Grant helps History Nebraska move curiosity online

The Institute of Museum of Library Services has awarded History Nebraska a grant of $164,586 for a project called “Moving Curiosity Online.” The grant process was highly competitive: of more than 1,700 applicants, only 68 institutions were awarded grants. We’re proud to be one of them.

“This is a big deal for us and for Nebraska,” said History Nebraska Director and CEO Trevor Jones.

One of the IMLS grant reviewers wrote, "The plan will prepare History Nebraska with flexible and far-reaching options into the future to continue outreach across the state."

“The application reveals a substantial level of self-knowledge on the part of the institution,” another reviewer commented, “knowledge that is supported by a
culture of constant evaluation and internal improvement.”

Here is the project summary:

“History Nebraska will develop online educational materials to mitigate disruptions to traditional learning environments caused by COVID-19. Targeting fourth and 11th grade students in Title I schools statewide, History Nebraska’s ‘Moving Curiosity Online’ project will move the organization’s curiosity-focused programming outside its physical walls and into schools. Intentionally designed for a digital environment, the new content will spark curiosity and fuel students’ intrinsic motivation to learn. The project will support the salary for a new position of digital outreach educator, who will design and develop the inquiry-based curriculum incorporating the museum’s collections.”

The Birth of the Omaha Stockyards
Now gone, the sprawling Union Stockyards of Omaha was a Beef State icon for generations of Nebraskans. Rare photos from History Nebraska’s collections show the site before and during construction in the 1880s. Historian John Carter (1945-2015) interpreted the images in a 2013 photo essay for Nebraska History Magazine. Read the blog version, or download the full article PDF.

Before the stockyards, before Nebraska even had its own cattle industry, Nebraska was the northern end of the legendary longhorn cattle drives from Texas. The forthcoming Winter 2020 issue of Nebraska History Magazine will tell the story (with maps) of the Blue River Cattle Trail, which briefly turned Schuyler, Nebraska, into a booming cow town around 1870. A subscription is a benefit of History Nebraska membership.
The Girls of Company Z

Gary and Caitlin Mitchell were intrigued when they found this circa-1890s photo from an Omaha studio. They soon learned that Omaha’s Central High School briefly had an all-girls military drill team known as Company Z. Uniformed, ranked, and carrying rifles, they practiced precision military-style parade drill, just the like boys’ company that existed at the time.
The existence of the such a group pushed boundaries of gender. When the high school got a new principal, he soon found fault with the team. **Keep reading.**

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**Remembering the North Platte Canteen**

In honor of the 75\(^{th}\) anniversary of the end of World War II, History Nebraska’s Chris Goforth recently talked with 1011 Now’s *Pure Nebraska* about one of the state’s proudest wartime legacies, the North Platte Canteen. The [segment features archival film footage](#) from History Nebraska’s collections.

As we remember World War II, let’s also remember the ones who didn’t make it home.
Dr. Mark Ellis is a historian and Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He researched the men of Buffalo County who were killed in the war.

“It is important to recognize, celebrate, and remember the 114 men with Buffalo County connections who gave their lives in the American effort to defeat Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy. It is also important to emphasize the human tragedy of World War II. Not only did 114 men lose their lives in most horrible ways, but their deaths devastated families and friends, schools, and local communities.”

Ellis’s article appears in the Fall 2020 issue of Nebraska History Magazine. A subscription is one of the benefits of History Nebraska membership.
Considering the National Register? First check out History Nebraska’s Multiple Property Documents
The next time that you walk by a National Register plaque, remember that it’s there because a perfectly ordinary person did something extraordinary. At its very core, the National Register is a grassroots program.

Nominating properties for the National Register program might seem intimidating, but the State Historic Preservation Office (part of History Nebraska) has created numerous resources to help you prepare a nomination. One of these resources is called the Multiple Property Document (MPD). It’s a
boring name but is one of the most innovative and democratic resources available to people interested in the National Register. Keep reading.

Popular on our blog and social media

The Goose-powered flying machine. According to a letter published in 1891, all you need to fly up to 200 mph are 19 geese and a birch bark chariot.

