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## Article Title: Portrait of a Small Town: The Photographic Diary of Neligh's Emanuel Wolfe

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Article Summary: Emanuel Wolfe, a dry goods merchant in Neligh, took photographs that document his changing world. From 1900 until 1930 his large-format camera recorded images of family members, neighbors, homes, businesses, and events.

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Photographs / Images: Emanuel Wolfe; Wolfe and Brother store (1910s); a young girl and milk cows with Wolfe's shadow in the foreground (1910s); Priscilla Wolfe (1908); a young girl in a swing (1910); a young girl astride a rocking horse (1910); Wayne Wolfe (1917); an adult woman, possibly Wolfe's wife Lois (1908); Main Street looking north (1910); Main Street (1920s); interior view of the Wolfe Store (1915); interior of the store (1910s); a man and binder near Neligh (1900s); threshing scene (1920); photograph of a Ku Klux Klan parade in Neligh (1920s); finish line of a trotting race in Neligh (early twentieth century); an airplane, possibly built by the Savidge brothers of Ewing, at the Neligh fairgrounds

# Portrait of a Small Town

## The Photographic Diary of Neligh's Emanuel Wolfe

By Michael A. Amundson

Sometime around 1900, Nebraska merchant Emanuel Wolfe took a step back from his expanding dry goods business and began to document the life around him. Already over forty years old, Wolfe had recently married and was the father of an infant girl. At the same time, Wolfe's adopted hometown of Neligh was also maturing and was no longer the adolescent community it had been upon his arrival fifteen years earlier. Perhaps with a touch of nostalgia, Wolfe set out with a camera to record images of his changing life in a visual diary of photographs. Over the next twenty-five years, he accumulated more than 2,000 glass plate negatives. When he died, a local newspaper remarked that Wolfe had become "widely known as one of the best amateur photographers in Nebraska."<sup>1</sup> Today, this preserved collection serves as evidence of one man's interaction with a moment in time and the dynamics at work in his changing town.

Emanuel Wolfe was born to German parents in New York City on July 28, 1858. His childhood and early adult years are unknown until 1884. That year Wolfe, then twenty-six, left New York with his younger brother, William, to seek his fortune with an uncle living in Illinois. While there, the brothers began selling sewing machines, representing the firm of Marshall Field in Illinois and points west. Later in 1884 the Wolfe brothers moved to the small town of Neligh, Ne-

braska, where they opened a mercantile business known as "Wolfe & Bro."<sup>2</sup>

Neligh is located in the center of Antelope County in northeastern Nebraska, situated on the northern bank of the



**Emanuel Wolfe.** *Neligh Centennial, 1873-1973* (Neligh, Nebr.: Neligh Centennial Committee, 1973)

Elkhorn River. The first settlers had moved into the area by 1869. In June 1871 the county was organized and the nearby community of Oakdale became the temporary county seat. In 1873 settlers platted the town of Neligh and the following year a water-powered flour mill was opened. Despite grasshopper plagues over the next three years, the town continued to grow, and in 1876 the first bridge across the Elkhorn was constructed at Neligh. By 1880 Neligh's population was listed as 329.<sup>3</sup>

The decade of the 1880s was a boom period for most of Nebraska. Historian James C. Olson called it an era of progress and prosperity. Another historian, Addison E. Sheldon, wrote that during the decade

came the largest addition in our population; the greatest increase in our production; the furthest expansion of railway mileage; the greatest change in the physical aspects of our state. More land was taken by settlers in this period, more livestock added, larger increases in crops of all kinds, more new towns were founded, more post offices were established, more schools were created, more churches built, more homes constructed than in any other decade of Nebraska history.<sup>4</sup>

This expansion was evident in Neligh. In 1880 the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad surveyed a route along the Elkhorn River and the following year, the first train arrived in Neligh. This event not only made it possible for local residents to travel to Omaha and back in the same day, but it also enabled town producers to sell their goods in a larger market, while also allowing local merchants to stock their shelves with merchandise from across the country.<sup>5</sup>

The town's fortunes rose again in 1881 when representatives of the Congregational Church met in nearby Oakdale and offered to establish and maintain a college in whichever town would subscribe the most to the venture. Because Neligh offered \$8,000 and forty acres of land adjoining the town, the church awarded the school to Neligh, and Gates College opened in the fall of 1881. That same year town fathers gained Neligh's incorporation as a village.<sup>6</sup>

