



Engines started!





We kicked off the Nebraska History Museum's new auto racing exhibit with a street party on August 25. Enjoy these photos, then make plans to see the exhibit yourself (if you haven't already)!

[Start Your Engines: Nebraska Stock Car Racing Photographs by the Harold Mauck Studio](#) is here through August 31, 2019. **See more street party and exhibit [photos](#).**



"I haven't seen an honestly prejudiced person yet."

Ending segregation at Lincoln's swimming pool

Joseph Ishikawa came to Nebraska from a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II. As a city employee in 1946 he challenged a ban on African Americans at the municipal pool. When a multiracial coalition pressured city leaders, officials claimed they didn't support the rule—even as they resisted changing it. [Keep reading.](#)



Sure, the Ford Center can restore a painting—but what about the *frame*?

See how conservators at History Nebraska’s Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha restored a 102-year-old picture frame. And not just any frame—this one was hand-carved by Thomas R. Kimball, who will be inducted next year into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. Kimball was the architect of Omaha’s Hotel Fontenelle. He also carved this frame to display a portrait of the hotel's namesake, Logan Fontenelle, son of a French-American fur trader and grandson of an Omaha chief. [Keep reading.](#)

Nebraskans loved actress Sarah Bernhardt, whether they understood her or not

Sarah Bernhardt was a French stage actress of the 19th and early 20th century who as famous as any Hollywood actress in our own time. Maybe more so. It was front-page news when she performed in Omaha in 1901. But the play was in French. Most of the audience did not understand a word. Was this a problem for theater fans? [Keep reading.](#)



Experience *Color Quest*



What are your favorite colors? If you could design a quilt, what colors would you choose? Bright? Subdued? On-trend? Natural? Quiltmakers throughout Nebraska's history made their own choices. But fashion and personal preference weren't the only factors. *Color Quest: Explore Nebraska's Colorful Quilts!* not only displays historic quilts, but is also filled with interactive, hands-on exhibits designed to spark your curiosity. [Keep reading.](#)

Not that we're bragging about our exhibits, but...

...this September in Billings, Montana, the Mountain-Plains Museum Association will honor History Nebraska with a **Leadership and Innovation Award** for our recent exhibit, [Looking Past Skin: Our Common Threads](#). Judges praised its originality and creativity, and its impact on the community.

Q: This award-winning exhibit closed May 15—what can I do if I missed it?

A: Resolve not to miss our next award-winning exhibits!



Cool off with Nebraska's ice industry

Here's a cool story for the last hot days of summer. Before mechanical refrigeration, businesses harvested ice from lakes and rivers, storing it in insulated ice houses. Some of our present-day state recreation areas were built to produce ice for the meatpacking industry. [Where are they?](#)



Upcoming events

Celebrate Nebraska Archeology Month! Don't miss events at Fort Robinson on September 29-30 (a community dig at Red Cloud Agency, an Archeology Open House, and a Family Fun Day). In Lincoln on September 20, Nebraska State Archeologist Rob Bozell will talk about recent work investigating Plains Apache villages in the Sandhills. (*Apache* in Nebraska? You read that right.) [Keep Reading](#)



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Editor

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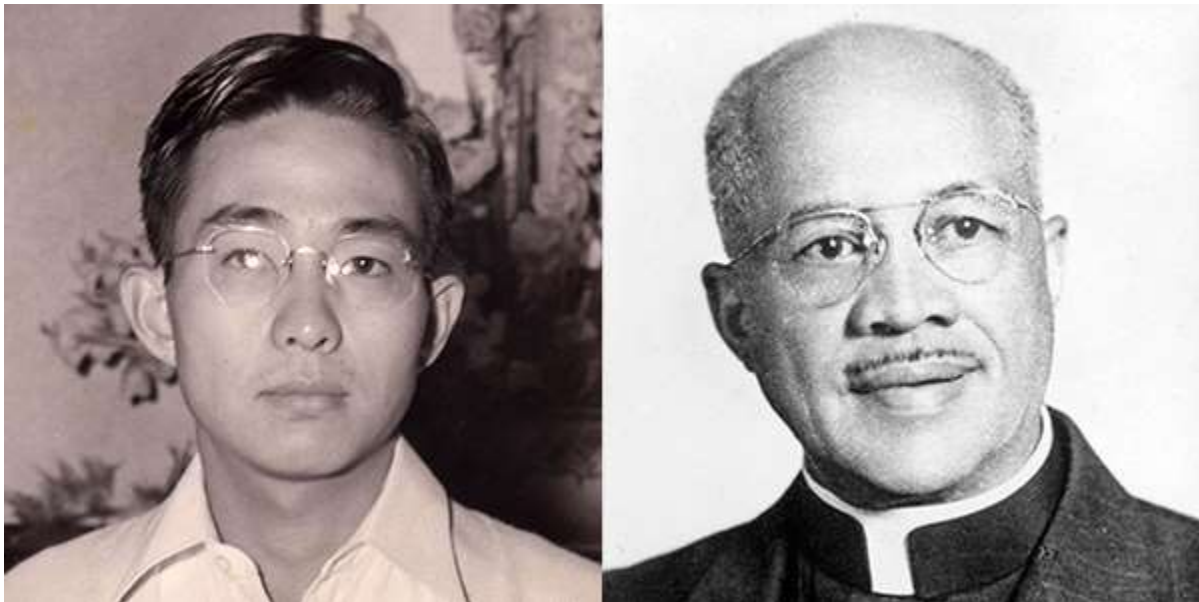
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Complete Articles from history.nebraska.gov:

“I haven’t seen an honestly prejudiced person yet.” Ending segregation at Lincoln’s public swimming pool

August 31, 2018



Joseph Ishikawa came to Nebraska from a Colorado internment camp during World War II. As a city employee in 1946 he challenged a longstanding policy barring African Americans from the municipal pool. When a multiracial coalition pressured city leaders, officials claimed they didn’t support the rule... even as they resisted changing it.

Above photos: left: Joseph Ishikawa (courtesy of Jesse Ishikawa); right: Rev. Trago T. McWilliams (History Nebraska RG2411-3675)

Jesse Ishikawa, Joseph’s son, writes about the controversy in the Fall 2018 issue of [Nebraska History](#). Jesse, a retired attorney living in Madison, Wisconsin, supplements public records and newspaper reports with his father’s notes and correspondence from the time. The result is a vivid portrait of how racial prejudice functioned in a northern city.

The son of Japanese immigrants, Joe Ishikawa was born in Los Angeles and grew up in the racially-mixed East Hollywood neighborhood. He graduated from UCLA in 1942. In post-Pearl Harbor America, Ishikawa and other West Coast Japanese-Americans faced incarceration due to prejudice and wartime paranoia. US citizenship did not protect them.

Ishikawa spent six months behind barbed wire in California and Colorado, but he was one of the lucky ones. He was able to shorten his internment by being accepted into graduate program at the University of Nebraska—one of the few universities at the time to accept even a limited number of students of Japanese ancestry.

Lincoln's African American community, meanwhile, faced racial prejudice every day. Northern segregation wasn't usually as blatant as its Southern counterpart, but it was real. When the Lincoln municipal swimming pool opened in 1921, Rev. Trago T. McWilliams brought his 12-year-old son to swim—and was turned away. He protested to Lincoln mayor Frank Zehrung to no avail.

Mayor Zehrung didn't defend the policy. He blamed other people. Sure, it seemed unjust, he said, but "there were comparatively few colored people in Lincoln and . . . a much larger number of white people would feel that it was unjust to permit Negroes to use the pool."

This is exactly the sort of reasoning that Joe Ishikawa encountered a quarter century later. After the war Ishikawa worked for the city's recreation department. When he learned that black children were not admitted to the city pool, he resigned his position in protest.



Bear in mind that the pool was not *whites-only*. African Americans were the only non-white group barred. Ishikawa was welcome to use the pool himself. But having been unjustly imprisoned because of racial prejudice, Ishikawa felt duty-bound to oppose prejudice wherever he found it, even if it wasn't directed at his particular group.

“Please do not regard this as a hostile move on my part against any individual,” he wrote to his boss. “I do not think that any one person is any more responsible than any other citizen of the community for allowing such an injustice to exist, and I am taking this method as a citizen of this community to try to rectify my part of this wrong.”

Ishikawa began mailing letters to city officials and building a coalition to fight the rule—which had been allowed to stand for 25 years despite being illegal under Nebraska law. The city's director of recreation, James Lewis, accused Ishikawa of stirring up trouble. Lewis claimed that he was not prejudiced himself, but he worried that if the rule was changed, “other people” might object.

“It's always other people,” Ishikawa remembered thinking. “I haven't seen an honestly prejudiced person yet.”

