



Our new name

By now I hope you have heard our exciting news – we are changing our name to History Nebraska!

This new name and logo confirms what we are – the central place to learn about Nebraska’s rich history. From our sites to our amazing archival collections, we are fortunate to be the home of the greatest collection of Nebraska history anywhere in the world. The History Nebraska name allows us to put all of the services you value under one easily remembered name. It will also be an effective way for us to promote interest in Nebraska history, to be welcoming to all Nebraskans, and to

expanding and improving what we offer. I encourage you to keep an eye on our website, history.nebraska.gov, for the latest updates as we move forward.

This idea has been a long time coming and was reinforced by thorough study. We conducted research across the state, organized focus groups, talked to stakeholders and discussed intensely with staff and our Board of Trustees. Everything we heard led in this direction; to create a friendly name that showed what we do – which is just about everything related to Nebraska’s history!

live our mission to “open to all the stories we share.”

You may wonder how this may affect our programs and services. As History Nebraska, we will continue to offer the same services you have come to enjoy, with the potential of

This is an exciting change for us, and we know it will make the future of this amazing organization even brighter as we work to engage all Nebraskans with their past with the goal of creating a better future.

– *Trevor Jones, Director & CEO*



Summer Kids Camps

The Nebraska History Museum is excited to offer a round of fun and educational camps this summer. There's no better way for your children to go beyond the textbook and get a fun hands-on historical education while school is out. [Learn more](#)

The Art of Making Moonshine

Law enforcement seized this still and jugs of moonshine from a Lincoln basement in 1931. We wanted to know more about it, so we asked Nebraska author and folklorist Roger Welsch. [Keep Reading](#)



"I learned one thing I will never forget," said **Robert F. Kennedy** 50 years ago April 27, "It is a long way across Nebraska by train." Nebraska enjoyed a rare moment in the national political spotlight during the 1968 primary season, and no candidate spent more time here than Kennedy.

But on May 13 not all students at Creighton University were pleased with RFK's words on the touchy subjects of race and the Vietnam War... [Keep Reading](#)



The Nebraska Wolf-Breeding Industry?

In 1902 a rumor spread that Nebraska was home to a clandestine "industry" breeding wolves in order to scam the state's controversial bounty system. It was part of a larger dispute between eastern and western Nebraska, but was the "wolf industry" a real thing? Find out in our history column in [NEBRASKAland](#). See p.10 of the [April issue](#).

Upcoming events

Join us May 4 for a free special after-hours event celebrating Asian Pacific American Heritage Month; on May 17, journalist and author Joe Starita talks about "Susette and Susan La Flesche: Two sisters who helped change the face of Native America."

[Keep Reading](#)



History Nebraska (formerly *Nebraska History News*), May 2018 (Vol. 71, No. 5)

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(Formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society)

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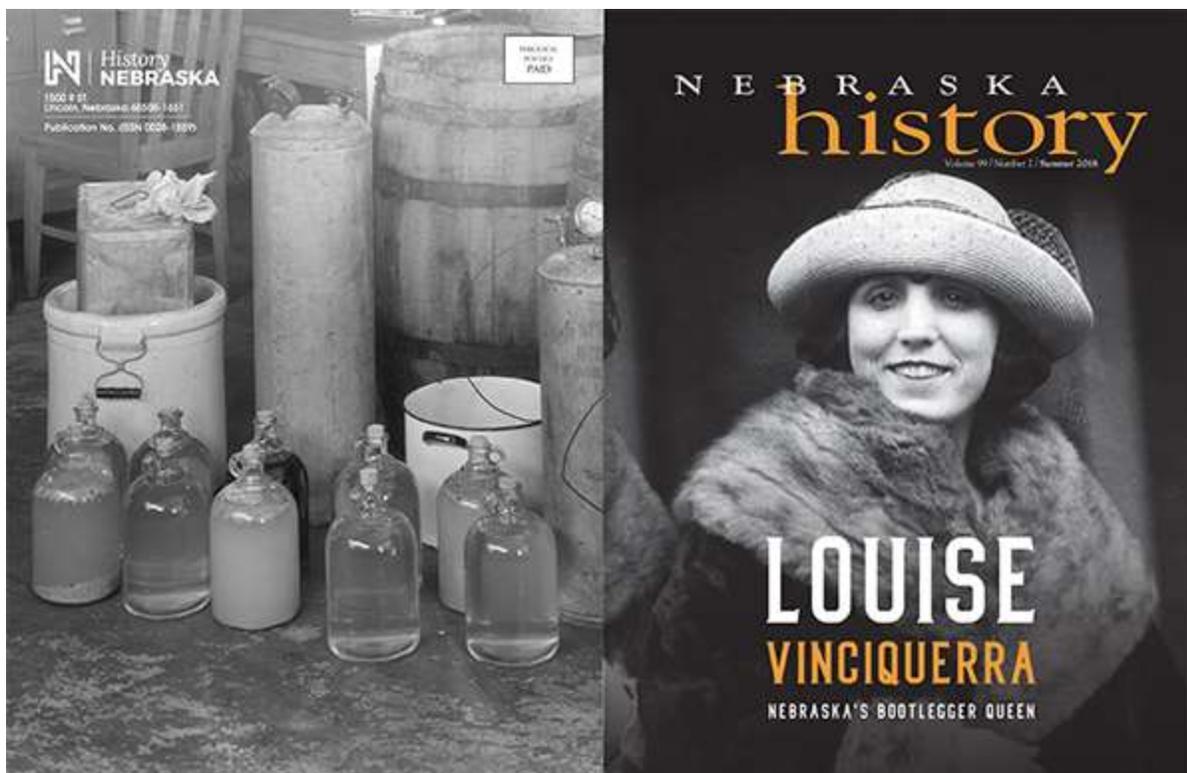
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The Art of Making Moonshine