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Over the next two years Neligh experienced its greatest expansion. The town's population boomed 294 percent. The first county fair was organized and held in Neligh in 1883. In October of that year, the latest in a series of hard-fought elections relocated the county seat to the bustling community.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the setting in which Emanuel and William Wolfe arrived in 1884 was ideal for their new store. Even though the community had been settled eleven years earlier, the addition of the railroad, courthouse, and college gave Neligh the aura of a town with a future. For merchants, the railroad brought both the necessary supplies to keep their businesses open, as well as new settlers to provide demand. The Wolfe brothers' first advertisement, on page one of the *Neligh Advocate*, July 18, 1884, offered a complete line of dry goods including clothing, hats, caps, boots, shoes, and furnishing goods. Three weeks later the paper's editor gave a glowing report of the brothers' store: "They have a fine stock of elegant goods of the latest and most fashionable styles, have them neatly and tastefully arranged, and are selling at bed rock prices."<sup>8</sup>

The store's success encouraged Emanuel Wolfe to put down roots in the growing community. Beginning in the spring of 1887, he purchased three lots from Neligh photographer W. E. Relf and his wife. Two months later, Wolfe acquired the adjacent three lots from another local couple. The following year, Wolfe bought two more lots in the Neligh commercial district. With a bounty of real estate under his control, Wolfe then helped to organize an agency to boost his speculating. On October 18, 1888, he helped found the Neligh Improvement Company (NIC), dedicated to "purchase, sell, and improve real estate in the County of Antelope and State of Nebraska." Capitalized at \$5,000, the seven founding members of the company included Wolfe, A. B. Beach, M. C. Remington, W. C. Estes, N. D. Jackson, Carl Roben, and John J. Roche. To cap it off, Wolfe was elected

the company's first president. Two days after its organization, the NIC conducted its first transaction by paying \$900 for a parcel in Neligh's commercial district. Encouraged by such expansion, the city fathers filed for Neligh's incorporation as a second-class city in 1888.<sup>9</sup>

Although the exact dealings among the shareholders are not known, one primary function of the NIC seems to have been to secure lots for the construction of a new Wolfe and Brother store. On the heels of its first purchase, the NIC paid \$1,000 and \$1,300 respectively for two adjacent commercial lots

Over the next three decades Neligh matured into a central railroad shipping point, with a modest industrial base provided by the Neligh Mills, and the commercial advantages accruing to the seat of county government. In 1890 the city's population was about 1,000, and by 1900, had grown to 1,135. Ten years later the population had increased by about one-third, to 1,581. Although these figures do not reflect the rapid expansion of earlier decades, Neligh's physical geography continued to evolve. New brick schools and commercial blocks were constructed to replace earlier wooden structures. Street lights



**The Wolfe and Brother store at the height of its popularity in the 1910s. The smaller addition at right served as the brother's shoe store. The building's 1889 construction date is clearly visible, as are Odd Fellows and Masonic symbols, indicating the second story was used for lodge meetings. NSHS-RG2836:14-5**

in the spring of 1889. Although the growing value of land in these purchases suggests the company had achieved its goal of raising property values, there is no evidence that the organization was making money on the sale of its land. In fact, the only other notable activity of the NIC also began in the spring of 1889, when the company, with Wolfe as president, began erecting the town's second brick building, a two-story structure that by year's end housed the firm of Wolfe and Brother.<sup>10</sup>

replaced oil lamps around the town and eventually, concrete sidewalks and paving replaced the old-fashioned boardwalks and dirt streets.<sup>11</sup>

The Wolfe brothers' business matched the economic expansion of the early 1890s in Nebraska. In 1893 the brothers opened a second store in nearby Elgin under the management of their younger brother, Ira. Despite the depression of the 1890s, the Wolfes expanded their Neligh store to be the largest of its kind in northern Nebraska west of Norfolk. Another branch store was

operated in the town of Oakdale.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to his business, Emanuel Wolfe's personal life also changed significantly. In March 1898 he married Lois McGintie, the daughter of local teacher and entrepreneur H. L. McGintie. The couple had their first child, a daughter named Priscilla, the following year. By 1900 the family lived in a mortgage-free home and employed a live-in housekeeper. Interestingly, the housekeeper's sister had a similar position with Emanuel's brother, William. In 1904 Lois gave birth to the couple's second child, Wayne.<sup>13</sup>

The years from 1905 to 1925 seem to have been Wolfe's most prosperous ones. With farmers likely his main customers, it is not surprising to find Wolfe doing well during the late 1910s and struggling somewhat in the following decade. One indication of this prosperity is the number of photographs he took during this period. It is obvious that Wolfe had both the leisure time and the money to engage in photography to the extent that he did. Another indication is his construction of a large new house, complete with darkroom, on his old lot at the corner of Fifth and H streets in the fall of 1917.<sup>14</sup>

A survey of the Wolfe photograph collection suggests that, despite photography being an avocation, Wolfe was a more than competent photographer. His views of his growing family, his changing community, and local events are typical of the work of many professional photographers of this period. But Wolfe was a merchant, not a professional photographer. Nevertheless the relationship of successful merchant and changing community is key to understanding Wolfe as a photographer. After all, as a successful businessman, he probably spent at least sixty hours each week in and about his store.<sup>15</sup>

A survey of the Sanborn Insurance Company maps of Neligh (Table 1) shows that, like his home life, Wolfe's working world was also in the midst of change. Besides the obvious transformation from frame to brick, the actual

number of buildings in the downtown commercial district increased from thirty-three to more than fifty between 1893 and 1920.

