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Article Summary: The years 1940-1960 brought modern life to Nebraska. That era marked by political conservatism and anti-Communism saw important changes including increased home construction, greater educational opportunity, and interstate highways.

Cataloging Information:

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Photographs / Images: Nebraska's all-Republican congressional delegation meeting Boy Scouts visiting Washington, July 10, 1951: Rep Carl T Curtis, Rep Howard Buffet, Sen Kenneth Wherry, Rep A L Miller, Rep Karl Stefan, Sen Hugh Butler; inset Nebraska State Federation of Labor flyer, "Labor Speaks, Why You Should NOT Sign the 'Right to Work Petition' "; Sen Joseph McCarthy broadcasting over KFAB radio, August 24, 1951; new homes in a Lincoln suburb built by Strauss Brothers Lumber Company; inset flyer, "GI Bill of Rights Helps You . . ."; Theodore Sorensen; Consumers Public Power District advertisement in *Nebraska Electric Farmer*, September 1948; Hazel H Abel

Change, Continuity & Context in Nebraska History 1940-1960

By William C. Pratt

Recent Nebraska history is relatively unexplored territory. A quick look at back issues of this journal will confirm this observation. Like the history of many other states, our recent past has attracted little scholarly attention. And this is true whether we are talking about political, economic, or social developments. To be sure there are exceptions, one of the most noteworthy being Frederick Luebke's 1990 article on the Tiemann administration.[1] But as a practical matter, when approaching the last half century of Nebraska history, the prevailing tendency is to rely upon personal recollections, journalistic accounts, or generalizations drawn from national treatments. Such sources can be very helpful; at the same time, they are not an adequate substitute for scholarly research in recent state history.

In this essay, I look at three themes, change, continuity, and context, which are the stock in trade of historians everywhere, though I will be exploring them within the relatively narrow confines of two decades, the 1940s and 1950s. There is no compelling logic in this conceptualization. I am simply taking this opportunity to look at some facets of Nebraska's recent past and, in so doing, to touch upon political, social, economic, and cultural trends in a regional context. This piece is really a call for further research and, if I exaggerate a point, neglect a topic, misread a trend, or (perish the thought) malign a statesman, perhaps such derelictions will provoke others to do a better job on those and other subjects.

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Many observers have commented on the conservative nature of Nebraska politics since the defeat of Senator George Norris. There is, of course, no quarreling with that generalization. The eighty-one-year-old Norris was turned out of office in 1942, defeated in a three-way race by Kenneth Wherry.[2] From that point on, conservative Republicans dominated state government and the Nebraska congressional delegation to Washington. And with one exception, the 1948 election of Omaha's Eugene O'Sullivan in the Second District, that was the story of Nebraska politics until 1958, when Democrat Ralph Brooks won the governor's mansion and his party took two congressional seats.

Even then, the Democratic gains proved temporary. Following Brooks's death in 1960, Democrat Frank Morrison was elected to three two-year terms as governor, and his party managed to win another congressional race in the 1964 Goldwater debacle, when Democrats carried the state in a presidential contest for the first (and still the only) time since 1936. Nebraska was a conservative stronghold from the 1940s well into the 1960s, as Republican domination of state government and the election and reelection of Congressmen and U.S. Senators such as Karl Stefan, Howard Buffett, Kenneth Wherry, Hugh Butler, Carl Curtis and Roman Hruska testify. Even Frank Morrison's three terms as governor support this assertion; at least in that era, Morrison was a cautious and conservative Democrat.[3]

But too much can be made of Norris's 1942 defeat as the beginning of this conservative trend. Norris himself was an anomaly in Nebraska and national politics. His following at home probably should not be interpreted as general support for some of the positions he assumed in Washington. Perhaps many Nebraskans supported him because of their perception he was a nuisance in the distant national capitol.[4] He had great prestige, even managing to get a popular President of the United States to campaign for him in 1936, but it should be remembered that Norris, running as an independent, won in a three-way contest that year with less than a majority of the vote, and he had the backing of many Democrats over the party's official nominee, Terry Carpenter.[5]

Evidence of political conservatism that predated Norris's 1942 defeat can be seen in the 1934 defeat of Congressman Edgar Howard, not to mention Charley Bryan's two terms as governor in the 1930s, or perhaps Democratic U.S. Senator Edward Burke's move to the right after having been elected in 1934 as a New Deal supporter. FDR carried Nebraska in 1932 and 1936, but never again. New Deal governor Roy Cochran thwarted Burke's bid for a second term in the U.S. Senate in the 1940 primary, but Cochran himself was defeated by Hugh Butler in the general election.[6]

Nebraska may or may not have been "the most conservative state in the union" as former U.S. Senator Carl Curtis has claimed, but it is situated in the heart of what was generally a politically conservative region.[7] That is, Nebraska voters were not uniquely tilted in a conservative direction in the 1940s and 1950s. Leaving North Dakota aside as a

Nebraska's all-Republican congressional delegation meets Boy Scouts visiting Washington, July 10, 1951. (From left), **Carl T. Curtis, first congressional district; Howard Buffett, second district; Senator Kenneth Wherry; A. L. Miller, fourth district** (at rear); **Karl Stefan, third district; and Senator Hugh Butler. Stefan died October 2, 1951, and Wherry died November 29, 1951.** NSHS-PC0355-7608-248

special case, Nebraska's neighbors also tended to opt for conservative politicians. Democratic governors, Congressmen, and U.S. Senators also were rare in Iowa, Kansas, and the Dakotas. The story is a bit more complicated in North Dakota due to the presence of the liberal Nonpartisan League within the ranks of the Republican Party in that state, but even there one had to be a conservative to be elected as governor in these years.[8]

A clear sign of a conservative political tilt in this region was the passage of right-to-work measures in Nebraska, Iowa, and the Dakotas in 1946-47. In all four states this anti-union effort triumphed prior to the passage of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act nationally. And in South Dakota and Nebraska, the union shop ban was added to the state constitution as well as to the statute book.[9] The explanation for its adoption goes a long way in explaining the region's political conservatism in this era: Organized labor was relatively weak in each of these states and was unable to upset the right-to-work drive. That also meant that the labor vote normally was insufficient to put more liberal or Democratic candidates over the top in state-wide or congressional elections.

Organized agriculture was a more important political force than organized labor in these states. In the Dakotas, the Farmers Union played a key role in rallying what liberal strength there was. Much of the time there, it was able to persuade Republican senators to back farm legislation. Karl Mundt of South Dakota and Milton Young of North Dakota, right-wing Republicans, often voted the right way on farm issues as far as the Farmers Union was concerned.[10] In the Dakotas the Farmers Union was larger than the more conservative Farm Bureau, and that was the difference.