The Ford Model T put millions of people on the road. In Hooper, a local Ford agency organized a parade for Model T owners. After the 103-car parade, the motorists rallied at the school grounds and posed for a photograph.

People like our 1870s version of an I-80 truck stop. It was near Antelopeville,
better known as...(can you guess?)

Nebraskan William F. Lillie invented a *special leather glove with a built-in hook for shucking corn*. People used his patented invention through the 1920s. Some of our readers remember using shucking pegs up through the 1940s and ’50s.

How do archeologists know where to look? One way is to take [core samples](#).

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**Upcoming Events**

Most of our collections sit outside public view. On October 16th, we’re throwing open the doors and inviting you to join us for an [Afternoon in the Archives](#).
Meet History Nebraska curators and archivists who can answer questions like “What’s in History Nebraska's archives?” “How do I access these amazing resources?” “How do I preserve my family photos?”

And mark your calendars for our Virtual Dia de los Muertos on November 1!
The Birth of the South Omaha Stockyards

By John E. Carter, History Nebraska

By 1870 the cattle industry in western Nebraska was booming. Thousands of head of Texas cattle came either to meet the railroad for transportation to Chicago markets or to be driven further north to meet the demands of military posts and Indian reservation.
During this decade large ranches grazed cattle on huge tracts of government land. The high quality grasses produced high quality beef, and demand for this Nebraska product grew. By 1880 ranchers clamored for a stockyard in Omaha. They were tired of their animals losing weight by traveling the extra five hundred miles from Omaha to Chicago. Lost weight meant lost profits.

In 1883 Wyoming rancher Alexander Swan came to Omaha to encourage local entrepreneurs to establish a stockyard. The location was perfect. Omaha was surrounded by plenty of grass and corn, and the Missouri River provided both ample water and a swift moving stream to haul waste away—a stark contrast to the slow-moving Chicago River that regularly backed up with rank sewage, creating an immense health hazard.

Swan assembled a group of investors and acquired land in what would become South Omaha. What began with a single farm exploded into a huge enterprise. By the end of the decade South Omaha was established as a major meat center, and by 1956 Omaha was the largest meat producing city in the world.

For something this big very few pictures survive of its birth. Here are a few that do survive.

It is hard to imagine the speed of the stockyard’s progress. It began with the Frank Drexel farm (top photo). The farm encompassed ten acres of land; the farmhouse, marked with the arrow, served as the first exchange building.

Things moved at a breakneck pace. In 1886 developers erected the elegant Stockyard Exchange Building. Between 1885 and 1887 four major meat packers—G. H. Hammond (1885), Fowler Brothers (1886), Armour–Cudahy and Swift (both 1887)—established major plants adjacent to the stockyards.
In this photo, one gets a good sense of the frenzy of building from the photograph of construction crews grading the land in what would become the large pen areas. On the horizon on the right of the image one sees the array of newly-built houses and stores, the birthing of the City of South Omaha. To the left, the smokestacks and substantial industrial buildings locate the packing houses.

The crews are using horse-drawn bucket scrapers to bury an immense eight-foot-square wooden sewer. One of the advantages of Omaha was its proximity to the Missouri, and a structure like this would be necessary to deal with the waste produced by the huge volume of livestock to come.
The railroads were key to the success of the stockyards, and both the Burlington and Union Pacific developed lines into South Omaha. In this photo we see flatcars loaded with dirt being delivered for grade development. There were no sophisticated side-deliver dump cars, but here we see a clever solution to the same problem.

The cars are lined up and loaded with soil. On the last car, a blade has been positioned that is attached to a thick rope that runs under the dirt and across all of the cars. When the cars are in position the rope is pulled, no doubt by a locomotive, which draws the blade forward neatly scraping the cars of their loads.

South Omaha has long been known as a place of muscle and sweat; it was born of the same stuff—all of this was going on in a five-year stretch. It is no surprise at all that South Omaha became the hub of an exploding Nebraska meat industry.
This article is adapted from a piece that historian John Carter (1950–2015) wrote for Nebraska History magazine in 2013. The complete article is available as a free PDF. The version above first appeared in the November 2019 issue of NEBRASKAland magazine.