**Table 1**  
Relative numbers of buildings in Neligh commercial district constructed of frame, brick, and stone, 1893-1920<sup>16</sup>

Year	# frame	#brick	# stone
1893	29	4	0
1899	32	5	0
1904	22	13	0
1920	10	45	1

In short, the growing, prosperous town of Neligh seemed an ideal location for a photographer to work. And a steady stream of photographers plied their trade in Neligh during this period. This turnover was probably accounted for because photography, usually considered a lucrative profession, was directly tied to the fortunes of the community in which a photographer worked. During times of rain, farm prices rose and people could afford the luxury of photographs. During bad times, many could not afford the extravagance. Sometimes a saturation point was reached for the market in which a photographer worked.<sup>17</sup>

Such a situation was clearly evident in Neligh. The 1879-80 edition of the *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory* lists a William Lawrence as a photographer. According to the *Gazetteer*, Lawrence remained in business until 1884, when he was replaced by W. E. Relf. With a studio on Main Street, Relf was assisted by his wife, Emma, a toner. Another photographer, W. Saxton, worked in Neligh from 1884 to 1887. Although Saxton was in town only a short time, Relf remained in business until at least 1902. By 1910 Relf was gone, but another man, Joseph W. Pike, had been operating a studio since 1907. In 1913 yet another studio opened, this one owned by two women, Jennie Bliss and Carla Johnson.<sup>18</sup>

This high turnover in the profession forced photographers to seek other ways to make money. While some, like

J. E. Stimson of Cheyenne and L. C. McClure of Denver, were hired by railroads and state government agencies as promotional agents, others were forced to peddle their photographs door to door. Another avenue of financial escape was to contract to make photographs for a book as Solomon D. Butcher of Custer County had done. But in small towns like Neligh, professional photographers were sometimes forced to find other jobs. Given their technical backgrounds, many photographers turned to pharmacy to help support themselves. To maintain an ongoing visual documentation of such small towns, what was needed were capable part-time or amateur photographers who were not solely dependent on income derived from selling photographs. Beginning around 1905, Emanuel Wolfe ably filled this niche when he began to take pictures for his visual diary.<sup>19</sup>

This idea of a visual diary is an important step in understanding Wolfe's relationship with his subjects and thus the meaning within his photographs. Some may argue that Wolfe did not think about such things, and merely took snapshots of his life. To displace such notions, one needs to look no further than Wolfe's professional, large-format camera.

Success with a large-format camera like Wolfe's six-by-nine-inch view camera takes a good eye and patience. By selecting this medium, Wolfe showed that he wanted professional results. If he had not been serious, he could simply have taken his pictures with a Kodak. But that camera and its photographs were considered toys by professional photographers.<sup>20</sup>

Much like the modern disposable camera that comes ready to shoot, the Kodak was sent from the factory loaded with one hundred frames of film. It had a fixed-focus lens and when the entire roll was exposed, the camera had to be shipped back to the supplier for development and printing of the negatives. It was then reloaded with film and sent back to the owner. In a sense, the "pho-

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tographer" merely had to point the camera and shoot.<sup>21</sup>

Wolfe, on the other hand, by choosing to work in large format, was required to load his glass plates into their holders in total darkness, set up the camera on its tripod, select a lens, zero in on a subject that appeared through the viewfinder upside down and backwards, then focus the camera under a black cloth. He then had to insert a film holder, determine an exposure based on film speed, aperture setting, and shutter speed, then finally snap the cable release. Negatives were then processed and prints made. This complicated process assumably kept the large-format photographer aware of each photograph he took.<sup>22</sup>

Each photograph Wolfe made required greater care than those taken with a Kodak. There were few truly spontaneous photographs; each was produced and directed to convey a transaction between photographer, time, and place. Each photograph should then exhibit an intimate knowledge of that transaction.

