on March 31, 1864, while he and other men of the First Nebraska Volunteer Cavalry guarded a steamboat that had run aground on the White River of northeastern Arkansas.

By the time Scherneckau had recovered from his wound and returned to his regiment in February 1865, the men of First Nebraska Veteran Volunteer Cavalry were fighting a new war against a new foe in a new locale: Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho warriors in Nebraska's Platte Valley. He tells his own story in “Soldiering in the Platte Valley, 1865: A Nebraska Cavalryman's Diary,” edited by James E. Potter and Edith Robbins, and translated from the German by Edith Robbins.

In a separate essay in this frontier military-themed issue, John D. McDermott explores the physical hardships of a frontier soldier's life in “The Plains Forts: A Harsh Environment.”

Look for the issue in your mailbox the week of May 10. 📄

# UPCOMING EVENTS

*Unless otherwise noted, all events are free and open to the public.*



Photographer John Nelson depicted a family's fishing success, 1907-17.  
NSHS RG3542-164-3

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## April 7-9

**"Czech and Slovak Americans: International Perspectives from the Great Plains"**  
**Conference by Center for Great Plains Studies**  
**Nebraska Union, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
*(registration required)*  
[www.unl.edu/plains](http://www.unl.edu/plains)  
402-472-3082

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## April 10 • 2-4 p.m.

**"Czech Culture"**  
**Family Workshop**  
Nebraska History Museum  
15th & P streets, Lincoln  
402-471-4754  
[judy.keetle@nebraska.gov](mailto:judy.keetle@nebraska.gov)

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## April 13 • 10-11 a.m.

**Picture book readings with related activities for all ages • Hour at the Museum**  
Nebraska History Museum  
[judy.keetle@nebraska.gov](mailto:judy.keetle@nebraska.gov)

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## April 15 • 12 noon

**Jill Dolberg, NSHS Historic Preservation Division**  
**"Make-work Projects of the New Deal in Nebraska"**  
**Brown Bag Lecture Series**  
Nebraska History Museum

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## April 18 • 2 p.m.

**Tom May, songwriter and host of River City Folk**  
**"Songs of the Prairie"**  
**Sunday at the Museum**  
**John G. Neihardt State Historic Site**  
306 W. Elm Street, Bancroft  
[www.neihardtcenter.org](http://www.neihardtcenter.org)  
888-777-4667

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## April 24

**"Neihardt and the Short Story"**  
**28th Annual Neihardt Spring Conference**  
**John G. Neihardt State Historic Site**  
*(registration required)*

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## April 30-May 1

**"They Came to the Heartland"**  
**Symposium by Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International**  
Nebraska Union, University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
*(registration required)*  
[www.cgsi.org](http://www.cgsi.org)

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## May 20 • 12 noon

**Karen Keehr, NSHS Library/Archives Division**  
**"How to Take Care of Your Family Photographs"**  
**Brown Bag Lecture Series**  
Nebraska History Museum

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## June 3-5

**"Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing"**  
**Willa Cather Spring Conference**  
Red Cloud *(registration required)*  
[www.willacather.org](http://www.willacather.org)  
866-731-7304

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## June 8, 15, 22, 29 • 10-11 a.m.

**Picture book readings with related activities for all ages • Hour at the Museum**  
Nebraska History Museum  
[judy.keetle@nebraska.gov](mailto:judy.keetle@nebraska.gov)

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## June 17 • 12 noon

**Nolan Johnson, archeologist**  
**"What Remains?: Historic Salvage at the Beaver Creek Trail Crossing Site"**  
**Brown Bag Lecture Series**  
Nebraska History Museum

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## Save the Date: July 3-4

**Old Mill Days and 4th of July Celebration • Neligh**  
**Neligh Mills Jamboree plus scavenger hunt, street dance, parade, greased pig and pedal tractor contests, turtle and motorcycle races, fireworks.**  
[nshs.mill@nebraska.gov](mailto:nshs.mill@nebraska.gov)  
402-887-4303

*For updated events, see the Society's Facebook page, linked from [www.nebraskahistory.org](http://www.nebraskahistory.org)*



N S H S

# foundation news

April/May/June 2010

## Exploring the Art of John Falter

John Falter, called “America’s most gifted illustrator” by Norman Rockwell, was born in Plattsmouth in 1910 and spent his youth in Falls City. After graduating from high school in 1928, Falter studied art in Kansas City and New York City before receiving his first commission from *Liberty Magazine* in 1933. Soon, Falter was a successful illustrator of fiction.

During the 1940s Falter’s career skyrocketed as he became a thriving advertising illustrator, creating over three hundred recruiting pamphlets and posters while serving in the Navy, and began his notable work for *The Saturday Evening Post*. By the 1960s, Falter had created more than 185 covers for the *Post* along with many pieces for other leading magazines of the day. Later in his career, Falter concentrated on book illustrations, private commissions, a large series of paintings dealing with American migration in the 1800s, as well as his “Jazz from Life” portfolio of prints based on sketches of the Colorado and Odessa Jazz Parties. Falter was elected to the Illustrator’s Hall of Fame in 1976.