Law enforcement seized this still and jugs of moonshine from a Lincoln basement in 1931. We wanted to know more about it, so we asked Nebraska author and folklorist Roger Welsch. He has studied the art of distilling (purely for scientific purposes, you understand!) and knows experts in the field. Below, he tells us more about the equipment we see here.

A detail of this photo appears on the back cover of *Nebraska History* (Summer 2018), to be published in mid-May:



The issue includes “Louise Vinciguerra, Nebraska’s Bootlegger Queen,” by Kylie Kinley. If “Queen Louise” were still around, she could tell us how she and her associates manufactured liquor during Prohibition. Instead, Roger and his friends looked closely at this photo and offer some insights:

“On the most basic level,” Welsch says, “the round metal ‘barrel,’ front center with the ‘pipe’ coming out the top, is a copper pot still. It is sitting on a burner. The copper pipe coming out the top runs into a coil in the condensing barrel. ‘Mash’ (sugar or anything starch—grain, potatoes—that can be converted to sugar) is fermented in the open top barrels.”

“After the sugars have been converted to alcohol by yeast, the mash is put in the copper pot and heated. The alcohol boils off, runs out the top tube and into the condenser, barrel...the one with the copper coil in it. The coil in the barrel is bathed in cool water and the alcohol vapor condenses, goes out of suspension, just as beads of water condense on a cold glass, and exits the tube as moonshine.”

As for the jugs themselves, some contain clear liquid, some cloudy. In an earlier conversation, Roger had suggested that the cloudy jugs might contain “tails,” the last that comes out of the run, “high in flavor, lower in alcohol, destined to go into the next batch for a rerun.”

But Roger was curious about the floaters and sinkers in some of the cloudy jugs. “Oyster shell to raise pH? Yeast culture?” It was a mystery until he zoomed in and found...

...Maggots! Eww!



“Talk about giving a bad name to the science! If those are indeed tails, then it was low enough proof for flies to get into it. I’m thinking the law didn’t take as good care of these items as the operators probably did.”

The experts agree it looks like a well-made still. “The tall, thin cannisters with pressure gauges probably contain fuel (pressurized white gas?) for the burner, which can be seen under the still. Like working with a hair-trigger bomb!”



As for the clear jugs, one of Roger’s friends guesses that they contain the “hearts” of one run of the still. Roger explains that this is “maybe six gallons of 120-140 proof ‘white dog’ or raw whiskey, ‘proofing out’ to maybe 9 gallons of 90 proof moonshine. That would be about right for this size still. With the number of open end barrel fermenters I see here... maybe 10 or 12?... they could easily do a run a day in that still (40 gallons maybe?), some days two, depending on how fast their mash was fermenting. And that could depend on a lot of things, especially temperature.”

“That’s a lot of ‘shine! Four to or six cases a day... Yikes! A dollar a pint? My Dad was making two dollars a day shoveling coal into the University powerhouse. A lot of hot, dirty, hard work but a good living wage. I mean making whiskey, NOT shoveling coal!”