Photo historian and Nebraska State Historical Society Curator John Carter has discussed this idea as it relates to architectural photography. By considering a photograph as this kind of transaction, what Carter calls "the tripartite act of picturing," then

we may explore the act of photographing a building. We know that buildings carry meaning and this comes from the builder, the occupant, and the society and culture that surround them. When the photographer experiences a building he or she responds in some way to those symbols with which the building is laden. The photographer, either unconsciously or deliberately, selects the vantage point and moment which makes the experience meaningful, and takes the photograph. The level of meaning now held in the photograph corresponds to the depth of understanding—the level of resonance—the photographer has experienced.<sup>23</sup>

Acceptance of this transaction then suggests the question of audience. Who was Wolfe making photographs for?

Perhaps the best way to answer this



**A view of a young girl and milk cows in the 1910s also shows Wolfe at work. The tripod and focusing cloth for his large-format camera can be clearly discerned from the shadow. NSHS-RG2836:13-20**

question is to eliminate the audiences for whom Wolfe was not making photographs. First, although he might have taken the photographs for a family album, he could have chosen much simpler methods. Second, although some photographs also appear as postcards, it is doubtful Wolfe produced such postcards on a massive scale to make money. More likely, he made them at the urging of local merchants. Third, he might have made some of the photographs to boost Neligh. His record as president of the Neligh Improvement Company indicates a past history of boosterism. Still, since he never operated a studio, it is unlikely he was able to produce many promotional shots. He did not take the pictures for a calendar, or for conscious historical documentation like a history book. He did not take the photographs for a railroad, the state government, or any state agency. Still the question remains, why?

By examining the photographs in historical context, the answer could be that Wolfe, faced with a changing world, was simply trying to record a mo-

ment in time. Through his own accomplishments, he had both the financial resources to support this expensive hobby, as well as the business ties and intimacy with the townspeople to capture Neligh's images in a personal light.

Finally, it must also be assumed that Wolfe knew what a good picture should look like. Since photograph books, lithographs, and stereographic cards had all been produced by this time, it is safe to assume he had seen good photographic examples.<sup>24</sup> Where he learned the actual operation of a camera is unknown, but he could have gathered the basics from early Neligh photographer W. E. Relf. As mentioned, Wolfe purchased town lots from Relf in 1887. Furthermore, the 1894 Sanborn Insurance map shows a photograph studio, probably Relf's, located next to Wolfe's store.

Regardless of how Wolfe learned his technique, he often applied it in the same thematic way as had photographers elsewhere. The result is a typical assortment of photographs of people, houses, business districts, agriculture, news, and sports. Although this process



This portrait of Priscilla Wolfe, about 1908, clearly shows Wolfe's eye for composition, with its black background accenting Priscilla's white dress. NSHS-RG2836:22



A swing frames this portrait of a young girl, possibly Wolfe's niece, about 1910. NSHS-RG2836:1-18

seems vague, it is really no different than the way people today look at an Ansel Adams book and then go out and try to make similar photographs. Wolfe simply combined a camera with his cultural baggage to record the life around him. Thus this record, when observed within the context of the place, time, and photographer, reveals more than simply an album of family snapshots. It provides a solid portrait of a small town.

Photographs of the Wolfe family abound in the collection. Because the birth of his daughter probably coincided with his earliest photographs, it is not surprising that Wolfe photographed his children, his nieces and nephews, and his wife. These are not mere snapshots. Several of the large-format photographs show that Wolfe placed a background board or cloth behind the subject so he could present a more formal image after cropping. Such images exist of his

son and daughter, his wife, and another young girl, probably his niece. His view of his daughter, Priscilla, seated in a wicker chair, reflects this idea.

Wolfe also worked at composition in these images. Although several show traditional poses, other portraits are more elaborate. The striking image of a young girl framed by a wooden swing attests to this artistic expression. Another, with a blind as a backdrop, shows a young girl seated on a rocking horse. All in all, Wolfe's family portraits reveal a skilled photographer capturing his growing family.

A second genre of images depicts Neligh's evolving business district. As a leading businessman, Emanuel Wolfe had an intimate knowledge of his town's commercial interests. The collection contains scenes of local stores, lodges, hotels, and other typical buildings. Several important themes prevail.

The first is Main Street. If Sinclair Lewis's axiom, "Main Street is the climax of civilization" is true, Wolfe's views of Neligh's Main Street suggest much about this dynamic place.<sup>25</sup>

In the collection are several images taken from almost the same vantage point (near the Wolfe and Brother store) looking straight up the street and focusing downward to the road. An interesting comparison can be made from two images taken more than two decades apart. The first, an early scene about 1910, shows a lone street lamp hanging from an overhead wire above a dusty street. In the second, photographed by Wolfe in the 1920s, the street is paved, there are numerous automobiles, and the lone street lamp is almost lost in the abundance of new technology.

