



## The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1954

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Article Summary: Society staff members spent their first full year in their new building planning territorial centennial events, new educational activities, and the establishment of a traveling museum.

## THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1954

BY JAMES C. OLSON

OUR new building and the territorial centennial year have combined to make 1954 the busiest—and in many respects, the most productive—year in the history of the Nebraska State Historical Society. In recognition of the Society's achievements during the year, the American Association for State and Local History, at its annual meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, September 9-11, gave the Society an Award of Merit, its highest accolade. This is the second award received by the Society, an earlier one being granted in 1951.

The new building has met with enthusiastic acceptance, both in Nebraska and in the nation. As of 31 August, 1954, or during the first eleven months of operation, a total of 100,251 persons visited the building. Professionals from various parts of the country who have visited the building have joined with the laity in high praise. We have had requests from a number of institutions to permit their staff members to visit us and to observe the building and our operational procedures. The beauty of the front of the building has been greatly enhanced by landscaping, made possible through a gift of \$2,000 from the Cooper Foundation, and the installation of flood lights. A few minor details still remain to be completed, but when all

*Dr. James C. Olson is superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This report was presented in part at the 76th annual meeting of the Society, Lincoln, 25 September 1954.*

these are finished, the building will have been constructed and equipped well within the funds appropriated. Indeed, we will be able to turn back to the State Treasurer a portion of the sum. Details will be found in the report of the Treasurer.

In accordance with a legislative resolution, Governor Robert Crosby appointed a Territorial Centennial Commission to assist Nebraskans in the observance of their territorial centennial. Although the President of the Society was appointed chairman of the Commission by Governor Crosby and the Superintendent was named secretary by the legislative resolution, the Territorial Centennial Commission is entirely independent of the State Historical Society, and its activities are not properly a part of this report. The Society's offices, however, serve as the office of the Territorial Centennial Commission, and Society staff members have engaged in a great deal of activity related to the work of the Commission.

In addition to carrying on our regular activities in an expanded form, we embarked on a number of major new activities during the year: an educational program, a travelling museum, and a series of television programs.

With the appointment, last September, of Mrs. Phyllis Winkelman as Director of Education, the Society for the first time was in a position to provide educational service commensurate with its rich resources in the history of Nebraska. The educational program has included promotional activities, educational activities within the building, and educational activities outside the building. Within the building the educational program has emphasized museum visits as a part of the regular program for classes in history. To encourage the use of the museum by school groups, approximately 9,500 brochures, describing the program and providing space for reservations, were sent to school officials and leaders of other groups in Nebraska. The educational program was greatly assisted by the Lincoln Junior League which provided volunteer guides each weekday afternoon. In addition, League workers assisted the museum staff in pottery restoration, cataloging, and display work. The Junior League volunteer program has

been successful so far as both the Society and the League are concerned. Last year we had seven volunteer workers. This year we expect to have seventeen. A total of 419 different groups were given guided tours through the building during the past year.

In addition to the guided tours, the educational program in the building has emphasized the use of the auditorium in co-ordination with the galleries. The major aspect of this activity was a series of ten programs, August 31-September 4, for children who completed the Lincoln City Library's summer reading program. The reading program used the centennial as the central theme, and each child was required to read at least two books on Nebraska. The auditorium programs included a film on Nebraska and the singing of Nebraska songs. Approximately eight hundred children attended.

Further activities in the building included a program of museum aide training conducted in co-operation with the Girl Scouts of Lincoln. Twelve Girl Scouts participated in the program, which included five training sessions followed by thirty hours of service to the Society by each Scout. Those who completed the program earned the Girl Scout museum aide bar.

Educational activities outside the building included the taking of historical programs by staff members and Junior League volunteers to hospitals and other institutions and the preparation and distribution of educational materials. The Director of Education answered approximately 175 letters asking for specific information about Nebraska and distributed approximately ten thousand educational leaflets and other materials. Scripts of centennial programs produced by the South Sioux City High School were reproduced and distributed by the Society to approximately two hundred schools and organizations in the state. The Director of Education supervised the preparation and distribution of the *Centennial Handbook*, published by the Territorial Centennial Commission to assist local communities and groups in the commemoration of the centennial. A major continuing project has been the writing of a series of scripts being produced by the Radio and Tele-

vision Section, University of Nebraska Department of Speech, and tape-recorded by the University's Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction. These programs, thirteen in number, present the territorial period in dramatic form. They are to be released October 15th. The master tapes will be kept in the "Tapes for Teaching" Library at the University's Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction, and radio stations, schools, or other organizations may have the series transferred to their own tapes by payment of a nominal fee to cover the cost of handling. Also in preparation are scripts for a series of tapes on Nebraska folk songs to be produced by the University Department of Music and to be available from the Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction.