These days, making liquor is again providing a living wage to Nebraskans as small, locally-owned (and *legal*) distilleries have opened in parts of the state—including in St. Paul in Roger Welsch’s own Howard County. We suspect it’s a lot easier to make a high-quality product when you don’t have to hide the still in your basement or out on the back forty.

—David L. Bristow, Editor

Robert Kennedy and the 1968 Nebraska campaign trail



“I learned one thing I will never forget,” said Robert F. Kennedy fifty years ago April 27, “It is a long way across Nebraska by train.”

Kennedy had just finished an old-fashioned whistle-stop campaign tour across the state (he is shown above in Lexington), part of the run-up to the crucial Nebraska presidential primary on May 14, 1968.

Wait. Nebraska—*crucial*?

Yes. The title of a 2005 NET Television documentary says it all: ['68: The Year Nebraska Mattered.](#)

You can stop laughing, now, Iowa.

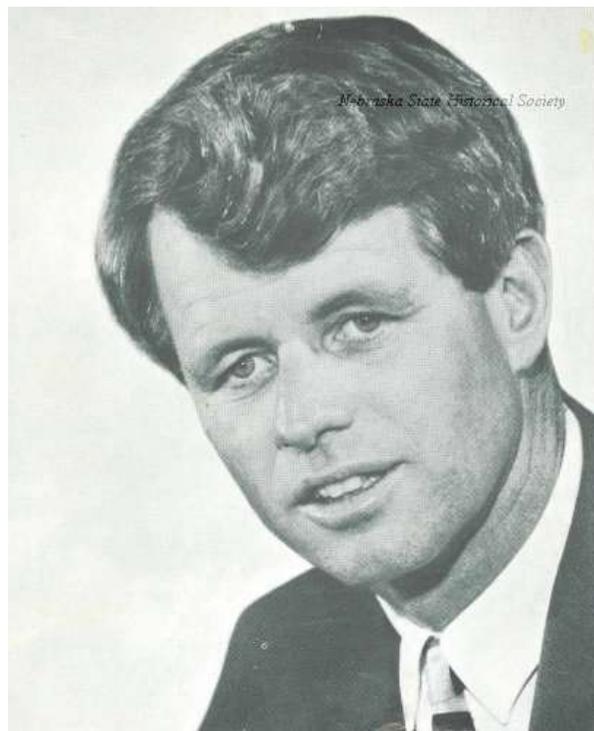
But the story is bigger than that. The year 1968 was one of the most turbulent in recent American history, and the campaign reflected the times.

Historian Gene Kopelson examined "[The 1968 Nebraska Republican Primary](#)" in the Fall 2014 issue of *Nebraska History*. Here we'll look at the Democratic race between Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, Sen. Eugene McCarthy, and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Why Nebraska Mattered

In 1968 the modern primary system was not yet fully formed. Democrats held primaries in only 14 states, Republicans in 12. The national conventions chose the nominees. It had been this way since the 1830s.

It was still possible to win a party's nomination without entering any primaries. (Eventual Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey would do later that year.) Still, the primaries would go a long way in sorting a crowded presidential field, and Nebraska's contest was early enough to draw national attention.



"I run for the Presidency because I want the United States to stand for hope, for the reconciliation of men, for new policies."

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, March 16, 1968

With these words, Senator Robert F. Kennedy launched his campaign for the presidency and gave new hope to millions of his countrymen and to the world. New hope because Senator Kennedy offers:

1. Concrete recommendations toward an honorable end to the war in Viet Nam.
2. New solutions to the problems of our cities.
3. A long and effective record in combating crime.
4. Total commitment to the cause of equal opportunity for all Americans.
5. A proven capacity to bridge the gap of confidence between young and old.
6. Eighteen years of intensive experience in public service, ranging from Navy seaman to Attorney General of the United States, member of the National Security Council, and U.S. Senator.
7. Qualities of courage and integrity that are admired all over the world.

"These are not ordinary times and this is not an ordinary election. Give me your hand and your help."

KENNEDY FOR PRESIDENT • 200 L STREET, WASHINGTON, D.C. • CHAIRMAN: JOSEPH BARRAN

13824-9

(Above: Campaign flier collected from Kennedy's visit to Crete, Nebraska, May 1968)

RFK's Whistle-Stop Tour

An estimated 31,000 Nebraskans saw Kennedy during his 11-stop tour on April 27. His train left Cheyenne, Wyoming, at 7:15 a.m. (Mountain Time) and stopped at Kimball, Sidney, Ogallala, North Platte, Lexington, Kearney, Grand Island, Columbus, Schuyler, and Fremont, before pulling into Omaha at 7:40 p.m.