In a sense, these photographs are a form of rephotography. The term simply implies the technique of repeating the

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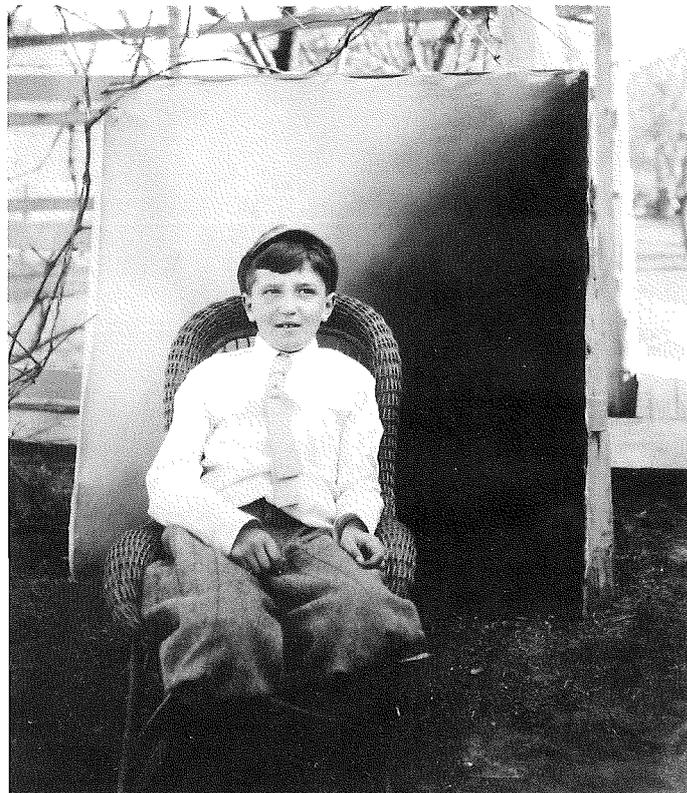


This unusual portrait of a young girl astride a rocking horse, about 1910, illustrates Wolfe's attempt at spontaneity. NSHS-RG2836:1-3

same vantage point of a photograph over a period of time to better understand the forces at work in the scene. In his rephotographic project of western landscapes, Mark Klett explained rephotography's use:

Like a punchline or the twist that ends a story, the Rephotographic Survey Project print changes what has preceded it without really altering it. And like a joke or story, each RSP pair can be rich with cultural meaning and metaphor that go far beyond the surface of what is presented. By making our second views as close as possible to the albumen prints that inspired them, we have animated the places [that the nineteenth century photographers] chose to photograph. Side by side, the pairs suggest movement—the growth, development, and dissolution that occurred after the . . . photographers made their pictures.<sup>26</sup>

Wolfe's recurring images of Main Street suggest his interest in this constantly evolving scene.



This image of Wolfe's son, Wayne, about 1917, shows that Wolfe continued to photograph his growing children using temporary backgrounds. NSHS-RG2836:2-17

Another important theme of the commercial growth of Neligh is the Wolfe and Brother store. Not surprisingly, Wolfe photographed many images of his store showing the outside, the inside, closeups of the counters, and the people who worked there. One interesting view shows the store interior about 1910. In this image, a man is behind a large counter. To his right is a Neligh pennant and to his left, on the counter, is a large wire rack containing postcard images of Neligh made by Wolfe. One of the images clearly shown is Wolfe's photograph of the Neligh Auditorium. The images reflect both Wolfe's commercial and photographic importance to the town.

A third major set of images in the Wolfe Collection is what might best be called photojournalist or photodocumentary photographs. These views record important or noteworthy events. Although Wolfe photographed in large-

format style rather than in the easier Kodak format, his early images record unusual events in the life of Neligh. By far the most famous Wolfe photograph of this genre is his view of the Ku Klux Klan parading in town. For his *Nebraska: An Illustrated History*, historian Frederick C. Luebke chose this image to portray the Klan's rise in the 1920s. The irony is that Wolfe, a Jew, photographed the Klan despite its slogan of "100 percent Americanism" and its hatred of New Immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and Blacks. Other documentary photographs by Wolfe include images of an early airplane in Neligh, fairs, tornado and flood damage, and sporting events.<sup>27</sup>

Agriculture was another important subject in Wolfe's portfolio. Because farmers provided much of the demand upon which his store based its livelihood, it is not surprising that Wolfe produced many images of farmers at work.



