

## Dia de los Muertos in Lincoln



On Sunday, November 4, experience the excitement and discover the meaning of El Dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead) with events in downtown Lincoln—including the Nebraska History Museum! Latin American holiday will be celebrated with *ofrendas* (traditional memorial

displays), storytelling, mariachi music, traditional Mexican folkloric dance, face painting, art making, refreshments and more. Admission to all performances and activities at this family-oriented event is free for everyone! [Learn more.](#)

**Girls, If You Want to Vote, Tell Your Exact Weight, Height, and Worst of All---Age**

Mesdames H. C. Sumney, James Richardson and Draper Smith First Women to Register.

Election Commissioner H. G. Moorhead is having the time of his life registering women for the first time in the history of Omaha to allow them to participate in the voting on the \$3,000,000 Douglas county paving issue. The new blanks were received yesterday and the first registrants were: Mrs. H. C. Sumney and Mrs. James Richardson, president and second vice president, respectively, of the Political Equality League, and Mrs. Draper Smith, honorary president of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage association.

Mr. Moorhead was nervous when three women appeared before the counter and applied for registration. He endeavored to appear at ease, but he could not conceal his feelings.

**No "Apparent" Age.**  
The blanks call for "apparent

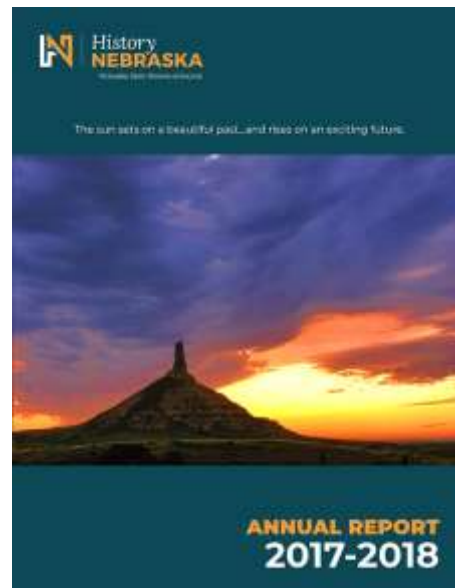


Left to right: Election Commissioner Moorhead, Mrs. H. C. Sumney, Mrs. Draper Smith and Mrs. James Richardson.

"Girls," would you like some condescension to go with those ballots? Anti-suffragists resorted to fraud to derail Nebraska's 1917 limited suffrage law, but two of the women shown here uncovered the deception and won a court battle. [Keep reading.](#)

## What did History Nebraska accomplish this past year?

Find out in our [2017-2018 Annual Report](#). OK, the words "annual report" don't necessarily imply good reading, but ours is full of pictures and stories about our big projects and how they fit our strategic plan. If you want to know where we're headed as an organization, this is a good way to find out.





## **1918 flu was deadlier than World War I**

November 11 marks the centennial of the armistice ending World War I. The war killed some 15 to 19 million people, military and civilian, including 751 Nebraska soldiers.

But the influenza pandemic of 1918 was even deadlier, killing somewhere between 50 and 100 million people. Nebraska's disease reporting was incomplete, but the state's death toll was variously reported between 2,800 to 7,500 people. How did Nebraska communities respond? [Keep reading.](#)

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**In 10 years airmail went from this...**



**...to this.**



Early airmail pilots flew open-cockpit biplanes, navigating by landmarks and simple maps, and landing in grassy airfields. But by 1930 their facilities and technology had changed dramatically. Kathleen Alonso tells the story in “Trail above the Plains: Flying the Airmail through Nebraska from 1920 to 1930,” in the forthcoming Winter 2018 issue of *Nebraska History*. [Keep reading](#).



## Upcoming events

We've told you about El Dia de los Muertos. See what else we have planned for November. [Keep Reading](#)



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# “Girls, if you want to vote...”: fraud, condescension, and voting rights in 1919 Nebraska



Ladies, would you like some condescension to go with those ballots? Anti-suffragists resorted to fraud to derail Nebraska's 1917 limited suffrage law, but two of the women shown here uncovered the deception and **won a court battle**. Suffrage workers Katherine Sumney and Grace Richardson checked thousands of signatures to prove their case. Their detective work paid off, and the law went into effect in 1919.

Years later, Richardson compiled the suffrage materials they collected into a set of scrapbooks she donated to History Nebraska. This yellowed clipping from the *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 28, 1919, is preserved in one of their scrapbooks.

The law allowed Nebraska women to vote in municipal elections and for presidential electors, but not for governor, judges, or other officers provided for in the state constitution. (The law was superseded in 1920 by the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which granted full suffrage rights to women.) Nebraska law required a voter to give weight, height, age, and other identifying information when registering.

“I am not ashamed to tell you that I am 63, although many take me for 20 years more than my real age,” replied Mrs. Smith (pictured in the center) when the election commissioner asked her age. “Why not just put me down as short, stout, and gray?”