And *that*—and not open expressions of racism—was the main obstacle that segregation opponents faced. A multiracial coalition of local leaders began to pressure the city council. Prominent among them was Rev. Trago O. McWilliams, son of Trago T., and who as a 12-year-old had been turned away from the pool shortly after it opened.

The group was prepared to file a lawsuit, but tried political pressure first. Ishikawa's comments about Lewis provide a clue to their strategy:

“Mr. Lewis is extremely political in the worst non-Aristotelian sense of the word. He is afraid of what he calls ‘trouble.’ At the same time, he regards me as a trouble maker. The implication is that if our side creates a greater degree of ‘trouble’ for their not opening the pool than can be caused by their opening the pool, he would switch his stand.”

“Trouble” came peacefully through publicity and well-attended city council meetings. The group embarrassed the city council into doing the right thing.

And the much-feared “other people” got over it.

— *David L. Bristow, Editor*

There's much more to the story than this brief summary. Read more in the print edition! The Fall 2018 issue of *Nebraska History* also features "Start Your Engines: Nebraska Stock Car Racing Photographs by the Harold Mauck Studio" and "Over Hill, Over Dale": A Nineteenth Century Biography of Omaha's Military Road Network."

Please support our shared history! History Nebraska [members](#) receive four issues of *Nebraska History Magazine* annually. You can purchase single copies from our museum store at 402-471-3447.

Promoter of Peace

August 1, 2018

The Objects Lab at the Ford Center recently treated a interesting frame for a painting of Logan Fontenelle. It is a large, wooden frame for the portrait by artist William Andrew Mackay. Logan Fontenelle, or Shon-ga-ska (White Horse), was the last ruling Chief of the Omaha Tribe. He was the son of Me-um-bane, the daughter of chief Big Elk, and Lucien Fontenelle, a French-American fur trader from New Orleans.

The painting and frame were commissioned by the Colonial Dames group of Omaha as a gift to the newly built Hotel Fontenelle. The Colonial Dames had reached out to portrait artist Cecelia Beaux to create the painting. Due to its large size and the fact that it was a full-body portrait with Fontenelle in traditional Native American dress, Beaux recommended they hire William Andrew Mackay who had worked previously on similar portraits. As luck would have it, Mackay's father had met Logan Fontenelle in Omaha in 1855. In a letter which accompanied the delivery of the painting, he passed along his father's approval: "Just before shipping the canvas I had my father look at it again. He told me that the coloring and features were those of Fontenelle and that the position carried with it the same dignity that marked our Indian hero in life."



The portrait of Logan Fontenelle by William Andrew Mackay in the frame designed by Thomas R. Kimball. This picture is before treatment.

According to Museum Records, the frame was carved by Thomas R. Kimball who was the architect of the Hotel Fontenelle in Omaha where the frame and painting were displayed. It was presented to the Hotel Fontenelle in Omaha in 1916, where it remained on public view until sometime in the 1950s. Kimball is also known for being the architect of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in 1898 and St Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha in 1905.

The frame is composed of an inner frame and an outer frame, both of which have surfaces embellished with composition and wooden ornaments. These ornaments include spears, spearheads, feathers, fleur de lis, and the Fontenelle family coat of arms which represent his Native American and French ancestry. A wooden panel with text written about Logan Fontanelle is on the back side, indicating that both sides were intended to be visible.



The back side of the frame with text about Logan Fontenelle. The text is below.

In gold-toned letters, the following is written:

“Fontenelle / Scion of a noble family of Old France / son of an Indian mother, friend / of the white man, teacher of civili/zation, respec/er of treaties, promot/er of peace. Whose wisdom and fearlessness made him chief of the /tribe that gave its name to this great / city. Whose unmarked grave lies south/ward in the silent wooded hills / toward which the Missouri’s waters / flow, but Whose monument this/building is-typifying in its rug/ged strength as it reaches upward his aspiring sterling qualities, his / persevering patient nature born / of his Indian blood-symbolizing in its adorning Gothic crown his grace of heart, his courtliness / of manner, his adventurous spirit, / bequests of his proud French an/cestors. Thus his nature high and / daring through the fusion of French / and Indian blood is expressed in / this building which bears his name /-- Fontenelle-- Logan Fontenelle-a true Brave in birth, in life, in death!”



Detail of frame during treatment in which the right side of the frame had been cleaned.