The Nebraska Farmers Union, however, was much more conservative than its counterparts in the Dakotas or Iowa. Its president was a Republican, and he was out of step with the organization's national leadership. The Farm Bureau's membership grew in Nebraska during the 1940s and 1950s as well. Organized agriculture in the Cornhusker State had a distinctively conservative bent in the post-World War II years, which helped insure the Republican ascendancy of that era.[11] In neighboring Iowa, the Farmers Union had left-wing leadership, but was a small organization. The Farm Bureau, on the other hand, had a large membership and was quite influential politically.

A much studied national political topic of the post-World War II years is anti-Communism or McCarthyism. While the two terms are not the same, it is not

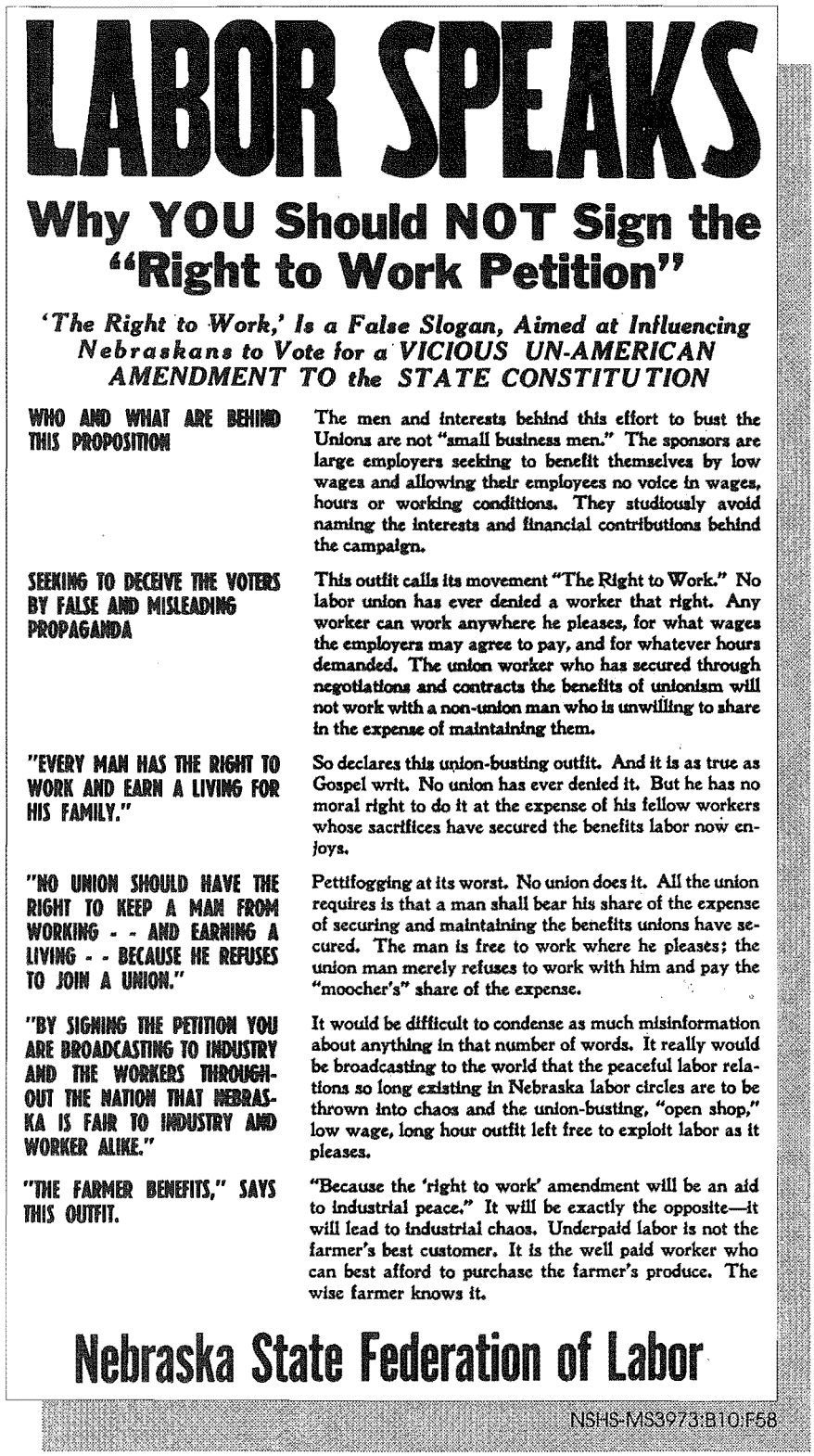
always easy to make distinctions between them, as there were few people in public life in the cold war years who were not anti-Communist. McCarthyism itself was a bigger phenomenon than the activities of the Wisconsin senator, and many politicians and others were charged with being Communists, Communist sympathizers, or fellow travellers.[12]

In Nebraska, Governor Val Peterson told the press in late 1950 that he had compiled a list of suspected subversives, who were to be rounded up in the event of a national emergency. At the time, according to the FBI, there were fewer than forty Communist Party members in the entire state. As recently as April of 1995 the *Omaha World-Herald* defended Peterson's list-making as a prudent step.[13]

Loyalty oaths became a popular device in this era. Nebraska, along with many other states, opted for such a measure, requiring all state employees including those employed at the state university and state colleges to sign in order to keep their jobs. This requirement was enforced until the late 1960s, when a secretary in the Department of Philosophy at the university brought a lawsuit after being fired for noncompliance. Numerous other examples of this kind of behavior can be given.[14]

On McCarthy himself, there is a mixed report. He spoke in the state on several occasions, and these appearances were given quite a bit of attention in the press.[15] When a resolution to censure McCarthy was introduced in the U.S. Senate in late 1954, Nebraska senators split on the issue. Roman Hruska voted against the measure, and his fellow Republican Hazel Abel (who had been elected to complete Dwight Griswold's term) supported it. South Dakota and Iowa senators also split their vote, while North Dakotans Milton Young and William Langer stood by McCarthy.[16]

Perhaps another example of Nebraska anti-Communist sentiment was the failure of the left-wing Progressive



LABOR SPEAKS

Why YOU Should NOT Sign the "Right to Work Petition"

'The Right to Work,' Is a False Slogan, Aimed at Influencing Nebraskans to Vote for a VICIOUS UN-AMERICAN AMENDMENT TO the STATE CONSTITUTION

WHO AND WHAT ARE BEHIND THIS PROPOSITION

The men and interests behind this effort to bust the Unions are not "small business men." The sponsors are large employers seeking to benefit themselves by low wages and allowing their employees no voice in wages, hours or working conditions. They studiously avoid naming the interests and financial contributions behind the campaign.

