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Article Title: The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1949

Full Citation: James C Olson, "The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1949," *Nebraska History* 30 (1949): 359-365

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1949NSHS.pdf>

Date: 1/17/2017

Article Summary: Olson reports the "steady progress" of the Society in 1949. The Society's museum exhibits and publications were bringing the history of Nebraska to the people, and it was beginning to make plans for the construction of a headquarters building.

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Cataloging Information:

Keywords: "Out of Old Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, *Merci* train, Mullen Reservoir, Dismal River people

# The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1949<sup>1</sup>

*By James C. Olson*

**T**HE year 1949 has been one of steady progress for the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Governor Peterson recommended, and the 61st session of the state legislature appropriated \$64,950.00, which, plus unexpended balances of \$11,521.90, reappropriated, made available for the operation of the Society during the biennium 1949-1951, a total of \$76,471.90. This represents an increase of \$9,245.59 over the amount appropriated for the biennium 1947-1949, and is the largest biennial appropriation ever received by the Society—a gratifying reflection of the fact that the people of Nebraska are aware of and appreciate the growing importance of historical work in the state. This appreciation is even more strongly reflected in the steady upward trend of appropriations during the past decade. The appropriation for the current biennium, for example, is approximately four times as great as the appropriation for the biennium 1939-41, a decade ago. In connection with these increases, it should be pointed out that during the past several bienniums the Society has had substantial unexpended balances, and that successive increases have, in effect, been provided for as a result of economies in the operation of the Society and the wise practice of successive legislatures in reappropriating funds saved by those economies. Unexpended balances from the last biennium, for example, were greater than the increase provided for the current biennium. Economy

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<sup>1</sup>Read in part at The 72nd Annual Meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society, held in Lincoln, October 8, 1949.

will always be a primary consideration in this administration of the Society's affairs; it is to be hoped that out of that practice may come continued expansion for the future. We still have a long way to go if we are to give the people of Nebraska the kind of historical society their glorious history deserves, and specifically the kind that will be necessary to assist in the interpretation of the State's centennial period, whose beginning is only five years hence.

In addition to appropriating generously for the current support of the Society, the 61st session of the legislature, upon the recommendation of Governor Peterson, reappropriated, for the purposes of erecting and furnishing an historical society building, all money already raised and that may be raised during the biennium by the special levy authorized by section 82-113, *Revised Statutes of Nebraska*, 1943. As of October 1, 1949, there was contained in the building fund thus provided a total of \$572,606.10. As you know, your executive board was reluctant to begin construction in the face of wartime building conditions. You will be glad to hear at this meeting, however, that plans are now going forward so that the building may be completed and ready for use as early as possible. Mr. Ellery Davis of Lincoln has been commissioned as architect for the building, and together with your board and Superintendent has been occupied during the past year in the preparation of studies and preliminary drawings.

It is gratifying, too, to report that the Society's membership has continued to increase. During the past year 222 new members were added to its rolls, bringing the total to 1,868, the highest in the organization's history. It is to be hoped that this steady increase may continue through the years, and that the Society may continue to extend its sphere of usefulness as well as its basis of support. I would like to urge here, as I have for the past three years, that our membership can be most effectively and surely increased through the interest and activity of our present members.

During the past year, also, we have continued the Society's program of bringing the history of Nebraska to

the people of Nebraska. The Superintendent's weekly column, "Out of Old Nebraska," now beginning its fourth year, continues to maintain its circulation. It was carried in approximately 100 papers each week, and altogether appeared in 251 different Nebraska newspapers. We deeply appreciate the continuing support received from the editors of Nebraska, from the Nebraska Press Association, and from Mr. Scott Greenwood, its manager. Your Superintendent delivered thirty-two historical addresses during the year, including seven at Lincoln, three each at Omaha, Scottsbluff, and Wayne; two each at Aurora, Bayard, Hastings, and Indianola; one each at Fremont, Gering, Humboldt, Kearney, Morrill, Murray, and Schuyler; and one over the Nebraska radio network. In addition, he has represented the Society at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association in Washington, D. C.; the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in Madison, Wisconsin; and the American Association for State and Local History at Burlington, Vermont. He is a member of the council of the last named organization, served this year as Chairman of its nominating committee, and appeared on its program at Burlington.

Unremitting efforts have been exerted to continue the improvement of *Nebraska History*, the Society's quarterly magazine. During the past year contributions have been published from scholars representing such widely spread and varied institutions as the University of Southern California, Oklahoma A. & M. College, Texas State College, Kansas State College, the University of Minnesota, the University of South Dakota, Northwestern University, the National Park Service, the Illinois State Historical Society, Doane College, Kearney and Wayne State Teachers Colleges, and the University of Nebraska. The *Historical News Letter* was published monthly and sent to all members.

An activity of particular interest centered around Nebraska's car of gifts from the French *Merci* Train. Governor Peterson designated the Society to receive and distrib-

ute the gifts for the State. The gifts were presented on March 1—State Day—by Mr. J. J. Viala, French Consul General at Chicago, in special ceremonies in the museum. President Lawrence presided, Governor Peterson accepted for the State, and Chancellor R. G. Gustavson of the University of Nebraska, delivered the principal address. A statewide committee, appointed by President Lawrence, devised a plan whereby the gifts, after being on display in the museum for a short time, were divided into loan collections and placed in the custody of Joslyn Memorial Art Museum at Omaha, the House of Yesterday at Hastings, VFW Post No. 1681 at Scottsbluff, and the State Historical Society.