A second major project, in addition to the educational program, has been the preparation and operation of a travelling museum for the Territorial Centennial Commission, a museum very generously provided by the railroads serving Nebraska: Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy; Chicago and North Western; Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific; Missouri Pacific; and Union Pacific. The railroads modified the Union Pacific's exhibition car into a travelling museum, at a cost of approximately \$9,600, and have transported it into all parts of the state since June 10th, when it was formally launched by Governor Robert Crosby, President Lawrence, and officials of the railroads and Territorial Centennial Commission. This travelling museum, known as "The Centennial Car," has met with a highly enthusiastic response everywhere it has gone. When the car went out of operation September 23rd, a total of 104,290 Nebraskans had visited it. The Centennial Car was on exhibit at the Nebraska State Fair, and during that period a total of 34,453 went through it. The success of the Centennial Car has prompted us to hope that it might be possible to establish a mobile museum as a regular part of the Society's program, thus making it possible to carry the Nebraska story to thousands who would not have an opportunity to visit the building in Lincoln.

A third major project has been the production, in co-operation with University of Nebraska Television, the

University of Nebraska State Museum, and the Educational Television and Radio Center, of a series of thirty-nine half-hour television programs under the general title, "The Great Plains Trilogy." The series, telecast over KOLN-TV, has been filmed for national distribution through a grant of \$9,000 from the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. This series, representing an effort to interpret the land and the history of the Plains through the medium of television, has drawn nationwide attention.

In addition, we have carried forward and expanded our regular activities. The annual spring meeting, held in Falls City, May 9th, was a joint meeting with the Kansas State Historical Society to commemorate the centennial of the organization of the Nebraska and Kansas territories. The large group from both states assembled at Falls City heard papers from Dr. Roy F. Nichols, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania; and Dr. Robert Taft, professor of chemistry at the University of Kansas, chairman of the Kansas Territorial Centennial Committee, and a past president of the Kansas State Historical Society. Harold C. Prichard of Falls City was general chairman of the meeting.

*Nebraska History*, now in its thirty-fifth year, continues to publish a wide variety of articles on Nebraska's past. The first three issues of Volume XXXV contain contributions from our members and from scholars representing the following institutions: Brigham Young University, Butler University, State University of Iowa, University of Kansas, Mexico City College, the National Park Service, University of Nebraska, University of Pennsylvania, Oberlin College, and Wayne State Teachers College. The *Historical News Letter*, now in its seventh year, continues to be published monthly. "Out of Old Nebraska," the Superintendent's weekly column, continues to appear regularly in the press of the state. As of 30 August, these columns had been issued for 424 consecutive weeks. An arrangement has been made whereby the University of Nebraska Press will publish a one volume history of Nebraska, prepared during the year by the Superintendent,

at no expense to the Society. It is anticipated that the volume will be published about January 1st.

The Director of the Museum gave four addresses during the year, three in Lincoln and one in Omaha. The Archivist spoke to eight different groups, five in Lincoln, one each in Beatrice, Broken Bow, and Indianola. The Superintendent made a total of forty-two historical addresses during the year, including twenty-three in Lincoln; three each in Omaha, Seward, and York, two each in Lexington and Minden; and one each in Auburn, Cambridge, Fort Calhoun, Nebraska City, Steinhauer, and Wahoo.

The Society has been represented during the year at the following national and regional meetings: American Historical Association, Chicago, Illinois; Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Madison, Wisconsin; Plains Conference for Archeology, Lincoln; Association of American Museums, Santa Barbara, California; Photographic Society of America, Los Angeles, California.

The Librarian served as chairman of the Constitution Committee of the Nebraska Library Association, chairman of the committee to revise the constitution of the Lincoln Library Association, and vice-president of the Lincoln Library Association. The Superintendent served as secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and a member of the Council of the American Association for State and Local History.

At present the staff of the Society consists of twenty-three permanent members and ten part time, temporary employees. Permanent staff members joining the Society during the year include Helen Boehmer, secretary to the Superintendent and bookkeeper; Mrs. Olive Moore, secretary to the Director of the Museum; Mrs. Mildred Kohler, and Mrs. Vera Melkers, microfilm technicians.

