



## The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1950

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# THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1950<sup>1</sup>

BY JAMES C. OLSON

The year 1950 has been one of steady progress and growth for the Nebraska State Historical Society. In reporting to you, it is a pleasure to express my deep appreciation for the continuing support given me as Superintendent by President Lawrence, members of the Executive Board, and members of my capable and loyal staff.

Much of our activity during the year has been devoted, in one way or another, to planning for the construction of the Society's new building and in preparation for the enlarged responsibilities and opportunities that will be ours upon the completion of that building. If conditions beyond our control permit, it is expected that actual construction will begin during the spring of 1951, and that the building will be completed and ready for occupancy at the time of our annual meeting in the autumn of 1952. The general design and layout, as approved by the Executive Board, is being displayed here today. Working drawings are now being prepared, and it is hoped that the Executive Board will be in a position to advertise for bids early in 1951. An agreement has been signed with the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska whereby the building will be erected on land deeded to the Society at 15th and R streets, just east of the Student Union. The Society's building will thus face the monumental state capitol.

As of 30 September 1950, there was in the fund provided by the state legislature for the Historical Society's building a total of \$582,383.34.

The building of an adequate staff—an urgent necessity if we are to meet the obligations imposed upon us—has gone

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<sup>1</sup> Read in part at the 73rd annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society, held in Lincoln, 28 October 1950.

forward in gratifying fashion during the past year. Mr. John B. White, formerly serials librarian at the University of Nebraska, has been appointed librarian of the Society. Mr. Stanley D. Sohl, who received the bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Nebraska in January, 1950, has been appointed museum artist. Miss Marcia D. Becker has been appointed bookkeeper, a position which she combines with that of secretary to the superintendent, succeeding Miss Frances Staats, bookkeeper, resigned. Miss Ila Skjelver has been appointed secretary to the Director of the Museum. At present the Society has thirteen permanent employees and, in addition, employs four university students on a temporary, part-time basis.

We have continued the Society's program of bringing the history of Nebraska to the people of Nebraska. In *Nebraska History*, the quarterly journal of the Society now in its thirty-first year, we continued to publish a variety of articles on many phases of Nebraska's history. In commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of William J. Bryan's death we have published one article in each issue this year devoted to various aspects of the Great Commoner's career. Another notable Nebraskan whose career has been treated at length in *Nebraska History* during the past year is George W. Holdrege, whose life has been discussed in a three-part study by Dr. Thomas M. Davis. Contributions have been published from scholars representing such widely-spread institutions as the University of Buffalo, Creighton University, Doane College, Kansas State College, The National Park Service, North Dakota State Teachers College at Minot, Oberlin College, Oklahoma City Libraries, Oklahoma A. and M. College, University of Oklahoma, University of Nebraska, the Smithsonian Institution, University of South Dakota, The United States Naval Academy, and Wayne State Teachers College. The *Historical News Letter*, now in its third year, continued to be published monthly. The Superintendent's weekly column, "Out of Old Nebraska," continued to be published each week by the press of the state. As of 30 September these historical columns had been issued for 209 consecutive weeks.

Both the Superintendent and the Director of the Museum filled numerous public speaking engagements in various Nebraska communities. The Superintendent delivered twenty-eight historical addresses during the year, including eleven at Lincoln; three at Kearney, two each at Crete and Hastings; and one each at Bridgeport, Cambridge, Chadron, Fremont, Minden, Nebraska City, Omaha, Sidney, Stella, and Wahoo. The Director of the Museum delivered eleven addresses on historical and archeological subjects, including eight at Lincoln; and one each at Plattsmouth, South Sioux City, and Trenton. The Society was represented by staff personnel at the following meetings of regional and national associations: American Historical Association, Boston, Massachusetts; American Museums Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Seventh Plains Archeological Conference, Lincoln; Society of American Archivists, Madison, Wisconsin; Society for American Archeology, Norman, Oklahoma; Midwest Museums Conference, Dayton, Ohio; and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. During the past year the Director of the Museum has served as Chairman of the Eighth Plains Archeological conference, and as Chairman of the Anthropology Section of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences. The Superintendent has served as member of the council of the American Association for State and Local History, a member of the membership committee of the Society of American Archivists, and as Consultant to the War Department on the History of the United States Army in World War II.