SEEKING TO DECEIVE THE VOTERS BY FALSE AND MISLEADING PROPAGANDA

This outfit calls its movement "The Right to Work." No labor union has ever denied a worker that right. Any worker can work anywhere he pleases, for what wages the employers may agree to pay, and for whatever hours demanded. The union worker who has secured through negotiations and contracts the benefits of unionism will not work with a non-union man who is unwilling to share in the expense of maintaining them.

"EVERY MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO WORK AND EARN A LIVING FOR HIS FAMILY."

So declares this union-busting outfit. And it is as true as Gospel writ. No union has ever denied it. But he has no moral right to do it at the expense of his fellow workers whose sacrifices have secured the benefits labor now enjoys.

"NO UNION SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO KEEP A MAN FROM WORKING - - AND EARNING A LIVING - - BECAUSE HE REFUSES TO JOIN A UNION."

Pettifogging at its worst. No union does it. All the union requires is that a man shall bear his share of the expense of securing and maintaining the benefits unions have secured. The man is free to work where he pleases; the union man merely refuses to work with him and pay the "moocher's" share of the expense.

"BY SIGNING THE PETITION YOU ARE BROADCASTING TO INDUSTRY AND THE WORKERS THROUGHOUT THE NATION THAT NEBRASKA IS FAIR TO INDUSTRY AND WORKER ALIKE."

It would be difficult to condense as much misinformation about anything in that number of words. It really would be broadcasting to the world that the peaceful labor relations so long existing in Nebraska labor circles are to be thrown into chaos and the union-busting, "open shop," low wage, long hour outfit left free to exploit labor as it pleases.

"THE FARMER BENEFITS," SAYS THIS OUTFIT.

"Because the 'right to work' amendment will be an aid to industrial peace." It will be exactly the opposite—it will lead to industrial chaos. Underpaid labor is not the farmer's best customer. It is the well paid worker who can best afford to purchase the farmer's produce. The wise farmer knows it.

Nebraska State Federation of Labor

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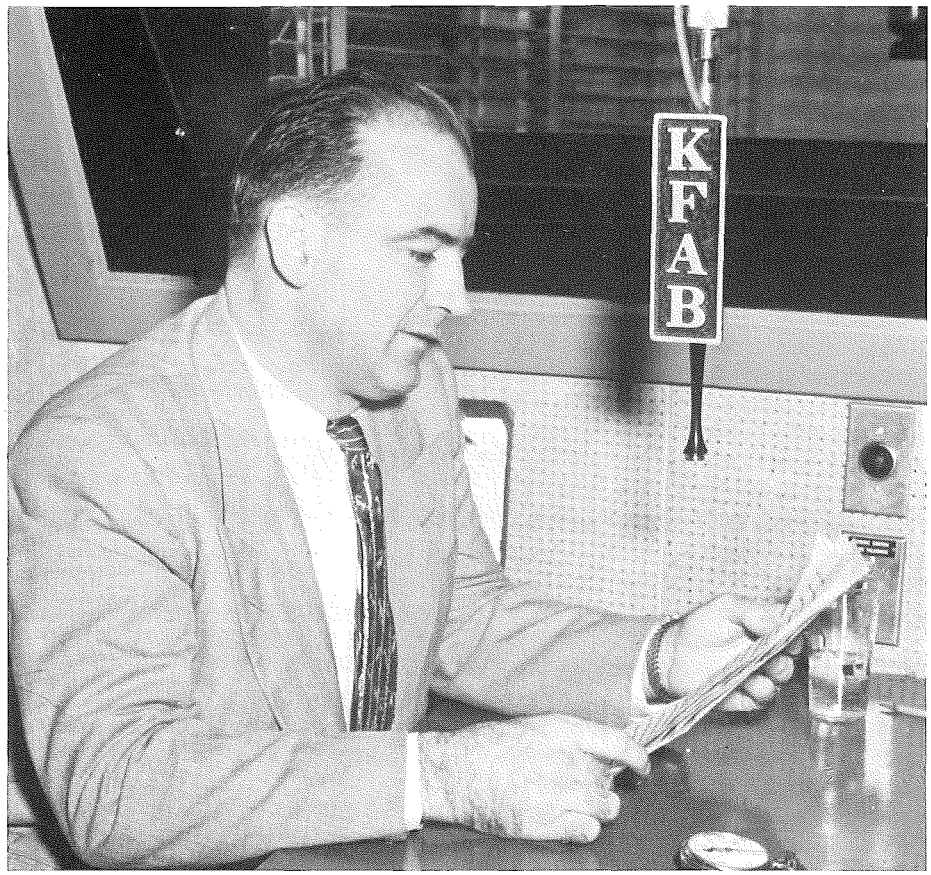
Party campaign to even get its presidential candidate, Henry Wallace, on the ballot in 1948. Nebraska was one of only three states in the entire country where this happened. Wallace had more support in Iowa and the Dakotas; in North Dakota, Quentin Burdick, who later served in the U.S. Senate for thirty-two years, had been active in the Wallace campaign, as was Fred Stover, the president of the Iowa Farmers Union. The contrast should not be exaggerated, but a scholar who studied the 1948 Wallace campaign later wrote that Nebraska people who had been involved with this effort were more frightened than any others who were contacted.[17]

The issue of Communism was one of the flash points in the argument between the Nebraska Farmers Union and the national leadership, which ultimately kicked out the Iowa affiliate because of its president's opposition to the Korean War. Ironically, the conservative Nebraska organization opposed this draconian measure, fearing the precedent of expelling a state unit because it dissented from the national leadership's position.

Similarly, the Red issue was a divisive one within the ranks of organized labor, especially packinghouse workers. Omaha was the single largest packing center in the region, but plants in Iowa and the Dakotas also were organized (Iowa having many more unionized packinghouse workers than the Northern Plains states). The AFL's Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen used the issue against its CIO rivals, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA).[18] But it may have been of more importance within the UPWA itself.

In Omaha, where there were four large locals, the leadership of the Armour unit was outspokenly anti-Communist. Realistically, there were few Communists in the Omaha plants in the late 1940s, but it was an issue around which more conservative elements united in their disagreement with the national leadership.[19] The point here is that even liberal groups such as CIO packinghouse workers often were outspoken in their opposition to Communism. In Iowa, however, there was more left-wing sentiment within CIO unions, and there were a number of Communists active in some UPWA and United Farm Equipment Workers locals into the 1950s.



Senator Joseph McCarthy broadcasting over KFAB Radio, August 24, 1951.
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The 1940s and 1950s, in marked contrast with the Depression decade, were prosperous years economically. Unprecedented government spending restored prosperity during World War II, and its continuation and the pent up demand for new homes, new cars, and the good life in the postwar years helped perpetuate it. Defense installations, the most significant of which in the region was Offutt Air Force Base, became major economic assets.[20] Although the Missouri Valley Authority (MVA) never was adopted, its substitute, the Pick-Sloan Plan, resulted in large scale construction of dams and other structures. U.S. government construction projects proved a boon to the region generally and to construction workers specifically.