Photo credits:

1. The Frank Drexel Farm, ca. 1888. History Nebraska RG1085-24-11

2. Grading the land ca. 1887. History Nebraska RG1085-77-1

3. Moving dirt with a flatcar. History Nebraska RG1085-7-6
4. The stockyards in 1925. The Livestock Exchange Building completed that year still stands. History Nebraska RG1085-7-15

Categories:
Nebraska History, photographs, South Omaha, stockyards

https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/girls-company-z

The Girls of Company Z

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

An 1890s Omaha photo shows three young women dressed in what look like men’s military cadet uniforms. It was frowned upon for women to be dressed in such a
manner, so why were they? Questions about the story behind the camera lens led Gary and Caitlin Mitchell to investigate. Their research uncovered the story of a female military drill company at Omaha’s Central High School. They tell the story in “The Girls of Company Z” in the Summer 2020 issue of Nebraska History Magazine.

Military-style drill teams became common in universities and schools in the latter nineteenth century. The Morrill Act of 1862 required land-grant colleges to teach their students military tactics. This later influenced high schools to do the same.

But the act didn’t discuss gender, so a few universities started military-style units for women. After young men had participated in drills for years, by the 1890s girls across the nation began to take up this activity. Performing with replica rifles or with brooms, dressed in their own uniforms, and studying manuals such as Barnett’s Broom Drill and Brigade Tactics, female drill teams becoming increasingly popular. Many of these “fan” and “broom drills” were held at exhibitions to raise money for worthy causes.

For a group of girls attending Omaha’s Central High School though, this would mean something more.

In 1896 a group of students formed a female drill team called “Company Z.” They drilled under the direction of the boys, and held fundraisers and social events such as dances. The public began to take notice. Company Z was praised as being “equal of any male organization in the proficiency and smartness of their movements.”

In October Company Z held a public drill competition to determine which girls would be promoted to corporal. Full of determination, the girls showed up not only to compete against each other, but also to prove themselves in a predominantly male activity. With each command given, they were sharp and swift in their movements, and were eliminated one by one for any error until only two remained on the field. After quite the battle, Miss White finally made a mistake and Miss Ward emerged victorious.

Despite the impressive performance, the company still had room for improvement. One opportunity came as a result of an 1892 law requiring the army to assign an
officer from Fort Omaha to instruct and drill the Omaha High School Cadets. The officer, Lieutenant Clement, was supportive of Company Z, offering a cadet cap to the girl who won an individual competitive drill.

Later the entire company was outfitted with cadet caps and, eventually, rifles. The company was an inspiration for other schools to start their own female drill teams. Dressed in their blue blouses, skirts, neck ties, and their flat-brimmed band caps with gold-embroidered “Company Z” lettering, they were proudly recognized.

However, after five years Company Z ended as suddenly as it began. By 1899, Omaha Central had a new principal who complained that the drill team’s membership had become too exclusive and snobbish. The Omaha Bee reported that he told them they “must open their ranks to any girl who wished to drill, or else they must disband.”

Company Z disbanded, but authors Gary and Caitlin Mitchell doubt that social snobbery was the real reason. “It is difficult to believe that the ladies of Company Z would have walked away from their beloved unit with so little provocation,” they write. The school newspaper, the High School Register, which was “no shrinking
violet when it came to criticism, never attacked Company Z on such grounds.” And the principal allowed other school groups to select their own members, though he brought student-run clubs “under the tight control of the school administration.”

It is left for the reader to question what the principal’s true motives were and whether it had to do with any fault of Company Z, or whether the principal simply wanted to eliminate an ‘un-ladylike’ activity.

Company Z did not return, but its legacy lives on as a predecessor of what is known today as the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) program which is taught in over 3,000 high schools today in America.