Kennedy gave pretty much the same speech at each stop: emphasizing the need to preserve small towns and family farming, and to turn the fighting in Vietnam over to the South Vietnamese Army.

Not everyone who showed up was a fan. In Omaha a heckler shouted,

“Why don't you back up the boys in Vietnam? You'd sell 'em out for a nickel.”

“I support them so much I'd like to see the South Vietnamese doing the fighting,” Kennedy replied.

Earlier that day in Grand Island someone held up a sign that read: “McCarthy Is No Opportunist.”

This was a dig at Kennedy. Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota had been the first candidate to challenge President Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic nomination. In the March 12 New Hampshire primary, McCarthy didn't beat Johnson, but made a surprisingly good showing against the incumbent. LBJ looked vulnerable. Kennedy—who had already endorsed Johnson—announced his own candidacy four days later. Some called Kennedy an opportunist, saying he used McCarthy as a ‘stalking horse’ for his own campaign.

But Kennedy showed no displeasure at the Grand Island sign. He jokingly agreed that McCarthy was no opportunist.

“If he were an opportunist, he would be here in Grand Island.”

In fact, McCarthy's campaign was busily organizing an “army” of young Nebraskans. That day 200 young volunteers came to Omaha for training in door-to-door campaigning. Young men were not allowed to have beards or long hair; young women dressed more conservatively than the fashionable miniskirt. Their slogan was “Clean for Gene.” Though he opposed the war, McCarthy didn't want to be portrayed as the hippie candidate.



RFK at Creighton

Kennedy spent a lot of time in Nebraska that spring, making some half-dozen visits, with appearances in multiple communities. On May 13, a day before the primary, he stunned a Creighton University audience of 4,300 with pointed remarks about the Vietnam War and the draft (from which college students were exempt):

“...You say students should not be drafted. How can you argue that? How many black faces do you see here? How many Indians are at this university? How many Mexican-Americans? If you look at a regiment of paratroopers in Vietnam, 45 percent would be black... Will you work with me to bring whites and blacks together, to bring decent jobs, to bring decent housing for all?”

According to the *World-Herald*, “Many shouted yes, but there were some loud ‘no’ replies, too.”

That day Kennedy also made his case at 24th and Erskine Streets in the heart of Near North Side, Omaha’s black neighborhood. The area been torn by rioting following former Alabama Governor George Wallace’s campaign appearance in Omaha on March 4.

But Eugene McCarthy was also in town on May 13—and his brief visit to his campaign office at 24th and Charles sparked an hour-long parade and demonstration by 400 of his supporters. McCarthy repeated his ongoing challenge to debate Kennedy.

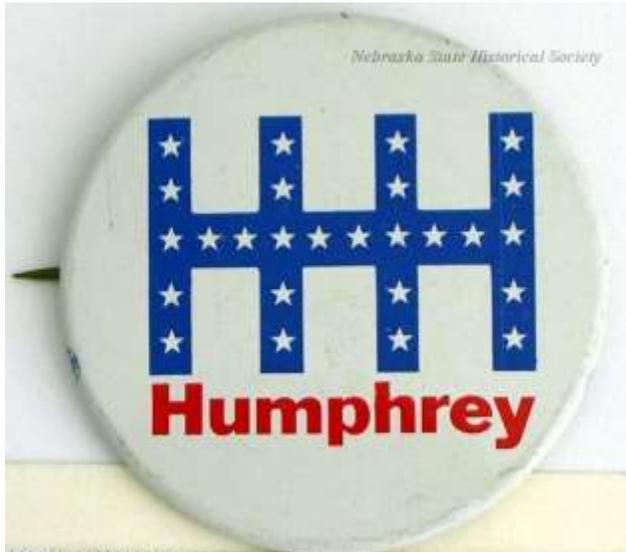
“I sought one in Indiana and offered to meet him at high noon in Scottsbluff. I said I was prepared to come alone,” he quipped. Kennedy ignored the challenge.

That night, Kennedy’s Omaha staff evacuated their campaign headquarters at the Sheraton-Fontenelle Hotel while police investigated a bomb threat. Police concluded it was hoax, and the story got a few paragraphs on page four of the next day’s paper.

The Results

Kennedy won the Nebraska primary the following day, defeating McCarthy 52 percent to 31 percent. It was his second primary victory.