A photograph of an adult woman, possibly Wolfe's wife Lois, about 1908, shows another background on the front porch. Compare the composition in this photograph to the one of a young Priscilla Wolfe taken at the same place, but with a different backdrop. NSHS-RG2836:3-14

Like his commercial images, the farm photographs also portray the changes taking place from mechanization in the early twentieth century. There are images of horse-drawn rakes, animal-powered hay derricks, and typical barnyard

scenes. There are also views of large, steam-powered tractors being used for stacking and threshing grain. In one powerful image, Wolfe placed his camera looking down a row of crops toward a threshing scene. There, lined up against

the horizon, is a steam traction engine, grainstacks, and the separator. Billowing smoke rises against the large sky, suggesting nature's dominance over man.

The final major theme in the collection is house portraits. Like many photographers of his day, Wolfe photographed the built environment of Neligh's residential area. Both exterior and interior views abound in the collection. The exterior views often show people, presumably the homeowners, standing or sitting in the yard. Interiors include scenes of staircases, dinner tables, front porches, and organs. It is conceivable that such images were sold to their subjects.

Examined as a whole, the Wolfe Collection presents a fairly typical group of images of small town life. John Carter suggests that the collection is significant not because it is the work of a great photographer. Rather, it is significant because it is a large collection from a competent photographer and most important, it has survived intact.

From 1900 to 1920 Wolfe's family grew up, his business expanded, and he photographed a multitude of subjects. The greater part of the collection comprises images of this period. Unfortunately, Wolfe's prosperity did not continue. As depression came to Nebraska agriculture in the 1920s, falling farm prices meant Wolfe's chief customers no longer had as much buying power. The 1920 census shows that two of William Wolfe's children, Alexander and Miriam, were working in their father's and uncle's store. Furthermore, increased competition during the decade seemed to haunt Wolfe and Brother. According to an article published almost fifty years later, former Neligh resident Al Pagel recalled that although Wolfe had been a "prosperous pioneer merchant," his fortunes had "dwindled" during the early years of the Great Depression. Wolfe's financial situation had deteriorated so much that on July 29, 1929, Wolfe and Brother took out a \$12,000 mortgage, their first, on their Neligh and Elgin stores. Poor eco-

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This view of Main Street looking north, about 1910 shows the commercial district of Neligh. Wolfe's store can be seen at right center. NSHS-RG2836:10-32



A 1920s view of Main Street shows several changes from the earlier view. In addition to the paved street and automobiles, the large globe atop the building at left center marks the Atlas bank. NSHS-RG2836:11-24



This interior view of the Wolfe store, about 1915, shows a rack of postcards with Wolfe's photographs of the Neligh auditorium and the *Shade On* barn. The postcards, plus the Neligh pennant, reflect Wolfe's continued boosterism. Antelope County Historical Society



The interior of the Wolfe and Brother store during the 1910s. NSHS-RG2836:16-14

conomic conditions, and perhaps Emanuel Wolfe's declining health, led to the closing of Wolfe and Brother about 1931. Wolfe died in Neligh on December 1, 1933.<sup>28</sup>

If his obituaries are any indication of his life, Wolfe was a quiet man who kept to himself. The *Neligh Leader* called him "modest and unassuming, shrinking rather than courting projection into the limelight." The *Neligh News* reported that Wolfe "led a home life and his thoughts seemed always on his home and family." He was also a hard worker and a good businessman. The *Leader* said he worked with "industry, good merchandising, business energy, and acumen." As the *News* editor editorialized,

His friendly interest in all his fellow merchants and their affairs was one side of his character that was most admired by the majority of us who entered the business field after him. . . . [W]e came to look to him for counsel when things went wrong in our systems, and although a very busy man, he always took time to lend his assistance, which often solved the problem.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the *Leader* reported that Wolfe's success had been borne from a "comparatively small stock [of merchandise] in a small town and a new country." Indeed, it is crucial to understand the role that this "small town and new country" played in the life and photography of Emanuel Wolfe.

Although Wolfe never exhibited his photographs in a gallery, the collection provides an important look at small-town Nebraska life—family, neighbors, homes, businesses, news events, and Main Street—during the early twentieth century. In a sense, the Wolfe Collection presents a visual diary of life in Neligh. As historian Alan Trachtenberg explains, the very word "photography" literally means light writing.<sup>30</sup>

This analogy fits for Emanuel Wolfe. While a diarist might record the day's events in a symbolic code of letters and punctuation, Wolfe recorded his changing world in a code of silver film called photography. And his collection, preserved at the Nebraska State Historical Society, serves as a window on early twentieth-century Nebraska life.