It was a running joke among anti-suffragists that women would not register if they had to give their real age. But the extensive petition fraud showed that powerful interests understood clearly that many women *would* register to vote, and that they’d inform themselves about candidates and issues before entering the voting booth.

As *you* will do on November 6—correct, dear reader?

The women shown here—plus many others—devoted years of their lives to the suffrage issue because they understood that the ballot equals power, from the top of the ticket down to the most obscure local races.

The year 2019 marks the centennial of Nebraska’s ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. We’re planning programming and a special publication to commemorate the event. Stay tuned to learn more (but go vote first)!

--David L. Bristow, Editor

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# Deadlier than WWI: The 1918 Flu Pandemic in Nebraska



November 11 marks the centennial of the armistice ending World War I. The war killed some 15 to 19 million people, military and civilian, including 751 Nebraska soldiers.

But the influenza pandemic of 1918 was even deadlier, killing somewhere between 50 and 100 million people. Nebraska's disease reporting was incomplete, but the state's death toll was variously reported between 2,800 to 7,500 people.

A new and deadly strain of the flu hit the U.S. early in 1918 and greatly intensified by September. The flu reached Nebraska by October: Red Cloud reported two flu deaths on October 2; Omaha reported its first case the next day; and Scottsbluff reported its first cases on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Symptoms included high fever, cough, dizziness, and profuse perspiration. Frequently bronchial pneumonia developed, with death following in a high percentage of such cases. This strain of flu was unusual in that it was deadliest to healthy young adults. Omaha alone saw 974 deaths between October 5 and December 31.

On October 7 the state ordered the closing of all "schools, churches, places of entertainment or public congregation, pool halls and other places of amusement." Mail carriers continued on their rounds, but wore white face masks for protection.

Quarantine rules were issued for affected homes. All residents of a house who had been in contact with a diseased person had to remain in the house until the quarantine was lifted. Only a doctor or nurse was permitted to enter or leave the house while the quarantine was in effect, though medical professionals were in short supply. Necessary supplies could be brought to the house and left outside the door. Soiled clothes could be sent to the laundry if placed in a package covered with paper.

The statewide ban on public gatherings was lifted on November 1, but the flu continued. Even World War I victory celebrations were limited in many towns. Valentine, for example, didn't lift



its local ban on public gatherings until November 29, and the University of Nebraska did not resume classes until after Thanksgiving.

There was almost nothing of a holiday season. No Christmas events or entertainments were held, and Nebraska merchants sustained severe losses from the slump in trade during the last six weeks of the year. By mid-January 1919, although national news stories indicated the epidemic still was claiming thousands of victims, in Nebraska the worst was over.

Photo: Men wearing surgical masks in Shelby, Nebraska, December 8, 1918. History Nebraska RG2017.PH

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## Nebraska airmail in the 1920s



Early airmail pilots flew open-cockpit biplanes, navigating by landmarks and simple maps, and landing in grassy airfields. But by 1930 their facilities and technology had changed dramatically. Kathleen Alonso tells the story in “Trail above the Plains: Flying the Airmail through Nebraska from 1920 to 1930,” in the forthcoming Winter 2018 issue of [Nebraska History](#). Here we present a few photos from that story, plus an excerpt below.

*Left photo: De Havilland DH-4 airmail planes at Omaha’s Ak-Sar-Ben Field near 60<sup>th</sup> and Center streets, ca. 1922. The DH-4 was a British two-seat light bomber during World War I; the*

*US Army Air Service also used them, and the Post Office modified them for airmail service. HN RG3882-263-a*

*Right photo: A Boeing 80A at Omaha Municipal Airport, June 5, 1930. Mayor Richard Lee Metcalfe stands in center. Boeing Air Transport (today's United Airlines) took over airmail flights in 1927 and introduced its tri-motor Model 80 the following year. More than an airmail plane, the 80A carried eighteen passengers in its heated, leather-upholstered cabin, where a stewardess attended to their needs. HN RG 3882-1-25-1*

"On January 10, 1930, a plane crashed in a blizzard ten miles west of Sidney, Nebraska," writes Kathleen Alonso. "In an instant, twenty-eight-year-old Charles Kenwood became the first airmail pilot to lose his life in the state. Kenwood had dropped his two flares in an attempt to locate a landing site, but his efforts failed. Witnesses speculate that he did not realize how close he was to the ground when he crash-landed on the farm of Ben Crouch, leaving a debris field of 200 yards. After a funeral at St. Luke's church in South Omaha, Kenwood was buried at Graceland Park Cemetery.

"The most incredible thing about the fatal crash is that it had been so long coming, given the myriad of tragedies which defined the beginning of the airmail service. In 1920 alone, nine pilots, five mechanics and other staff, and the newly appointed district superintendent for the Omaha-to-Chicago portion of the route died in the line of duty. The following year the fatalities included James T. Christiansen of Blair, Nebraska, who failed to locate the airport in Cleveland, Ohio, one foggy day. A propeller still tops the Danish immigrant's gravestone, defining his life as a flier.