In the library, under the able direction of Miss Myrtle D. Berry, we have continued the work of effecting a more useful organization of our collections. Among special projects, the following may be of interest: 1) completion of arrangement of executive correspondence; 2) expansion of stack area through the building of temporary shelving in the vault resigned for standard manuscript boxes, adopted for use during the past year, and for the Society's land office tract books; 3) removal of land office records to the vault and an extensive rearrangement of the stack area in the basement of the capitol; and 4) arrangement and indexing of Bureau of Securities "Blue Sky" records, now in process. The work of reorganizing the library has been greatly facilitated by the enactment of L.B. 223 by the 61st session of the Nebraska legislature, granting us the authority to dispose of surplus materials. Under this authority we have transferred considerable quantities of surplus materials to the University of Nebraska and the State Library.

Approximately 2,200 persons came personally to the library during the year. In addition, approximately 800 written requests and some 450 telephone inquiries were answered. There were 55 calls for photographs. Particularly significant among the functions of the library is its service as a source center for graduate students at the

University of Nebraska. Through the work of these students the Society's collections are put to valuable use in research on various phases of the history of Nebraska.

During the year a total of 334 volumes were accessioned, of which 60 were purchased, 64 received in exchange for our publications, and 210 received as gifts. A total of 1,020 volumes were catalogued and one part time worker in the bindery bound and repaired 735 volumes. A total of 174 photographs were received as gifts, of which 122 were of the blizzard of 1949.

In the Newspaper Department, 386 Nebraska newspapers and other publications were received regularly. These may be classified as follows:

Daily newspapers .....	23
Bi-weekly newspapers .....	20
Weekly newspapers .....	280
Agricultural publications .....	11
College and high school publication .....	16
Religious publications .....	9
Trade and professional publications .....	18
Miscellaneous publications .....	9

Approximately 350 volumes of newspapers were bound during the year.

In the Museum we lost the invaluable services of Mr. A. T. Hill, first vice president of the Society and Director of the Museum since 1933, who asked on September 1 that he be relieved of his duties. He was succeeded by Mr. Marvin F. Kivett, Assistant Director since June 1, and formerly archeologist with the River Basin Surveys of the Smithsonian Institution. Mr. Hill was named Director-Emeritus.

The museum has continued during the year to fulfill its function of illustrating the past and present resources and progress of Nebraska and western America. Large numbers of interested individuals, schools, and other organized groups have continued to make use of the museum for educational recreation and for research.

An estimated 157,497 visitors viewed the collections during the year. This slight decrease from last year's total

may be attributed to the unusual weather of last winter. A total of 52,499 visitors who registered have been found to represent less than one-third of the actual number visiting the museum. Of the total number who registered, 11,245 were from 13 states other than Nebraska and 200 were from eleven territories and foreign countries. Every state in the United States was represented by one or more visitors. A total of 32 territories and foreign countries were represented.

States, territories, and foreign countries having the largest number of registrants were:

*States*

Iowa .....	2,729
Kansas .....	1,891
Illinois .....	1,592
Missouri .....	1,299
California .....	1,139
Colorado .....	735
South Dakota .....	563
Ohio .....	517
Minnesota .....	491
Texas .....	417
Indiana .....	356
Michigan .....	335
Wisconsin .....	320

*Territories and Foreign Countries*

Canada .....	77
France .....	22
Alaska .....	19
England .....	17
Mexico .....	14
Hawaii .....	13
Germany .....	11
China .....	9
Cuba .....	7
Puerto Rico .....	6
Belgium .....	5

A total of 49 Nebraskans and other interested individuals contributed more than 2,000 separate articles to the Museum during the year. Among the larger collections given during the year is the Richard D. Joy Collection of German World War II materials, a collection of archeological materials from the Sandhill area of Nebraska by

Carl G. Humphrey of Mullen, the J. D. and Mary E. Slade Collection of pioneer articles, and many other important additions.

An important phase of the Society's research program during the year was the continuation of archeological field work, in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution and the University of Nebraska, as a phase of the Missouri River Basin Development Program.

The area under investigation the past season was the proposed Mullen Reservoir on the Middle Loup River, Hooker County, Nebraska. Three of the more than 20 known sites in the area were tested rather intensively. All are pottery sites representing two cultural periods. A single village site of the Woodland period was tested and found to be buried beneath 6 to 10 feet of sand.

Two village sites of the later Dismal River people were also tested. Artifacts of bone, stone, and pottery; food; remains of bone and shell suggest a subsistence based largely on hunting and gathering in that area. A limited amount, however, of charred corn indicates the possibility that some corn may have been cultivated in the Sandhills of Nebraska as early as 1500 A.D.

With the large number of important historical materials now in the collections of the Society it is necessary that a regular rotation of certain displays be made if all are to be used to their best advantage. It is now evident that a policy of selection in accessioning is in order with representative materials of quality being selected.

In order to depict truly the various periods of Nebraska history many more of the rather ordinary materials of pioneer life are needed such as the furnishings of sod houses and log cabins, implements of agriculture, the cattle industry, and of business. These are not always the beautiful nor unique objects, but they are representative of the everyday pioneer life.

In conclusion, I wish to express my deep and heartfelt appreciation for the unfailing and effective support given me by President Lawrence, the executive board, and the staff of the Nebraska State Historical Society.