The labor movement, as already mentioned, was not strong in Nebraska and neighboring states, but it had received a real boost during the war years, which continued well into the postwar era. The railroads, packing plants, and telephone and trucking companies were major employers, and their workers were heavily unionized. But the Nebraska labor movement was not limited to these industries or to Omaha and Lincoln, as there were union members scattered across the state. Organized labor had not been

Strauss Brothers Lumber Company offered new homes in a Lincoln suburb, November 1952.
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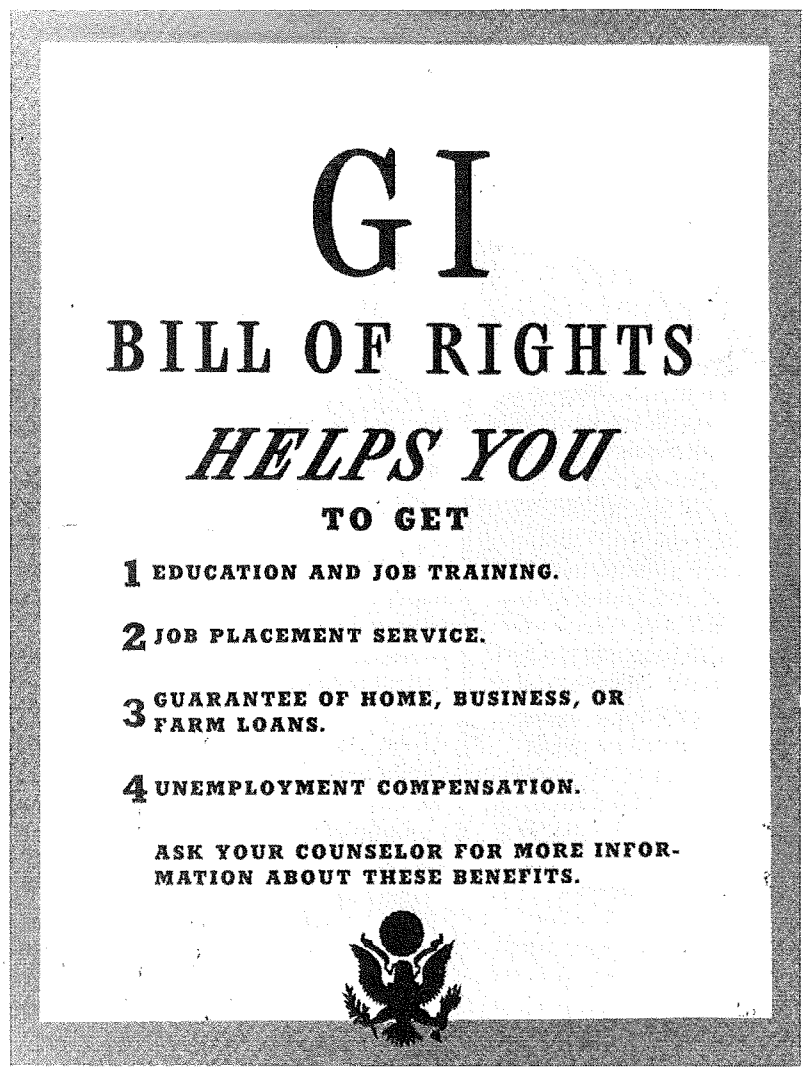
strong enough to defeat the right-to-work crusade, but it often succeeded in getting bigger paychecks for its membership in these years. As a practical matter, right-to-work laws were more a reflection of the relative political clout of employers and unions than an obstacle to unionization. These generalizations also apply to the rest of the region, though perhaps to a lesser extent in the Dakotas.[21]

A major boost to the regional economy in the postwar era was home construction. While suburban development dated to the turn of the century, if not before in Omaha, all of Nebraska's cities and larger towns experienced it in the late 1940s and 1950s. Offutt Air Force Base, for example, played a major role in the growth of Bellevue. (The latest figures report that Bellevue has surpassed Grand Island as the third-largest Nebraska city.)[22] Home ownership had been a dream of many of the immigrants who settled in urban areas earlier. In the 1950s, however, many of their children and grandchildren moved to the suburbs. Home construction, automobiles, and appliances helped drive the postwar economy even in agricultural states of this region.

Another important element in this economic development was improved educational opportunity. Thousands of Nebraska veterans went to college on the G.I. bill following World War II (and the Korean War), which provided op-



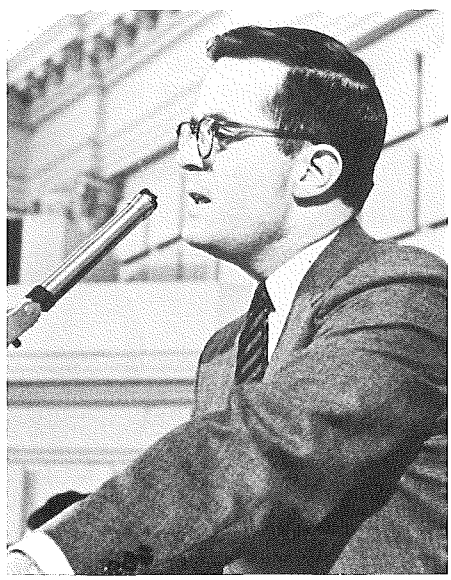
NSHS Museum Collections

portunity for higher education that many would not have had otherwise. In 1946, for example, more than two-thirds of the University of Nebraska's 9,000 students were veterans, a figure higher than the national average.[23] Expenditures for higher education zoomed upward in the postwar years, as faculty, administration, students, and facilities grew immensely. College increasingly was seen as a basic right, and much more emphasis was placed upon its desirability in the 1940s and 1950s than previously.

The interstate highway system also was a boost to the state's economy. While the legislation dated to 1956, most of the construction took place in the 1960s. I-80 was not completed across Nebraska until the early 1970s, and the location of the route provoked controversy. As with most economic decisions there were winners and losers, and towns and businesses on routes skipped by the new highway clearly were hurt. On the other hand, its construction helped larger towns, and the businesses located in them. Road construction generally was a big item in local and state budgets in the postwar years. Farm-to-market roads were paved or repaved, and the highway department was a very important agency of government.[24]

One of the painful realities for all these states was demographic. Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Kansas lost population in the 1930s, and none enjoyed significant population increases in the 1940s and 1950s. Urban centers such as Des Moines, Sioux Falls, Fargo, Bismarck, Omaha, and Lincoln grew, but small towns and rural areas have continued to lose population.[25] In mid-1961, Ted Sorensen, a native Nebraskan then on President John F. Kennedy's staff, spoke in McCook on the occasion of the commemoration of George Norris's 100th birthday. His remarks were controversial and much criticized at the time. He lamented the state's education system, saying at one point that Nebraska had become "a place to come from or a place to die."[26]

In retrospect, Sorensen had pinpointed a problem shared throughout the region. Simply stated, one of Nebraska's leading exports was its youth, and that could be said of the Dakotas and Iowa as well. These states devoted a substantial amount of their financial resources to educating people who then moved elsewhere because of limited job opportunities at home.