After his death in 1982, his wife, Mary Elizabeth Falter Jones, donated the contents of his studio, thousands of items from paintbrushes and easels, to completed paintings, sketches, doodles, diaries, and correspondence to the Nebraska State Historical Society. While the NSHS has cared for this collection over the years there has always been a desire to explore how it can help us understand Falter’s career and artistic process. Happily, this exploration is currently taking place.

Using funds supplied by the NSHS Foundation, an intern has been hired to work full-time on this collection for six months. Karen Anderson, a



Karen Anderson is cataloging, digitizing, and researching John Falter’s work.

Nebraska native finishing her Masters Degree in Museum Studies, is working closely with Senior Museum Curator Deb Arenz to catalog, digitize, and connect the dots of this extensive collection.

This project is made possible by the Johnson Endowment Fund, established by Fay Sherwin Johnson in honor of her husband and Nebraska artist, Thomas Berger Johnson, and the Gladys Marie Lux Internship Endowment established in memory of Mary Hannah Hansen Lux and Clarence Burton Lux, both steadfast supporters of education and art. If you would like more information on how you can support the important projects at the Nebraska State Historical Society or honor the memory of your loved ones in the gift process, please contact the Foundation. ☒

**Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation**

Meg Klostermann Kester,  
Executive Director

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Lincoln, NE 68508

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Email: [megk@nshsf.org](mailto:megk@nshsf.org)

[www.nebraskahistory.org/foundation](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/foundation)

## The Reference Room is Open!...and Other NSHS News

**A**t long last, the Library/Archives **Reference Room** at the NSHS Headquarters in Lincoln has re-opened, and we've resumed normal hours (Tuesday-Friday, 9-12 and 1-4; Saturday, 8-5). Other parts of the building are still under construction and this affects us and you: we have six floors of stacks and at times will be without an elevator. That and other construction issues may cause delays in accessing certain collections. We'll do our best and appreciate your patience.

The **Nebraska History Museum is now open Mondays**. (So is the Landmark Store inside.) Both will be closed Arbor Day, Friday, April 30.

This January the museum recognized **three long-serving docents**: Phyllis Fischer (25 years), and Don Humphrey and Mary Lienemann (10 years each). They have taken literally thousands of visitors through the museum, showing them the treasures of the state's past.

In June and August the **museum will host classes for students** in grades K-3 and 4-8. Topics will include: the Thomas P. Kennard house and daily life in Lincoln in the late 1800s; World War II arts, crafts, and games; using an orienteering compass to design an orienteering course; New Deal public art and the Depression era of the 1930s. Watch for details at [nebraskahistory.org](http://nebraskahistory.org) and on our Facebook page.

In the previous issue we told you to visit the **NSHS blog** ([blog.nebraskahistory.org](http://blog.nebraskahistory.org)) to read about the latest things we're learning about the history of our state. Ongoing construction delayed the placement of our web server, but the blog is now up and running.

Selected **full-text articles from *Nebraska History*** are now freely available online, thanks to volunteer Suzy Giannoble, who is scanning past issues. Contents include our special issue on the winter of 1948-49, and some of our best articles about Native Americans, baseball, prisoners of war, William Jennings Bryan, Nebraska statehood, and many other topics. Go to [nebraskahistory.org](http://nebraskahistory.org) and click on the magazine link.

Would you like to help lead the NSHS as a member of the Board of Trustees? **Trustee board application materials** are available at [nebraskahistory.org/admin/board](http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/board). Trustees are elected by members or appointed by the governor. To be considered for the nominating committee's slate of candidates, submit your application by June 1. Petition candidates may submit applications up to 5 p.m., July 19, 2010.

***Preventive Conservation for Historic House Museums*** is a primer on preventive care practices for historic houses and their collections. This new book from the American Association for State and Local History is coauthored by Julie Reilly, former associate director of the NSHS's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center. Ask your local bookseller (or Google it). 📖



## The First Frisbee Competition?

The year 1957 had its problems. Americans feared nukes from space after the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*. Baseball fans felt disorientated by the news that the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants were moving west. And Nebraska football fans suffered through a 1-9 season, with four shutouts and embarrassing losses to Oklahoma and Colorado.