"Public outcry and congressional skepticism meant that the fate of airmail in the early 1920s remained uncertain, but by 1930 the well-established aerial trail across the country had become a fact of life. The Air Mail Service took off, survived, and eventually thrived due to the influence of people in power, the determination of its pilots, the vision of community leaders, and the commitment of mechanics and other airport staff on the ground. It also relied on individual farmers, doctors, townspeople, and passersby, who supported local airfields and assisted pilots when mechanical difficulty or weather forced them out of the trail in the sky."

But how and why did airmail begin when airplanes were still so crude and dangerous? Alonso explains:

"The Air Mail Service, in which Nebraska would become a key player, began between Washington, DC, and New York City in 1918. Almost immediately after its creation Albert Burleson, the Postmaster General, and Otto Prager, the head of the Air Mail Service, pushed to create a coast-to-coast aerial highway with feeder lines from other cities connecting to the existing route. Despite the advancements in aviation during World War I, tremendous obstacles impeded the endeavor. The few airports that existed were little more than level fields. Pilots flew by sight, which made fog or unexpected storms deadly. The Post Office's route required pilots to fly in open cockpits over treacherous mountains and remote sections of the western United States with no ready help available in the event of an emergency. Despite these challenges the first scheduled mail flew from New York to San Francisco via Cleveland, Chicago, Omaha, Cheyenne, Salt Lake City, and Reno in September 1920. Less prominent fuel stops also developed airports to aid the pilots.

"A series of radio towers linked these cities and towns, allowing airports to communicate with each other regarding weather and the expected time of arrival for pilots. Soon after their installation, the new technology began providing non-aviation messages for the benefit of the local population. For example, in February 1921, William Votaw, manager of the Omaha airfield, received permission to transmit wireless weather reports to farmers in western Nebraska and eastern Iowa.

"In 1921, the Post Office feared that Congress, with the support of the new Republican President, would cut funding for the fledgling service. The Post Office responded with a publicity stunt of epic proportions. That February two planes set off from each coast in an attempt to fly the mail nonstop across the country, rather than transferring it to trains when darkness fell, the usual course of action. One eastbound pilot died in a crash over the Nevada desert, and fog kept both westbound planes from leaving Chicago. Pilot Jack Knight became a national hero by flying from North Platte all the way to Chicago when weather prevented his relief pilot from reaching Omaha. Towns lit bonfires along the way to help keep him on course. Front page headlines touted the success, and the wave of positive publicity became a huge asset for the new service. This, along with some Washington politicking, kept the service going."



*Undated photo. HN RG2929-148*

"The Post Office's next step for improving the speed of delivery meant developing a strategic plan for permanent night flying, which involved a series of light beacons placed ten to fifteen miles apart between Cheyenne and Chicago. These would later be extended across the country. Pilots started testing the practicality of night flying in February 1923 by making twenty-five-mile flights in and out of North Platte. Kerosene lamps marked the Platte River, which bordered the south edge of the field, and staff set up two bonfires to mark where planes should land. A highly successful nationwide test run followed in August. For five days the mail left California in the

morning, reached Cheyenne by nightfall, and Chicago by the following morning. The regularly scheduled night service began on July 1, 1924.

"In September 1924, the United States Air Mail Service division, led by Carl Egge, relocated to the Federal Building in Omaha. Egge started his career as a postal clerk in his hometown of Grand Island before becoming a railroad postal clerk in Omaha. He worked his way up to postal inspector in Minneapolis before joining the Air Mail Service. The head office remained in Omaha only a short time before returning to Washington, DC, in July 1926.

"The Post Office airmail pilots did not regularly carry passengers, although occasionally an official or other individual received special permission to ride along in the extra seat. World War I Ace Eddie Rickenbacker crashed at the Cheyenne field en route to Washington, DC, in May 1921, hitchhiked to Omaha with airmail pilot Christopher Pickup, and jumped in William Hopson's plane to reach Chicago. The development of private airlines allowed passenger service to really take off.

"By 1925, commercial aviation had begun to catch up with the Post Office. Congress then passed the Kelly Act, allowing the Post Office to contract airmail services to private corporations. The feeder routes that ran into the main transcontinental artery became the first to be transferred, but it did not take long for the Post Office to completely extract itself from the business of aviation. In 1927 Boeing took over the transcontinental route from San Francisco to Chicago, including Nebraska. Boeing's passenger service later became United Airlines.

"Airlines also bid for new routes. Universal Airlines instituted Nebraska's first route off of the main line when they began flying from Omaha to Saint Louis via Kansas City in May 1929. Although this company lacked the longevity and prominence of Boeing, the new route demonstrated the continued growth of aviation."

*Read the rest in the Winter 2018 issue of Nebraska History. [Members](#) receive each issue. Single copies are available through the [Nebraska History Museum](#).*