Kennedy was assassinated soon after winning the California primary; he died on June 6. Hubert Humphrey was nominated in August at violence-marred convention in Chicago, and lost to Richard Nixon in November.



Do you remember the 1968 campaign? Did a candidate visit your town? Were you one of the young people working for one of the Democratic or Republican campaigns? Post your recollections in the Facebook comments, or, if you have more to say, email david.bristow@nebraska.gov.

—David L. Bristow, Editor

Sources:

“RFK Train Will Consist of Six Cars,” *Omaha World-Herald*, April 25, 1968.

“Kennedy Talks to 8,000 in Omaha,” *Omaha Sunday World-Herald* (Metropolitan Edition), April 28, 1968.

“Get Off Duff, RFK Tells C.U. Youth,” *Omaha World-Herald*, May 14, 1968.

Categories:

[1968](#), [politics](#), [Robert F. Kennedy](#)

The Nebraska Wolf-Breeding Industry?

Wolf bounties were a point of contention between eastern and western Nebraska in the early 1900s. Many eastern Nebraskans saw wolves as a western problem and didn't want to be taxed to pay for it. The political struggle included charges of fraud—even the rumor that people were raising their own wolves and coyotes, killing them, and turning their scalps in for payment. It was “an industry that is thriving in several sections of the state,” reported the *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune* in January 3, 1902. The story soon went national with a *New York Times* report on January 20:

“The large number of claims coming into the [Nebraska] State Auditor's office for bounties on wolves and coyotes has led that official to make an investigation, and he has arrived at the conclusion that the farmers and ranchers in the western part of the State have gone into the business of breeding these animals for the bounty market. In one instance it was found that one farmer had raised more than 100 wolves last summer from several animals he had trapped and penned up for that purpose.”



State law allowed counties to pay \$3 apiece for the scalps of wolves, coyotes, or wildcats. The state added \$1, bringing the total bounty up to \$4. Claimants were required to present a scalp their county clerk with both ears and the face down to the nose. They swore an oath that they killed the animal in Nebraska. The county clerk then paid the claimant and billed the state for the extra dollar.

Was it profitable to breed wolves in captivity for only \$4 a head? It seems implausible, and contemporary reports are suspiciously vague on details. No names or specific locations are given.

The rumor may have gained traction because of the politics of wolf bounties. The state had fallen way behind in bounty payments by 1902. No money had been appropriated since 1899. Western Nebraska legislators wanted \$40,000 appropriated for wolf claims. Western farmers and ranchers wanted the bounty so that non-landowners would also have an incentive to reduce the wolf population.

Many eastern Nebraskans were skeptical. It sounded to them like ranchers wanted the government to pay them for performing a task they were going to do anyway. Stories of wolf breeding seemed to confirm their suspicions. The *Omaha Bee* claimed on March 23 that wolf-breeding was “the most profitable industry in Nebraska.”

In the end, the legislature appropriated the money—but also repealed the bounty for future claims.

The wolf bounty returned with the 1905 legislature. The *Omaha Bee* described the legislative struggle as a battle of “east against the west,” while the *Alliance Herald* advised that while waiting for the legislature, “this would be an excellent time to get out with your horse and hounds and kill off a few that are bothering your sheep or poultry.”

Western Nebraskans won, and the state enacted a new bounty law. On April 4, the *Omaha Bee* called the new law “another legislative outrage upon the taxpayers of Nebraska. There is no good reason why people subject to the depredations of wolves should not kill them for their own protection without the incentive of a bounty. The bounty law will simply resurrect the wolf scalp factories that did such a flourishing business a few years ago until the bounty claims accumulate again in such alarming proportion that the taxpayers will be forced to insist upon another repeal.”

But it doesn’t seem to have worked out that way. By November 8, 1905, the *Columbus Journal* observed that the “next legislature probably will not have to make an appropriation for a state bounty on wolf scalps, as wolves seem to becoming [*sic*] scarce in Western Nebraska. Auditor Cook reports that bounties for several months have not averaged more than \$100 per month.”

And with that, rumors of a Nebraska wolf breeding industry faded. Across the lower forty-eight states, wolves were all but exterminated by the mid-twentieth century. At one point only small populations survived in northern Minnesota and Michigan. Coyotes, of course, were another matter—bounties or not, these adaptable creatures have managed to thrive in a multitude of environments.

Photo: “Old Jules” Sandoz with his dog and a pair of coyotes he shot at his place in Sheridan County, circa 1924. History Nebraska RG1273-2-2

—David L. Bristow, Editor