When it came to the Ford Center, the frame was structurally sound, but exhibited many other problems. In some areas, the gold leaf was flaking off and in need of consolidation before more original material was lost. The faces of many gilded feather and arrowhead ornaments had been knocked off, revealing the beige-colored composition material below. There were deep gouges, scratches, and drill holes in the frame's surface. Brush strokes of bronze overpaint, once painted on to cover up areas of gilding loss, had oxidized over the years leaving black streaks. The gilded frame rails were covered in a thick layer of dirt and soot, with distracting residues from the past one hundred years marring the surface.



Technician Vonnda Shaw vacuums the interior of the frame.

After digitally documenting the condition of the frame, treatment was underway. The goal of the treatment was to stabilize the surface, and to bring the frame's appearance closer to what it once was when it was first commissioned.

The lifting gold leaf was consolidated, and then the surface was vacuumed overall, using a soft bristle brush to direct particulate matter into the vacuum nozzle. After carrying out extensive testing, conservators determined a cleaning solution that could be safely used on the surface to remove the thick grime and distracting residues. This was carried out using cotton poultices in

some areas, and swabs in others. For this large, double-sided object, the process ended up taking over twenty hours.



Ford Center intern Kayla cleans the grime from side of the frame. The area at the top has been cleaned and the bottom has not.

Once the surface had been stabilized and cleaned, the next step was aesthetic compensation. Replacement ornaments were made both by hand and by casting epoxy putty into silicon rubber molds of intact ornament. Gouges, drill holes, and losses were filled and then smoothed with fine tools. Reproduction ornaments and fills were then visually integrated using resins mixed with pigments, mica powders, and metallic powders.



Objects Conservator Rebecca Cashman adds fills to the decorative feather motif on the frame.

The conserved condition of the frame was documented with digital photography, and the painting was returned to the frame.

After this conservation treatment, the surface of the frame is now stable and the piece more closely resembles what it did one hundred years ago, when it commissioned for the Hotel Fontenelle. By returning the frame to its former glory, Logan Fontenelle's legacy lives on for future generations.



Fontenelle Frame after treatment, but before painting has been reframed.

Nebraskans Loved Actress Sarah Bernhardt, Whether They Understood Her or Not

August 31, 2018



Sarah Bernhardt was a French stage actress of the 19th and early 20th century who as famous in her day as any big-name Hollywood actress in our own time. When she performed in Omaha in 1901 it was front-page news.

Above: Bernhardt, age 53, in 1901. Wikimedia Commons

In our time of 24-hour news and overexposed celebrities, it's hard to appreciate what a big deal it was for up-and-coming Omaha to host the international stage star. On February 6, a reporter for the *Omaha Daily News* commented on the preparation of the actress's dressing room at the Boyd Theater:

“Every stitch and stick of the usual furnishings had been removed. The floor had been carpeted and the wall covered with tapestries. . . . From the door of the room to the points where

Bernhardt was to enter the various scenes new, clean canvas had been stretched for her to walk on, that her wonderful gowns should not come in contact with the dusty stage.”



Boyd Theater, 1621 Harney Street in Omaha. The building was demolished in 1920. History Nebraska RG2341-523

More than 2,000 people saw and heard Bernhardt playing the lead role in the well-known drama *La Tosca*. “Most of Omaha’s fashion and a large representation of its brains was at the Boyd last night to ‘see Bernhardt,’” said the *Daily News*.

There was just one small issue. The play was in French. Most of the audience literally did not understand a word.

And here is where the reporter becomes a little tongue-in-cheek as he describes audience reaction to the famously proud and touchy superstar:

The audience rose admirably to the necessity of saving Omaha's artistic reputation, and by way of doing so, recalled the actress several times at the end of the third act, and also after the fourth. She seemed pleased, but she is disappointed when she is anything less than delighted.

As for enthusiasm, how could there be enthusiasm when every person in the audience save six or eight was peering at the stage through a dense fog of lingual ignorance and was nervously uncertain just when enthusiasm would be acceptable to the divinity?

Bernhardt's acting style would seem campy by today's standards. In her day—before microphones and amplification—an actress had to reach the back rows with her unaided voice. In this, Bernhardt excelled. She was known for “the bell-like sweetness and clearness and the indescribable individuality” of her voice—and this, said the reporter, has “not been one whit exaggerated.”

But as to what she and the other actors were actually saying, most of the audience could only guess. If the crowd seemed a bit subdued through much of the performance, the reporter suggested that Bernhardt's ability to “sustain the interest of the unenlightened to the pitch reached by the average good performance in the English tongue, shows the power of her interpretation of meanings without words.”