Theodore Sorensen. NSHS-K81:1

Sorensen at the time was arguing in favor of the allocation of more funds (and implicitly for backing of legislation to provide federal aid to education, which Nebraska's congressional delegation had steadfastly opposed). But his comments hit a raw nerve. School consolidation, state and federal aid to schools, certification, and other measures lay in the future.[27]

To this day, despite tax concessions, tax exempt financing, and any number of other incentives, neither Nebraska, Iowa, or the Dakotas have truly succeeded in their economic development endeavors. The main reason why economic development became so important was the increased use of machinery and technology in agriculture. Farm population declined, while average farm size increased each time the calculation was made. In 1940 Nebraska had 121,000 farms with an average size of 391 acres; in 1950 it had 107,000 farms with an average of 443 acres; in 1960 it had 90,000 farms with an average of 528 acres.[28] Similar figures exist for the Dakotas and Iowa. Increasingly, sons and daughters moved to the larger towns and cities, many of them leaving the state or region altogether. The trend continues with no break in sight.[29]

One extraordinarily important breakthrough for rural areas in the postwar era was rural electrification. To many, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was a New Deal program, which it was, but as a practical matter much of the countryside was not lit up until the late 1940s or early 1950s. In 1930 less than 10 percent of Nebraska farm houses were hooked up to a power line. The remainder either relied entirely on a home generating unit or in most cases went without electricity. As late as December of 1947 "only a dismal 38 per cent of Nebraska farms [were] receiving electricity." Only two other states in the country, North and South Dakota, had a lower percentage.

The big push for rural electrification began in 1946, and great strides were made over the next several years. By the fall of 1954 more than 96 percent of Nebraska farms had electricity. While such developments occurred somewhat sooner in Iowa, and somewhat later in the Dakotas, they were similar to the Nebraska experience except that in Nebraska the projects were undertaken by power districts rather than cooperatives.[30] Rural electrification, along with improved roads and schools (not to mention the continuation of federal farm program payments), helped make rural life less different than life in urban and suburban areas, but it did not interrupt the exodus from the countryside.

Urban life has been important from the beginning of white settlement in the region. Omaha is the largest city in a five state area consisting of Nebraska, Iowa, the Dakotas, and Kansas, and de-

spite its relative remoteness the city has experienced many of the problems of larger urban centers.[31] Aside from Omaha, few cities in the region had a sizeable black population in the 1940s and 1950s. Race relations there had some low points, including a brutal lynching and destruction of the courthouse in 1919.[32]

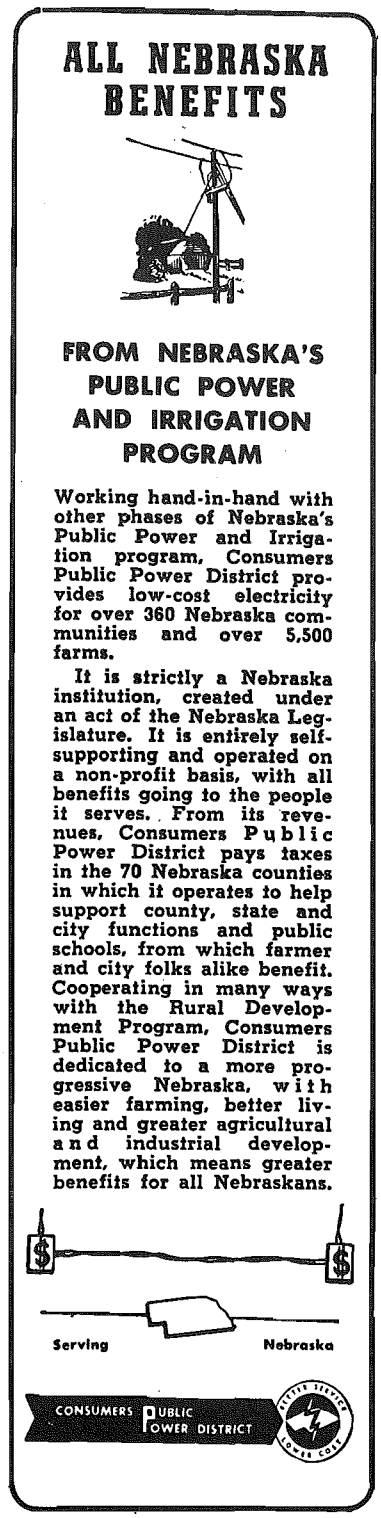
A large number of blacks worked in Omaha's packing plants, and the UPWA tried with mixed success in the late 1940s and early 1950s to improve race relations both within the union and in the communities in which the plants were located.[33] In the same era, however, a small civil rights group, the De Porres Club, undertook a campaign to integrate lunch rooms and persuade businesses to hire blacks. Composed of both Creighton University students and community people, this integrated group met with some success. The local Coca Cola Bottling Company, the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company, and the Reed Ice Cream Company all hired blacks in the wake of De Porres Club protests. This group also was briefly affiliated with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).[34] There was civil rights activity in Des Moines and Topeka as well, and the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which mandated racially integrated schools, was a product of a National Association of Colored People (NAACP) effort in Topeka.

Women had obtained new job opportunities during the war years, including work in defense plants such as the Martin Bomber Plant in Bellevue. With the end of the war, however, thousands of them were laid off. They had been a major source of labor in the packing industry for years, and continued to work in the plants.[35] Over a period of time, the numbers of women in the work force increased in postwar years. In many cases, the new homes and cars that helped drive the postwar economy also required two bread winners in the family. More women went to college than previously, as enrollments increased. In addition to improved job opportunities, some women became more active in other endeavors.