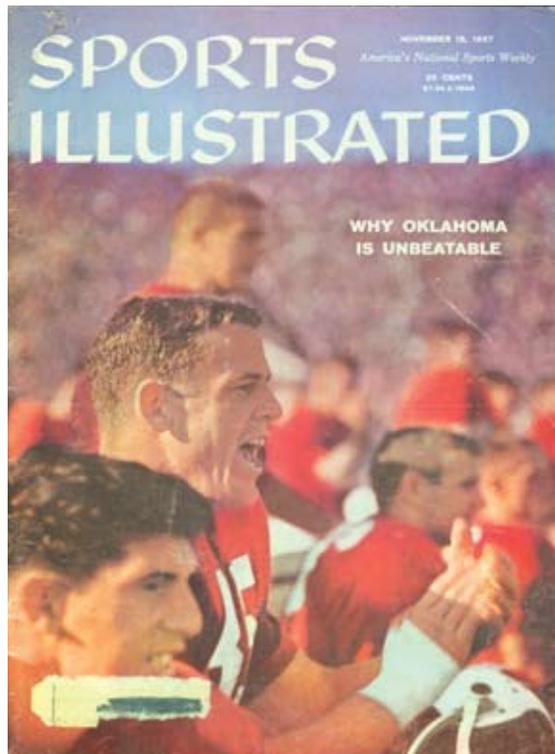
Such dark times call for serious playfulness. Earlier that year, toymaker Wham-O, Inc., bought the rights to a flying plastic disc called the “Pluto Platter” and renamed it the “Frisbee.” In November, several regulars at the Diamond Bar and Grill at 14th and P streets in Lincoln got the attention of *Sports Illustrated* by hosting what was apparently the nation’s first Frisbee tournament.

The toy was right for the times. Though the U.S. government was slow to get its rockets off the ground, anyone could throw the sleek, flying saucer-shaped Frisbees. Best of all, the game could be (and frequently was) played while intoxicated. Frisbee enthusiasts could drown their sorrows and play a rousing game of Frisbee. Misery and pleasure have rarely been such good bedfellows.

With forty contestants, the first United States Frisbee Match took place on November 2, 1957, one day before the Russians sent a dog into orbit in *Sputnik 2*. The match was held at 9:00 a.m. at the East Hills Country Club. The homecoming football game against Kansas that afternoon may explain the early start time, and participants may have wanted to start drinking early in anticipation of the game’s likely outcome (Nebraska lost, 14-12).

The Frisbee contest drew five hundred spectators, including legendary former Nebraska fullback Tom Novak. In its coverage of the match, the *Lincoln Evening Journal* wrote that “it looks like this is a sport that Oklahoma [which had not lost a football game since 1953] might take a backseat.”

The contest was organized by 26-year-old Bob Howey, a Lincoln insurance man who was a regular at the DB&G. It was his idea to call the game the “United States Frisbee Match.” Some wanted to call the game the “National Intercollegiate Frisbee Championship,” but Howey told *Sports Illustrated*



The November 18, 1957, issue of *Sports Illustrated* not only contained an article about a Lincoln Frisbee tournament, but also a sweet irony for Nebraska football fans: Notre Dame had just ended the Sooners’ record winning streak on November 16.

that “since it was his tournament, he and his buddies from the Diamond Bar and Grill could call it anything they wanted to.” He dredged up competitors from the booths and bar stools of the DB&G and began looking for a venue. Two country clubs turned him down before he booked East Hills.

The singles match was played on a point system. One competitor would fire off a Frisbee, and was awarded a point if his opponent didn’t catch it. The thrower lost a point if the disk was caught. Wayne Brown, a University of Nebraska junior, defeated Larry Carney of Grand Island in the tournament’s final match, winning 21-15.

Not everything went as planned. The doubles tournament was cancelled due to a 40 mph wind. Then somebody stole the trophies. But John Peterson, Lincoln’s only Frisbee dealer (who had done great business at the match) provided new ones.

In all, Howey was pleased with himself when *Sports Illustrated* found him back at the DB&G.

“We diehard Frisbeeans love the game,” he said. “We hope to organize lots of national tournaments, but I guess next year it will be too big for Lincoln. Some Ivy League town will probably grab it off. You know, this started as a joke but it got serious; people are serious about Frisbee. It’s a great drinking game. It’s even great if you’re not drinking, I suppose.”

—Kylie Kinley 🍷

# hours

**Nebraska  
History Museum**  
15 & P Streets, Lincoln  
402-471-4754

Monday–Friday, 9–4:30  
Sat. & Sun., 1–4:30

**Museum Store**  
402-471-3447  
Monday–Friday, 10–4:30  
Saturday & Sunday, 1–4

**Library/Archives**  
1500 R Street, Lincoln  
402-471-4751  
Tuesday–Friday, 9-12, 1-4  
Saturday 8-5

**State Historic Site hours:**  
[www.nebraskahistory.org](http://www.nebraskahistory.org)

# NEBRASKA history news

Nebraska State Historical Society

## From the Collection. . .

You may have had one of these as a kid, a classic 1960s Frisbee. This one from our collection still has traces of dirt. It is what curators like to call “an item that has passed through the culture,” which in this case means somebody’s back yard.

Earlier this year, Frisbee inventor Walter “Fred” Morrison died at age ninety. He began experimenting with flying disc designs in the 1930s, and in 1957 sold his soon-to-be-renamed “Pluto Platter” to Wham-O, Inc. The company has sold more than 200 million of the flying discs since then. The grooves on this Frisbee are the result of a 1964 re-design that produced a straighter-flying “Professional” model.

Nebraska played a role in the history of this popular toy: in 1957, Lincoln hosted what was apparently the nation’s first organized Frisbee competition (see story on p. 11). 📖