Cool Off with Nebraska's Ice Industry

August 31, 2018



Today a manmade lake in Saunders County is part of a recreation area, but the lake itself was not made for recreation. It was made for ice. [Memphis State Recreation Area](#) is a fine place for fishing and boating, but it's also an unusual legacy of Nebraska's meatpacking industry.

(Above: women pose with an ice pole in a circa 1910 photo by John Nelson of Ericson, Nebraska. Behind them, men are harvesting ice for storage. *RG3542-95-12*)

For many years the cutting of ice from rivers and lakes was an important winter industry, especially in eastern Nebraska. Just when the natural ice industry began in this state is unknown, but it was well established by 1890. Large quantities of ice were needed for the meatpacking industry, for railroad refrigerator cars, and for home use.

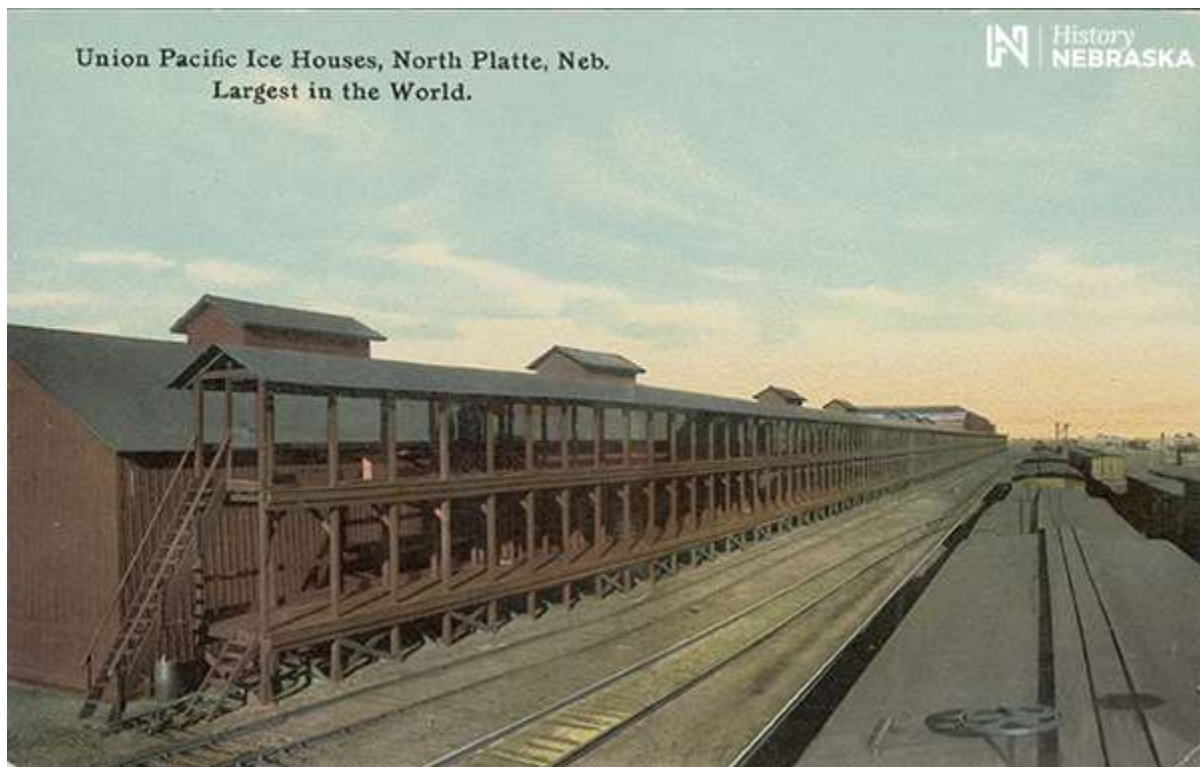
The refrigerator car is one of the great innovations that transformed the cattle industry. The first refrigerated boxcar was used in New York State in 1851, but the first practical "reefers" didn't appear until an engineer for the Swift Company designed an insulated, ventilated car in 1878. This car held ice at the top of the car so that the cold air would flow downward. The meat was packed at the bottom of the car to ensure a low center of gravity and stability on the tracks. Now meatpackers could ship their products across the United States.

But they needed ice. Lots of it. The Armour and Company Icehouse was built in 1897-98 northwest of Memphis, Nebraska. It was one of the largest icehouses in the country, measuring approximately 180 feet wide, 700 feet long, and 52 feet high. A 300-horsepower steam engine and two generators provided electrical power.