Mabel Gillespie, one of Nebraska's first woman legislators (1925-35) and a board member of the Eastern Nebraska Public Power District (1934-46), made several attempts at higher office, losing a bid for Congress as a Democrat in 1942.[36] In the mid-1950s, two Nebraska women briefly served as U.S. Senators, filling out the term of a man who died in office. Republican Eve Bowring, a Sand Hills rancher, was appointed by Governor Robert Crosby in April of 1954 after Dwight Griswold's death. Her appointment lasted until a replacement was elected to complete Griswold's term. Ironically, Bowring served longer in the U.S. Senate as an appointee than did Hazel Abel, who was chosen by the voters for the two month term. Abel took her seat just in time to participate in the McCarthy censure deliberations, her most noteworthy activity as a U.S. Senator. Subsequently, to help Carl Curtis (who had been elected to a full six-year term) gain seniority, Abel resigned her seat a few days early. In 1960, at the age of seventy-one, she made an unsuccessful bid for the Republican gubernatorial nomination.[37]

One of the biggest developments in postwar culture in the U.S. was the introduction of television. It made a big splash everywhere. In Nebraska television was introduced in 1949, and it came to play a role in homogenizing American culture and diluting regional and local differences in new ways.[38] Along with more mobility provided by improved transportation, including air travel, television transformed a way of life. Yet rural culture persisted, in part due to work requirements on the farm and distance (physical and otherwise) from town, as did some ethnic cultures, again insulated by social distance and group reinforcement. If numbers were sufficient, groups could continue a social life "among their own kind," which also was true for some in urban areas.

In some ways the years 1940-60 saw



Nebraska Electric Farmer, September 1948.

the beginnings of modern Nebraska, but there was still much to come in the next three decades. Urban blight and unrest, the decline of the packing and railroad industries, increased problems for rural areas and small towns, the revival of the Democratic Party, increased civil rights and equal opportunity concerns, and expanded involvement of women in public life, including the election of the state's first woman governor, were some of the important post-1960 developments. Others included rural school consolidation, adoption of sales and income taxes, expansion of the university system to include campuses in Omaha and Kearney, the emergence of collective bargaining in the public sector, and an expanded role for the federal government.[39]

Obviously, some of the developments that have helped shape the present are even more recent than those discussed in this essay. Thus Nebraska historians have quite a bit of work to do, and we can only hope that more of them will turn to topics of the last half century in their research.

Notes

I am particularly indebted to Jim Potter and Harl Dalstrom for their advice and suggestions on this essay as well as to the insights of Frederick C. Luebke, "Nebraska: Time, Place, and Culture," in James H. Madison, ed., *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 226-47. The *Omaha World-Herald* clipping collection at the Historical Society of Douglas County, Omaha, Nebraska, and an "Atomic Age Timeline" citation index at the Nebraska State Historical Society, were very useful for this project.

[1] Frederick C. Luebke, "Tiemann, Taxes, and the Centennial Legislature of 1967: Beginning Nebraska's Second Century," *Nebraska History* 71 (Fall 1990): 107-20.

[2] Harl A. Dalstrom, "The Defeat of George W. Norris in 1942," *Nebraska History* 59 (Summer 1978): 231-58. See also Richard Lowitt, *George W. Norris: The Triumph of a Progressive, 1933-1944* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

[3] See Justus F. Paul, "Butler, Griswold, Wherry: The Struggle for Dominance of Nebraska Republicanism, 1941-1946," *North Dakota History* 43 (Autumn 1975): 51-61; James F. Pedersen and Kenneth D. Wald, *Shall the People Rule? A History of the Democratic Party in Nebraska Politics 1854-1972* (Lincoln: Jacob North, Inc., 1972).

[4] In 1931 a Nebraska journalist won a Pulitzer Prize for an editorial in which he argued that Nebraska voters continued to send Norris to Washington because he irritated the rest of the country: "The state of Nebraska has elected Norris to the United States senate this year, as it has many times in the past, mainly because he is not wanted there. If his return to Washington causes discomfiture in official circles, the people of Nebraska will regard their votes as not having been cast in vain. They do not want farm relief or any other legislative benefits a senator might bring them; all they want is a chance to sit back and gloat." Continuing in this vein, the editorial asserted: "His [Norris's] real strength in Nebraska is measured by the antagonisms he stirs up beyond the borders of the state. His people take delight in setting him on the heels of the ruling powers, whether of government, of finance, or of industry. The more he makes himself obnoxious to a political party, to a national administration, or to Wall street, the better they like him." see [Charles S. Ryckman] "The Gentleman from Nebraska," *Lincoln Star*, May 5, 1931. The author of the editorial was managing editor of the *Fremont Tribune*, where the piece first appeared, and who had opposed Norris's candidacy in the 1930 election. Ibid., May 10, 1931.

I do not want to make too much of this argument, but there may be a contrarian streak in the state's political culture that has worked to the advantage of Nebraska mavericks in the U.S. Senate such as Norris, Edward Zorinsky, and Bob Kerrey.

[5] For the 1936 election, see Lowitt, *George W. Norris*, 138-62. Carpenter was nominated in the Democratic primary, but the state Democratic convention subsequently backed Norris. Carpenter was the Democratic candidate on the ballot, however.

[6] Support for the New Deal was the major issue in both the 1934 primary, where Burke defeated Bryan for the Democratic nomination, and in the general election, where he bested Republican nominee Robert Simmons. See "State Back of New Deal," *Omaha World-Herald* (Morning), Sept. 12, 1934 (hereafter MWH); "Burke calls His Victory Vindication of New Deal," *Omaha World-Herald* (Evening), Nov. 7, 1934 (hereafter EWH).

[7] The Carl Curtis quotation is found in James Reichley, *States in Crisis: Politics in Ten American States, 1950-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 72.

[8] For interesting treatment of these states from the perspective of the early 1970s, see Neal R. Peirce, *The Great Plains States of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Nine Great Plains States* (New York: Norton and Co., 1973). For a recent look at North Dakota, see David B. Danbom, "A Part of the Nation and Apart from the Nation: North Dakota Politics Since 1945," in *Politics in the Postwar American West*, ed. Richard Lowitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 174-84.

[9] William C. Pratt, "Employer Offensive in Nebraska Politics, 1946-1949" in *Politics in the Postwar American West*, 135-46.

[10] For the Farmers Union, see John A. Crampton, *The National Farmers Union: Ideology of a Pressure Group* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); Lowell K. Dyson, *Farmers' Organizations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 214-32.

[11] The Nebraska Farmers Union often opposed the liberal policies of the national organization. But in 1945 and 1946, the Left-Right division within the Nebraska union was pretty evenly balanced, and the "progressive wing" actually had a majority of one on the state board. Chris Milius continued to be elected president, however, and the conservatives regained control by 1947. See "Clash of 'Left' and 'Right'" Wings of State Farmers Union Seen Here," *EWH*, Feb. 14, 1945; "Milius Heads Farmers Union," *MWH*, Feb. 16, 1945; "Farm Union Right Wing Wins Tests," Ibid., Feb. 14, 1946; "Chris Milius Is Re-elected Head of NFU," Ibid., Feb. 15, 1946; "Farmers Union Progressives Exploit Edge," Ibid., Feb. 24, 1946.