Photos

Top: During the late 1890s, three young women had their picture taken at the Louis Gamer studio in Omaha. Little would they know that their picture would later inspire historians to investigate their will to step out against gender norms. The photo remains a bit of a mystery, as Company Z members did not wear the same uniforms as male cadets. Photo from Gary Mitchell and Caitlin Mitchell’s collection.

Bottom: Company Z is photographed for the High School Register newspaper (1897-98 annual).

(9/4/2020)

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2020 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

Learn More
Considering the National Register? First Check Out History Nebraska’s Multiple Property Documents

The next time that you walk by a National Register plaque, remember that it’s there because a perfectly ordinary person did something extraordinary. At its very core, the National Register is a grassroots program. While the National Park Service (NPS) and History Nebraska’s State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) administer the program, ultimately it relies on everyday individuals who take an interest in places special to their communities.

The official History Nebraska National Register Plaque can be spotted all across the state.

The National Register program might seem intimidating—it involves a lot of research and writing! But the reward of getting a special place listed is worth the
effort. The NPS and SHPO recognize that the process is not easy, and have created numerous resources to help you prepare a nomination.

One of these resources is called the Multiple Property Document (MPD). It’s a boring name but is one of the most innovative and democratic resources available to people interested in the National Register.

An MPD tells the story of how a particular type of place played an essential role in local history. This document groups places around a unifying theme and describes their historical context (for example, “Nebraska’s Carnegie Libraries” or “County Courthouses of Nebraska”).

If you are looking to nominate an individual property, reading an MPD can be a good starting point for your research. The MPD helps you know what to look for and how to identify important characteristics. It also cuts down on the amount of work needed in an application. If there’s a relevant MPD, the nominator only has to describe the property they are nominating; no need to worry about broader context because that is already addressed by the MPD.

The Warren Opera House in Friend, NE, was listed on the National Register using an MPD in 1988 and was rehabilitated using historic tax credits in 2017.
Here at History Nebraska’s SHPO, we’re developing a Multiple Property Document that tells the story of movie theaters in the state. Telling this story is important because these old theaters served as public gathering places in communities statewide. Think of all the Nebraskans who took their first date to the town theater, or of all the kids who would save their allowance money to be terrified by the latest horror film.

Memory is an important part of identity, and historic places play an important role in retaining memories. Recognizing these places helps a community reconnect with its identity. Furthermore, many of these theaters have the potential for rehabilitation projects and could greatly benefit from the tax credits that become available with a National Register designation.

The Bonham Theater in Fairbury was listed to the National Register in 1997 as part of a historic district and rehabilitated as a historic tax credit project in 2017. The upcoming Movie Theater MPD will hopefully inspire similar success stories. Photo credit: Tim Vrtiska

Beyond helping people prepare individual nominations, MPDs have a wide range of potential uses:
Lifelong Learning. The National Park Service describes the document as “worthy of publication.” MPDs are approximately the same length as a small book—any history buff will enjoy the hour or so that it takes to read one of these documents.

Homeschooling: Because MPDs are so well-researched on a single topic, they are also a valuable tool for students. For homeschool parents looking for inspiration, MPDs can easily be used as the foundation for hands-on projects. Your student can use the document as a jumping-off-point to discover and then research a building in your community.

Heritage Tourism: Google Maps makes it easy to create a “tour” inspired by an MPD (see the tutorial.) For a more elaborate example of heritage tourism inspired by the National Register, check out this resource created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Here is a list of some of the more recent MPDs created by our office:

Rural Church Architecture in Nebraska

New Deal Era Resources in Nebraska

Nebraska Carnegie Libraries, 1902-1922

Historic & Architectural Resources of the Detroit-Lincoln-Denver Highway in Nebraska

African American Historic and Architectural Resources in Lincoln, Nebraska

County Courthouses of Nebraska

Opera House Buildings in Nebraska 1867-1917
The Albion Carnegie Library was listed to the National Register in 2019 with assistance from an MPD. The library is still serving the community after 112 years of use.

If you have any ideas for future MPD topics or are interested in learning more about the National Register, please contact Jessica Tebo at jessica.tebo@nebraska.gov.

Categories:

historic preservation, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documents