The only practical way to get ice was to harvest it during the winter from lakes and rivers. A manmade lake of about 100 acres was filled each fall from Silver Creek. Harvesting began when the ice was eight inches thick. It was scored, then sawed with horse-drawn ice saws. The blocks were then poled along an open channel to elevators and into ice rooms, where they were packed in sawdust. In the spring the lake was drained, leaving a small fish pond.

The ice was used in refrigerated railcars and meatpacking plants, and was also sold to businesses in eastern Nebraska. Approximately 100,000 tons of ice were harvested in 1899. It was common to ship 100 or more railcars of ice each month during the summer. Twenty-five employees lived nearby, and 300 men were hired during the busy season. Most of them stayed in the “Armour Hotel,” which in reality was more of a large bunkhouse than a proper hotel.

The Armour Icehouse wasn’t the only big operation in Nebraska. One of the largest and best known was run by the Crete Mills at Crete. At first ice was cut from the Big Blue River, but as the demand increased, two lakes were constructed on the west side of the river. In addition, a large icehouse was built. During the season 75 to 100 men were employed to cut and handle the ice. Most of the Crete ice was sold to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, which shipped the freshly cut ice in especially designed “ice service” cars to various icing stations along the railroad. As many as 100 cars of ice were shipped daily from Crete during the ice cutting season.



*By about 1910 Union Pacific claimed to have the world’s largest ice house in North Platte.
History Nebraska RG2154-6-58*

Other ice cutting operations were located around the state. South of Hastings, “Crystal Lake” was created by damming a portion of the Big Blue River north of Ayr. Yet another operation was located on the Republican River near Orleans, and many other small cutting operations supplied local areas with ice for home and store use.

One drawback of natural ice was that the annual harvest was vulnerable to warm winters. “There is a panic among the ice dealers, brewers, butchers and packers just now,” the *Omaha Daily Bee* reported on January 9, 1882, “and every sort of scheme is being devised to get ice for next season’s use.” An unseasonably warm December meant that “the nearest known ice supply is Manitoba.”

Omaha mayor James Boyd owned an ice house near the Missouri River with a storage capacity of 6,000 tons. As a last resort he was prepared to invest in a newfangled \$20,000 “cooling machine” to blow cold air through the rooms and lessen the loss of stored ice due to melting.

Bear in mind that this was just one year after the infamous “Snow Winter” of 1880-81, the subject of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s popular 1940 book, *The Long Winter*. Across the Great Plains, settlers were learning what Native residents had long understood: the region’s climate was prone to extremes.

Fortunately, the weather soon turned colder. On January 18 the *Bee* reported that the “ice harvest began here last week, with blocks of ice eight inches thick.” Apparently the warm weather was posing a nationwide problem for the ice trade. On January 26 the *Bee* noted: “Thirty degrees below zero was recorded on the Hudson yesterday, and the ice harvesters’ hallelujah is being loudly sung for forty miles along the river.”

By the turn of the century, mechanical refrigeration was becoming more practical, and Chicago meatpacking plants adopted ammonia-cycle refrigeration. In Nebraska, the Valley Ice Company of Lincoln began manufacturing ice in 1901. The ice was clear and pure and desirable for home use—fit for a cool glass of lemonade— but “harvested ice” was still cheaper for railroad use.

Memphis lake ice was also said to be better than river ice, pure enough for home use. Armour workers used to drain their lake every spring and re-dredge it. The icehouse burned in 1921, putting an end to summer storage at the site. After that, Memphis ice was loaded directly onto railcars in cold weather. In 1930 Memphis State Recreation Area was established at the site of the icehouse and lake. No ice is harvested these days. Instead, the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission stocks the lake with fish for anglers. [A historical marker at the site](#) commemorates the lake’s history.

Crystal Lake in Adams County is also now a State Recreation Area, and has [its own historical marker](#) commemorating its ice harvest history. After its ice trade days ended, the lake eventually silted in, but was dredged and improved in 1976.

Despite advancing technology, harvested ice had a surprisingly long history. It remained common into the 1950s, when mechanically refrigerated railcars began to replace ice-based cars.

Today little physical evidence remains of the big railroad ice houses of the past, but the historical markers remain to tell the story. (Find them all with our [free historical marker app!](#))



An Armour refrigerated car, probably in Omaha, 1935. History Nebraska RG3882-50-168