The Society continues to attract new members. During the past year, 161 new members were added to the rolls. As of 30 September, the Society had a total membership of 1,826.

#### THE MUSEUM

The Museum, under the able direction of Marvin F Kivett, has continued to be a center of interest for thousands of Nebraskans as well as for people from all sections of the United States and other areas of the world. Although much of the Museum staff's attention has been directed toward the planning of exhibits for the new building, a marked change has been made in many of the exhibits in

the present display area in the capitol. Under the direction of Mr. Kivett, Mr. Stanley D. Sohl, Museum artist, and members of the Museum staff have revitalized the exhibits through the introduction of color and modern display methods.

It is estimated that a total of 185,331 persons visited the Museum during the year, an increase of more than 27,000 over last year, and the largest on record. As in the past, this estimate is based on studies which show that not more than one-third of the total number of visitors sign the register. Of the 61,777 visitors who registered, 14,904 were from fifteen states other than Nebraska. Every state in the union was represented by one or more visitors who registered. A total of 30 territories and foreign countries were represented by 321 registrants. Eighty school and other organized groups made use of the Museum for educational recreation and research. States, territories, and foreign countries having the largest number of registrants were:

## STATES

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Iowa .....         | 2,737 |
| Kansas .....       | 2,038 |
| Illinois .....     | 1,875 |
| Missouri .....     | 1,460 |
| California .....   | 1,447 |
| Minnesota .....    | 808   |
| Colorado .....     | 799   |
| Michigan .....     | 636   |
| South Dakota ..... | 692   |
| Ohio .....         | 519   |
| Texas .....        | 513   |
| New York .....     | 469   |
| Wisconsin .....    | 442   |
| Oklahoma .....     | 410   |
| Washington .....   | 359   |

## Territories and Foreign Countries

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Canada .....       | 129 |
| England .....      | 29  |
| Alaska .....       | 28  |
| Hawaii .....       | 14  |
| France .....       | 13  |
| Germany .....      | 11  |
| Denmark .....      | 11  |
| South Africa ..... | 8   |
| Argentina .....    | 7   |
| Cuba .....         | 7   |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Philippine Islands ..... | 6 |
| Latvia .....             | 6 |
| Ireland .....            | 5 |
| Sweden .....             | 5 |
| China .....              | 5 |

The Society continued its archeological research program during the past year as a part of the federal-state scientific salvage program for the recovery of archeological materials from the various dams and reservoirs being constructed under the Missouri River Basin Development Program. This work, coordinated by the Smithsonian Institution, was conducted in cooperation with the University of Nebraska, and funds were supplied, in part, by the National Park Service.

The area under investigation by the Society was the Swanson Lake Project near Trenton, in Hitchcock County. Here on a hill near the mouth of Massacre Canyon prehistoric Indians lived and died perhaps a thousand years ago. The field party from the Society, under the direction of Mr. Kivett, excavated the remains of this Woodland Indian village and also removed burials of men, women, and children from pits beneath the site. It is expected that when an adequate study has been made of the data collected during the summer, a chapter in the prehistory of southwestern Nebraska may be written.

In accordance with the policy of limiting the collections to representative historical and archeological materials, many donors offering materials outside our field were directed to institutions of another nature. Despite this policy of selection in accessioning, there were sixty separate donors this year as compared with forty-nine last year. These accessions have contributed to all types of collections, both historical and archeological. We fortunately are now acquiring more of the rather ordinary materials of pioneer life which more truly represent the history of Nebraska than do many of the items we formerly have acquired.