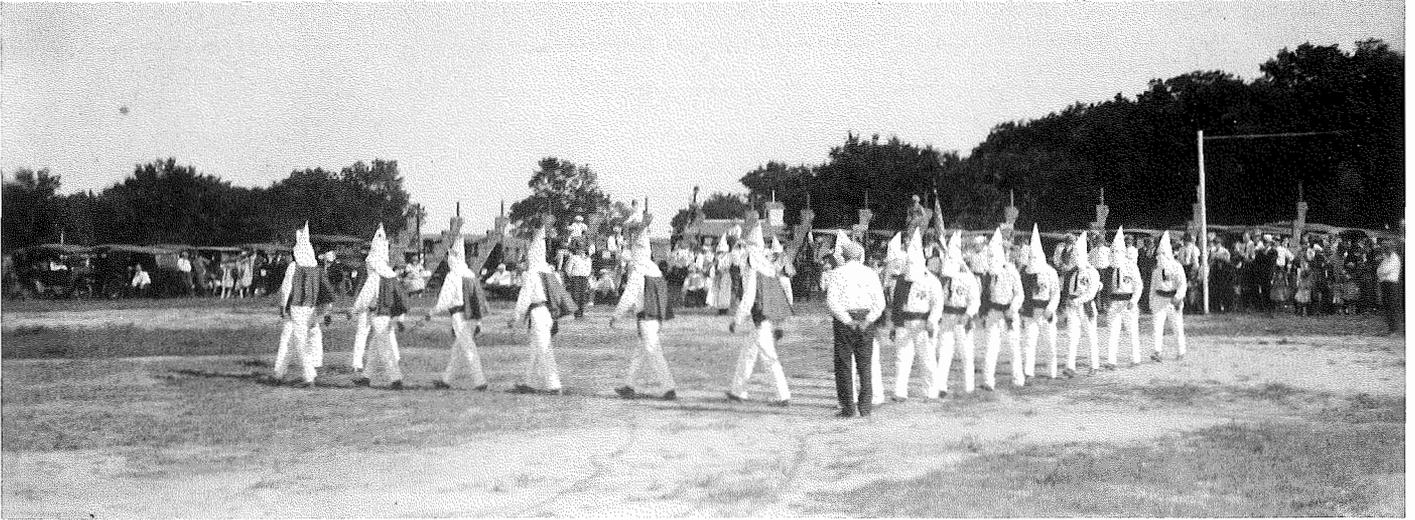
## Photographic Diary of Emanuel Wolfe



This 1900s view of a man and binder near Neligh shows traditional farming, but also the advent of new technology represented by the telephone pole at left. NSHS-RG2836:13-14



Threshing scene, about 1920, which shows the advance of technology on the farm. The billowing smoke of the steam tractor seems to overcome the dominating sense of nature, depicted by the enormous sky. NSHS-RG2836:14-34

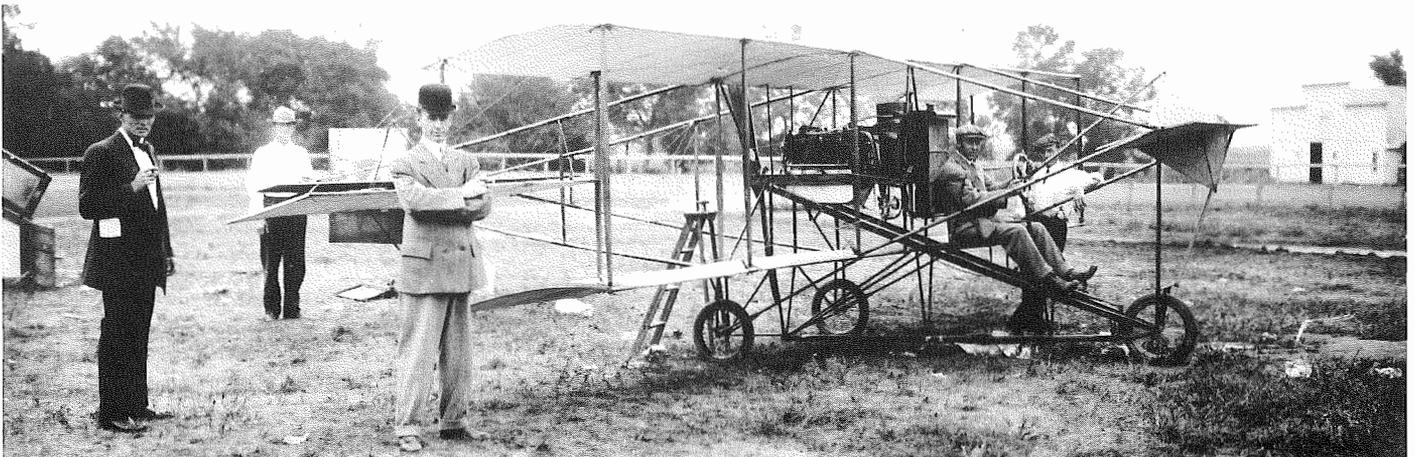


This 1920s photograph of a Ku Klux Klan parade in Neligh probably is Wolfe's most famous. NSHS-RG2836:22-57