Membership in the Society continues to grow. A total of 265 new members joined the Society during the year. As of August 31 the membership was 2,373, the highest in its history. Mrs. Christina Dugger of Bridgeport and Mrs. Nellie T. Magee of Lincoln became life members.

## THE MUSEUM

This has been a year of great activity for the museum staff, which continued under the able direction of Marvin F. Kivett. With the completion of the new building and the celebration of the centennial year, the demands for displays have been the greatest in the history of the Society.

Some of the museum displays are still in process and others have been completely changed since the dedication of the building in September, 1953. The second largest display project of the museum was the completion of sixteen units for the Centennial Train Car. Museum materials were also exhibited for special shows at the J. L. Brandeis Store and Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, and Miller and Paine in Lincoln. Special units of museum items were made available for six schools in Nebraska. The museum's collections were also drawn upon for clothing, tools, and other goods used in Series III of the Great Plains Trilogy.

In the museum there have been various temporary, or seasonal, exhibits throughout the year. Some of these have included: the Capitol Murals Competition, Christmas Toys, Easter Parade, Valentines, Doll Collections, Milk Glass, Woven Coverlets, Wintertime, and other minor display units.

More than 160 Nebraskans, and others, interested in the preservation of Nebraska's history, have contributed to the museum collections during the year. The total number of donors has increased steadily each year since 1949, when forty-nine persons contributed to the collections. The number of items given by each person has varied from one to several hundred.

Research has been directed during the year toward more adequately identifying and documenting materials representing the white man in Nebraska. Materials in this category have ranged from firearms to clothing.

Research in the extensive Indian collections has included the identification and repair of the clothing, tools, and implements of the historic Indians of Nebraska. A two-month period was spent this summer in carrying on extensive archeological investigations in the Fort Randall Reservoir, Buffalo County, South Dakota. This project,



jointly sponsored by the United States National Park Service, which provided a grant of \$4,000, and the Nebraska State Historical Society, had as its purpose the salvage of prehistoric Indian remains, soon to be covered by the rising waters of the reservoir. Excavations were carried on in a large prehistoric village site. Two culturally distinct groups of Indians had occupied the site during the prehistoric period of three hundred to seven hundred years ago.

Common to both groups was a subsistence economy based on corn agriculture and hunting, with the bison providing the major part of their meat. Both groups of people lived in a form of the rectangular earthlodge which varied in the details of construction. The earliest Indians to occupy the site were peaceful farmers who lived a life not unlike that of the prehistoric farmers of Nebraska. These villages were small, and evidence of warfare is lacking.

The second group of Indians to occupy the site during the late prehistoric period constructed many houses whose remains are still marked by depressions in the unbroken sod. Evidence that this later group feared attack by other tribes is visible today in the form of a fortification ditch which encircles the village for a distance of more than twelve hundred feet. Excavated with buffalo shoulder blades as shovels, it represents a united effort on the part of these early Missouri Valley inhabitants.

#### THE LIBRARY

The library, ably administered by Dr. John B. White, has put in a busy year adjusting the collections to the new building and providing great quantities of material regarding the centennial to newspapers, organizations, and individuals. Even so, it has carried on its regular work at an accelerated pace. A total of 2,043 volumes were catalogued during the year, of which 1,509 were from the backlog and the remainder were acquisitions—76 by purchase, 365 by gift, and 93 by exchange. Fifty-one maps and 1,324 photographs were added during the year. As of 31 August, 323 Nebraska newspapers were being regularly received, of which 22 were dailies, 267 weeklies, and 34 of other

frequency. Also, as of 31 August, 416 periodicals were being currently received, of which 182 were published in Nebraska. In the bindery, 172 volumes were bound and 168 repaired. Six hundred and ninety-one reels of microfilm were processed. In summary, the following inventory is presented:

Bound volumes .....	27,687
Bound volumes, newspapers .....	26,812
Maps .....	721
Microfilm .....	1,708
Genealogical charts .....	8
Broadsides .....	2
Motion picture films .....	6
Photographs .....	55,001
Backlog .....	26,547

In the manuscript division the following collections were processed:

1. Ambrose S. Shelley, papers and diary.
2. Saline County Old Settlers Reunion, interviews.
3. Henry Clay Rogers, extracts from a diary.
4. Thomas Jefferson Majors, letters and papers.
5. Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Nebraska, records.
6. Henry Herman Bartling, stock certificates.
7. William George Wedemeyer, letters.
8. Beatrice Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, records.
9. John Holden McBride, letters.
10. Wayne W. Polk, letters.
11. Peter Collins, deeds.
12. James Hervey Pratt, papers.
13. Rose Rosicky, scrapbooks and manuscripts.
14. Grand Army of the Republic, Nebraska, records.
15. James Comly Past, journals and papers.
16. Winfield Scott Miller, letters, diaries, account books.
17. William Stolley, letters and papers.
18. Bellevue, Nebraska Presbyterian Church, records.
19. Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, correspondence and records.
20. Nebraska State Sheriff, daybook.
21. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Lincoln, Nebraska Branch, minutes, records.
22. Frank B. Morrison, campaign material.
23. Mark Carleton, field notes.
24. American Sunday School Union, reports.
25. Nebraska District Court (1st district), records.
26. Roy Towle Davis, interview.
27. Henry L. Yother, interview.
28. Fairfield College, announcements, programs, records of literary societies.

29. Winslow letters.
30. Edward Louis Jeambey, speaking advertisements, etc.
31. Lincoln Library Association, records, programs.
32. James W. Thomas, reminiscences.
33. Lucius H. Rogers, deeds and papers.
34. Arthur Burkin, papers.
35. Democratic party, campaign material.
36. Blue Cross Associated Hospital Services, Nebraska, announcements.
37. Daniel Gantt, commission.
38. Oswald Ragan Black, cartoons.
39. Ellen Smith, letters, clippings, etc.
40. Joslyn Art Museum, clippings, announcements, etc.
41. Fred J. Seegert, manuscript.
42. Mary Walton Ferris, genealogical notes.
43. Foster Church, papers.
44. Henry Fontenelle, letters.
45. Charles Emerson Wood, letters, clippings, etc.
46. Charles Franklin Ladd, letters.
47. Camp Hickliffe, invoice.
49. Nebraska Art Association, records.
49. Dalphus Reed, papers.
50. Charles H. Franklin, papers.
51. Douglas, Nebraska, townlot shares.
52. Roy Lewis Post, poems.
53. Nebraska State Association of Superintendents and Principals of Graded Schools, records.
54. Daniel Bowers, photostatic copy of family Bible record.

During the year 1,701 persons were assisted in the library. The library staff answered 135 telephone inquiries and 523 inquiries received by mail. Loans, including inter-library loans, totaled 49, a considerable reduction from previous years. Our experience has compelled us to be much less liberal in loaning materials than we would like to be. The policy decided upon during the past year is to adhere to the practice of no loans, making exception only under very special circumstances. Six hundred ninety photographs were loaned. A total of 285 persons gave materials to the library during the year.

### A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

The territorial centennial and the completion of our new building have given the Society an unprecedented opportunity for service. The achievements of the past year, however, must be looked upon as only the beginning of

expanded activities which will both reflect and result in a growing interest in our Nebraska heritage.

To meet its responsibilities, the Society has requested an appropriation for the biennium 1955-1957 of \$271,507.40. With unexpended balances from the current biennium, which we are requesting be reappropriated, this represents an increase in new tax funds of approximately 20.5% over the amount appropriated for the current biennium. Every effort is made to give the people of Nebraska the greatest possible value for each dollar spent in the support of the State Historical Society. As an indication of that, we will be able to turn back to the State Treasurer an amount somewhat in excess of \$7,500 from the monies provided for the construction and equipment of our new building. This, we feel, is an extraordinary achievement, considering the limited funds available for the building and the high cost of labor and materials. We will continue, to the best of our ability, to provide the Society with economical, efficient, operation. This next year will see an expanded educational program, additional television activities, and above all, continuing research in the history and prehistory of Nebraska and the Plains. To make that possible, we are requesting funds to employ a field representative and a curator of anthropology. The former, if authorized, will be able to spend much of his time out among Nebraskans gathering materials still available in Nebraska. Such materials must be gathered in the near future if they are to be preserved at all. The latter will devote his time to further study of our vast collection of archeological materials upon which no laboratory study has been done.

We look forward with high hope to the continued expansion of our services in the cause of Nebraska's heritage—which, after all, is a part of America's heritage, an understanding of which is essential to an appreciation of the American way of life.

In conclusion I should like to express my appreciation for the work of the Society's capable and loyal staff and for the support given me as Superintendent at all times by the members of the Executive Board, and particularly, Mr. James E. Lawrence, president.