[12] See Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[13] *EWH*, Dec. 13, 1950; June 7, 1951; *Lincoln Star*, Dec. 28, 1950; Jan. 2, 1951; *MWH*, Apr. 17, 1995. According to the *World-Herald*, J. Edgar Hoover reported that Nebraska had thirty-five Communists in 1951. *EWH*, Mar. 26, 1951. Peterson's plan had little practical significance (and may have been a bit of grandstanding), because the FBI had its own Communist roundup program in place before 1950. See Athan G. Theoharis, "In House Cover-Up: Researching FBI Files," in Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *Beyond the Hiss Case: The FBI, Congress, and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 31-32.
I have not seen many FBI files from Nebraska, but a number of Freedom of Information Act releases on individuals from Minnesota and the Dakotas indicate that the FBI planned to apprehend suspected "subversives" in the event of a national emergency. For FBI surveillance in the 1940s and 1950s, see William C. Pratt, "Farmers, Communists, and the FBI in the Upper Midwest," *Agricultural History* 63 (Summer 1989): 61-80.

[14] *Sunday World-Herald*, May 14, 1967 (hereafter *SWH*). Phil Allen, an Omaha radio announcer who taught part time at the University of Omaha, criticized the loyalty oath as "unconstitutional and immoral," He wrote to a number of officials, including the governor, members of the Unicameral, and university administrators, asking that they sign "an 'oath of reassurance,'" which committed them to principles outlined in the Bill of Rights and Thomas Jefferson's writings "as a condition of my signature on the Nebraska loyalty oath for Teachers." Arch Donovan, "Omaha U. Teacher Asks Civil

Rights Reassurance," *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 4, 1951. The Paxton Hotel in Omaha also required its employees "to sign loyalty pledges and non-Communist oaths." *EWH*, Sept. 8, 1950.

[15] For a critical editorial on McCarthy see "It's August Madness," *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 27, 1951.

[16] For treatment of McCarthy's censure, see Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2d. ed., 1987). Abel said a few days after the vote: "My vote to censure Senator McCarthy... was based on his proven conduct toward witnesses appearing before his Senate subcommittee and his appalling treatment of fellow Senators as individuals and as members of committees of the United States Senate who were obstructed by Senator McCarthy's acts in carrying out the constitutional processes of the Senate." *EWH*, Dec. 6, 1954.

[17] "Throughout my research, I discovered no more frightened group than the scattered remaining ex-Progressives of Nebraska. Not only the Transportation Workers, but also the Packinghouse Workers Union, the AFL, and the National Farmers Union 'applied the heat'; they did it so thoroughly that, years later, principal victims paled and trembled when asked to recall it." Curtis MacDougall, *Gideon's Army* II (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1965), 398.

[18] The initial refusal of the UPWA to have its officers sign anti-Communist affidavits as provided under the Taft-Hartley law was used by critics of the union as evidence of pro-Communist sympathies. A local UPWA figure, Patrick Ratigan, quit the union in 1947 and became involved with an Amalgamated raiding effort. He was president of UPWA Local 47 at the Swift plant when he resigned. See "Ratigan Quits, Blasts Reds," *EWH*, Oct. 29, 1947. Later, he claimed that "half the officers of this union now are Communists." See Harold Andersen, "Red Minority Won Rule of Omaha Union," Ibid., Mar. 15, 1948. (This story was based on an interview with Ratigan.)

Edward Danner, a black unionist who later was a state senator, was local president in 1948, and James C. Harris was vice president. Harris, who also was black, was elected president of the Nebraska CIO in the 1950s. One of the local's trustees was Vic Meyers, who later served a number of years as state AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer. Lillie Hayden to Ralph Helstein, Jan. 28, 1948. United Packinghouse Workers of American Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. (Hayden was the local's recording secretary.)

Ratigan's claim that Communists dominated Local 47 seems unlikely to me. During the 1948 strike, he led a back-to-work effort and was roughed up by strikers. For the 1948 strike, see William C. Pratt, "Workers, Bosses, and Public Officials: The 1948 Strike," *Nebraska History* 66 (Fall 1985): 294-313.

[19] The political divisions within the UPWA are discussed in Roger Horowitz, "The Path Not Taken: A Social history of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990); Wilson J. Warren, "The Limits of New Deal Social Democracy: Working-Class Structural Pluralism in Midwestern Meatpacking, 1900-1955" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1992).

[20] George A. Larson, "Nebraska's World War II Bomber Plant: The Glenn L. Martin-Nebraska Company," *Nebraska History* 74 (Spring 1993): 32-43. For the impact of air bases in North Dakota, see John F. Fuller, "The New Look, Air Power, and North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 35 (Winter 1967): 1-14.

[21] See Keith Lumsden and Craig Petersen, "The Effect of Right-to-Work Laws on Unionization in the United States," *Journal of Political Economy* 83 (December 1975): 1237-48. By 1960, the state had 79,000 unionized workers, or "20.7 percent of [its] non-agricultural labor force." John Taylor, "Unions Show Slip," *SWH*, June 11, 1978.

[22] Laurie Niles, "Annexations Help Make Bellevue Third-Largest City," *EWH*, Nov. 6, 1995.

[23] Robert E. Knoll, *Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 108. At the Municipal University of Omaha, "[v]eterans comprised more than 60 percent of all enrollments" that fall. *Gateway*, Sept. 27, 1946. For impact of the G. I. Bill, see Keith W. Olson, "The G. I. Bill and Higher Education: Success and Surprise," *American Quarterly* 25 (December 1973): 596-610.

[24] See James C. Creigh, "Constructing the Interstate Highway in Nebraska: Route and Funding Controversies," *Nebraska History* 72 (Spring 1991): 44-53; George E. Koster, *A Story of Highway Development in Nebraska* (Lincoln: Department of Roads, 1986).

[25] See "Rural Population Slide Has Found No Bottom," *MWH*, Dec. 2, 1970.

[26] *Lincoln Star*, July 12, 1961; *MWH*, July 12, 1961. For varying responses to Sorensen's remarks, see William O. Dobler, "Sorensen Blast In Line," *Lincoln Star*, July 13, 1961; "Angry Frontierman," *MWH*, July 13, 1961. The episode may have first been called to my attention by Frederick C. Luebke, "Nebraska: Time, Place, and Culture," in James H. Madison, ed., *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 243. See also "Nebraska: 'A Place To Come From Or A Place To Die'?" in Peirce, *The Great Plains States*, 198-99.

[27] Steven J. Buss, "Public School District Reorganization and Consolidation in Adams County, Nebraska, 1949-1989," *Nebraska History* 72 (Summer 1991): 89-98.

[28] *Nebraska Statistical Handbook 1972* (Lincoln: Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 1972), 145. See Richard G. Bremer, *Agricultural Change in an Urban Age: The Loup Country of Nebraska, 1910-1970* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Studies, 1976).

[29] A recent U.S. Census Bureau projection suggests that Nebraska's population will increase "on an average annual growth rate of three-fourths of a percentage point" between 1994 and 2020. See "Slow Population Growth a Problem That Requires Political Vision," editorial, *MWH*, Apr. 20, 1994.