#### THE LIBRARY

The work of the Library was revitalized with the appointment of John B. White as librarian, effective 1 May



This view to the northwest across the Nebraska State Historical Society's 1950 archeological excavations near the mouth of Massacre Canyon, Hitchcock County, shows workmen uncovering the remains of a prehistoric Indian village and burial site in the shadow of the Massacre Canyon Monument. The square sections in the foreground are excavation units laid out for recording purposes and have no direct relationship to structures or similar remains attributable to the Indians.

1950; and under his direction the Library staff, in addition to its current activity, has worked to effect a more useful organization of our collections. The Library's most serious problem is the vast backlog of uncataloged material, the accumulation of years. The reduction of this backlog has been one of your Superintendent's first concerns since his arrival in 1946. Though we still are hampered by a shortage of personnel, appointments during the past year have greatly facilitated this important work.

Among specific projects, the following may be of interest: 1) preparation of a library manual; 2) establishment of an "Information Index," which it is hoped will develop into a valuable guide to Nebraska literature; 3) completion of arrangement of Bureau of Securities correspondence; 4) calendaring of the Robert W. Furnas papers, now in process; 5) interfiling of the old library cards in a single alphabet, replacing four separate files; and 6) preparation of an adequate catalog for the map collection, now in process.

Approximately 2,000 persons visited the Library during the year for purposes of study and research. Persons interested in genealogical research comprise the largest percentage of constant users. Instructional projects of the Union College History Department and the University of Nebraska School of Journalism brought a large number of students to the library during the school term 1949-50. Graduate students in the History Department at the University of Nebraska continued to make steady use of the collections in the preparation of theses and dissertations. In addition to assisting those who came personally to the Library, the staff answered approximately 400 telephone requests and 300 queries by mail. Approximately 15 volumes were let out on inter-library loan, and approximately 200 photographs were loaned to forty-five persons.

A total of 307 volumes were acquired by the Library during the year, of which 53 were purchased, 10 were received on exchange, and 244 came as gifts. A total of 1,200 volumes were cataloged, most of which came from the backlog of uncataloged materials. As of 30 September 1950, 322



Nebraska newspapers were being received, of which 25 were dailies, 282 weeklies, and 15 of other frequency. Four Nebraska newspapers suspended publication during the year. Of the 191 periodicals being currently received, 65 are Nebraska titles, 114 come from outside the state by exchange and gift, and 12 by purchase. A total of 108 photographs were received as gifts. In the Bindery, 200 volumes (including periodicals) and 600 newspaper volumes were bound, and approximately 425 volumes were repaired.

### NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS

As indicated above, the responsibilities and opportunities which are ours in connection with the Society's new building have occupied a large portion of our time and thought during the past year. Likewise, the needs of the new building have necessitated a sharp increase in our budget for the next biennium. For the biennium which will begin 1 July 1951 and end 30 June 1953, we have requested a total of \$163,502.00, an increase of \$87,528.10 over the amount appropriated for the current biennium. Despite sharply rising costs of operation, this increase is due entirely to the needs of the new building and the needs of a microfilm project which we feel must be instituted if we properly are to preserve our invaluable newspaper collection. The request for an authorization of the microfilm project is being made at this time because: 1) it is impracticable to construct sufficient suitable storage space to house Nebraska's newspapers—those already accumulated and those to be accumulated during the next few years; and 2) even if construction of such space were feasible, the very nature of the newsprint used for approximately the past sixty years is such that the papers cannot long be preserved.

In a larger sphere, we seriously need to develop a more adequate archival program for the state of Nebraska, as well as an adequate program of marking our historic sites, particularly along the state's heavily travelled highways. Likewise, we need to encourage the preservation of more private correspondence and business records and their ulti-

mate deposit with the State Historical Society. Finally, we look forward to an augmentation and enrichment of our educational program, through our publications and by other means.

The year 1954 will see Nebraska celebrating its territorial centennial. In 1967, we will celebrate the centennial of statehood. These centennial years, and those intervening, will offer the Nebraska State Historical Society the greatest challenge in its long history. I trust that we may all work together to meet that challenge in a manner and spirit worthy of the great tradition which it is our responsibility and opportunity to perpetuate.