Trotting races were popular in early twentieth-century Neligh. *Shade On*, a local stallion owned by John S. Kay, won the Classic Chamber of Commerce Stakes in Detroit in 1899 and helped put Neligh on the map. This view of the finish line at the Neligh track shows Wolfe as photojournalist. NSHS-RG2836:18-16



This photograph, taken at the fairgrounds, may be of an airplane built by the Savidge brothers of nearby Ewing, Nebraska. Note the *Shade On* barn in the right background. NSHS-RG2836:14-5



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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Neligh News*, Dec. 7, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; United States Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of Population. 1900: Nebraska Schedules* (Washington: Bureau of the Census, 1900); Antelope County Historical Society, *The History of Antelope County, 1868–1985* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1986), 225.

<sup>3</sup> John Kay, David Anthone, Robert Kay, and Kathleen Fimple, *Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey: Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Antelope County, Nebraska* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, 1990), 9–14; U.S. Census Bureau, *Tenth Census of Population 1880: Nebraska Schedules* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1880).

<sup>4</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), 1:661–62.

<sup>5</sup> James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 212–16; John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> *History of Antelope County* (1986), 174.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; Kay, *Buildings Survey*, 14; A. J. Leach, *History of Antelope County* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1909), 141.

<sup>8</sup> *Neligh Advocate*, Aug. 9, 1884.

<sup>9</sup> Records of Wolfe's land deals can be found in Deed Records Q 7 and Q 11 at the Antelope County Clerk's office, Neligh, Nebraska. For incorporation of the Neligh Improvement Company, see Miscellaneous Record 2, 362–63, also in the county clerk's office. Neligh's incorporation as a second-class city is noted in *Antelope County History* (1986), 176.

<sup>10</sup> The records of the Neligh Improvement Company are in the Antelope County Clerk's office.

<sup>11</sup> 1900 census; U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census of Population 1910: Nebraska Schedules* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1910); Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, *Neligh Nebraska*, Insurance maps for 1893, 1899, 1904, and 1920, copies at Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

<sup>12</sup> *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1893* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe and Co., 1893), 153; *Neligh Leader*, Dec. 8, 1933.

<sup>13</sup> *History of Antelope County* (1986), 225; 1900 census.

<sup>14</sup> Records showing construction of this house are in the Antelope County Clerk's office.

<sup>15</sup> There are numerous books devoted to small town photographers. An interesting place to start is Michael Levy, *Wisconsin Death Traps* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> For this purpose the Neligh Commercial District is defined as those buildings facing Main Street in a three-block area between Second and Fifth streets. See Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps, 1893, 1899, 1904, and 1920, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

<sup>17</sup> John E. Carter, *Solomon D. Butcher: Photographing the American Dream* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1893* as quoted in *History of Antelope County* (1986), 175; 1900 census; database of Nebraska photographers listed in the various editions of the *State Gazetteer*, compiled by the Nebraska State Historical Society; 1910 census.

<sup>19</sup> For two examples of promotional photographers who were contemporaries of Wolfe, see Mark Junge, *J. E. Stimson: Photographer of the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), and William C. Jones and Elizabeth B. Jones, *Photo by McClure: The Railroad, Cityscape, and Landscape Photographs of L. C. McClure* (Boulder: Pruett Press, 1983). For Butcher see Carter, *Solomon D. Butcher*. A wonderful example of an amateur photographer of this period is Carole

Glauber, *Witch of Kodakery* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> John E. Carter, interview by author, Nov. 16, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Collins, *The Story of Kodak* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 55–57.

<sup>22</sup> Carter interview.

<sup>23</sup> John E. Carter, "Architecture, Photography, and a Quest for Meaning," *Exposure* (Fall 1987): 16.

<sup>24</sup> A fascinating look at America's changing visual communication during this period is Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876–1915* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), esp. 177, 181–82, and 193–200. See also Peter B. Hales, *William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>25</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

<sup>26</sup> Mark Klett, et. al., *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick C. Luebke, *Nebraska: An Illustrated History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 274.

<sup>28</sup> Al Pagel quote in *Antelope County History* (1986), 227; William Wolfe obituary, *Neligh Leader*, Apr. 13, 1955. Emanuel Wolfe's obituaries appeared in the *Neligh Leader*, Dec. 8, 1933, and the *Neligh News*, Dec. 7, 1933. The *News* also published an editorial on his life.

<sup>29</sup> *Neligh News*, Dec. 7, 1933. All previous and subsequent quotes and commentary relating to Wolfe's death are from the *Neligh News*, Dec. 7, 1933, and the *Neligh Leader*, Dec. 8, 1933.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 6.