[30] *MWH*, Dec. 12, 1947; Apr. 1, 1948 (source of quotation); Oct. 11, 1954. For Nebraska public power, see Robert E. Firth, *Public Power in Nebraska: A Report on State Ownership* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962).

[31] For Omaha history, see Garneth O. Peterson, "Historical Framework," in *A Comprehensive Program for Historical Preservation in Omaha* (Omaha: Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, 1980), 8-73; Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha* (Denver: Pruett Publishing Co., 1982); Donald L. Stevens, Jr., "Government, Interest Groups, and the People: Urban Renewal in Omaha, 1954-1970," *Nebraska History* 67 (Summer 1986): 134-58; Harl A. Dalstrom, *A.V. Sorensen and the New Omaha* (Omaha: Lamplighter Press, 1987); Janet R. Daly-Bednarek, *The Changing Image of the City: Planning for Downtown Omaha, 1945-1973* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

[32] Orville D. Menard, "Tom Dennison, *The Omaha Bee*, and the 1919 Omaha Race Riot," *Nebraska History* 68 (Winter 1987): 152-65.

[33] Warren, "The Limits of New Deal Social Democracy," 395-424.

[34] Jeffrey H. Smith, "The Omaha DePorres Club," *Negro History Bulletin* 33 (December 1970): 194-99; Jeffrey H. Smith, "The Omaha De Porres Club" (M.A. thesis, Creighton University, 1967); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973, 1975), 60-61. See also Dennis N. Mihelich, "World War II and the Transformation of the Omaha Urban League," *Nebraska History* 60 (Fall 1979): 401-23.

[35] William C. Pratt, "'Union Maids' in Omaha Labor History, 1887-1945," in *Perspectives: Women in Nebraska History* (Lincoln: Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska State Council for the Social Studies, 1984), 205-7.

[36] "A Lone Woman Legislator," *SWH*, Dec. 2, 1928; Doris Ann Ware, "Women of the Midlands: Political Career Began as a 'First,'" *MWH*, Dec. 27, 1970. In 1944 Gillespie was defeated by Howard Buffett in what was characterized "the worst year of the twentieth century for the Democratic party in Nebraska." Pedersen and Wald, *Shall the People Rule?*, 331. She also sought the Democratic nomination in 1934 and again in 1956, but was unsuccessful. In 1954 her efforts to win the party's nomination for a short U.S. Senate term fell short as well. *EWH*, Feb. 17, 1956. The Nebraska Unicameral had relatively few women senators in the period covered in this essay. Two were appointed

(the first in 1946, the second in 1954) and Kathleen A. Foote was elected in 1954. James Denney, "Women in Politics," *SWH Magazine of the Midlands*, Apr. 2, 1967, 6-7; "Mrs. Abel to Senate, Mrs. Foote to Legislature," *MWH*, Nov. 3, 1954.

[37] Harold Andersen, "Mrs. Bowring to Be Interim U.S. Senator," *MWH*, Apr. 17, 1954; James Denney, "Eve Bowring Treasures Her Shaving Mug," *SWH Magazine of the Midlands*, Dec. 13, 1970, 4, 6. John Jarrell, "Mrs. Abel to Resign on Dec. 31, *EWH*, Dec. 17, 1954. Bowring and Abel had been very active in the Republican Party, both of them serving as vice-chairman of the state organization prior to going to the Senate. In 1956 President Eisenhower appointed Bowring to the U.S. Board of Paroles, where she served until 1964. Nebraska had nine different senators, all of them Republican, between 1951 and 1954. This situation developed because three of them died in office. See Justus F. Paul, "Nebraska's Record in the Senate: Nine Senators in Three Years," *Nebraska History* 47 (December 1966): 399-407.

[38] See James Denney, " Omaha Television Turns 35," *SWH Magazine of the Midlands*, Aug. 12, 1984, 4-6. For development of television in a neighboring state, see Bill Snyder, "Adding Picture to Sound: Early Television in North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 60 (Summer 1993): 2-23.

[39] Several of these developments are discussed by Luebke in "Tiemann, Taxes, and the Centennial Legislature of 1967." For his summary see p. 107. For civil rights legislation, see Paul A. Jensen, "The Nebraska Civil Rights Act of 1969; Senator Edward Danner and the Fight For Fair Housing," graduate paper, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Apr. 27, 1994. Nebraska legislative history has generally been neglected. Terry Carpenter was a major player in Nebraska politics from the early 1930s into the 1970s, but his main arena was the Unicameral, and a good study of his legislative career would be a real contribution to our understanding of the state's political history.

POLITICAL CULTURE

Hazel H. Abel, elected to the U.S. Senate in November 1954, to fill the two-month unexpired term of Dwight Griswold. NSHS-P853

One topic not discussed in this essay is that of political culture. Historians and others have utilized this concept in the study of politics. Michael P. Malone and Dianne G. Dougherty, in an impressive article on Montana's political history, have defined it as "the configuration of ideas, attitudes, biases, and emotional attachments that characterize a political community, whether that community is a city, a state, or a nation."[1] Political culture also may be seen as the ideological and institutional parameters in which partisan politics are conducted.

Part of Nebraska's political culture involves an effort to balance the influence of Omaha versus the rest of the state. Thus no person from Omaha was elected governor in the twentieth century until 1990 (and then Ben Nelson "stressed his McCook roots more than his residence in Omaha"), and one U.S. Senator always has been from south of the Platte River (though that imperative also may be overturned in the 1996 senatorial election). This attempt to limit Omaha's influence probably is related to a general east-west divide in the state that extends beyond politics.[2]

A newer feature of Nebraska's political culture is the appeal of a nonpartisan Unicameral. Despite calls for change from both major parties at times, this 1930s-era innovation is well entrenched. To many observers it is largely responsible for another characteristic of Nebraska's political culture: the relative weakness of party organizations (which is reinforced by the nonpartisan status of mayors, and city council and school board members.)

Yet another feature of Nebraska's political culture is its persistent localism. While recent decades have witnessed significant school consolidation, Nebraska still has more school districts than all but three other states that have much larger populations.[3] For further discussion on the concept of political culture in this region, see Daniel J. Elzar, "Political Culture on the Plains," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11 (July 1980): 261-83.—WCP

Notes

[1] Michael P. Malone and Dianne G. Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture: A Century of Evolution," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 31 (Winter 1981): 44.

[2] C. David Kotok, "Governor's Race a Squeaker," *Omaha World-Herald* (Morning), Nov. 7, 1990; David Hendee, "East and West Still Fail to Meet," *Sunday World-Herald*, June 21, 1992.

[3] Frederick C. Luebke, "Nebraska: Time, Place, and Culture," in James H. Madison, ed., *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 235.