



The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1956

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THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

IN 1956

BY WILLIAM D. AESCHBACHER

Ten years ago my predecessor, Dr. James C. Olson, prefaced his report with the remark that it was a report of the work of Dr. J. L. Sellers, who had been acting Superintendent, as much as it was a report of his, as he had been on the job a little more than six months. Much more than that I must say that this is a report of the work of Dr. Olson rather than of mine as I was in charge only one month of the period reported on, and the program for that month was well developed and underway when I came on the scene. It is a report of work well done and of a program carried forward with energy and imagination. Professor Olson adds distinction to a list of able and dedicated historians who have given the Nebraska State Historical Society outstanding leadership. The state would be much more the loser at his departure from the Society if it had not retained his ability, energy, and experience on the University staff. The year 1956 has been a very successful year, primarily because of the program of Dr. Olson, and because of the support and counsel he has had alike from a very capable staff and an effective Executive Board.

Dr. William D. Aeschbacher is Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This report was presented in part at the 78th annual meeting of the Society at Lincoln, 29 September 1956.

In preparing my first report for the Nebraska State Historical Society it seemed appropriate that I should take the opportunity to look back through the reports of earlier years, and so trace our development. Over the years the reports changed, but there were recurring items. A major part of every report until 1954 was concerned with the need for properly housing the Society. There has continually been a need for more field work throughout the state. The 1907 report of Secretary Clarence S. Paine said in part, "The field work of the Society which has been under the direction of Mr. Addison E. Sheldon, might easily occupy the time of half a dozen men . . . All of the State institutions should be visited from time to time, and periodical visits should be made to all of the county seats . . . All over the state public records are being destroyed that would be of very great value to future historians. . . ." The 1937 report by A. E. Sheldon started, "The largest crop in the United States—drouth or no drouth—is the American tourist crop. . . . It is the plan of the Nebraska State Historical Society that Nebraska shall secure a far larger share of this national crop. . . . Chief attractions for the tourist are climate, picturesque land and water, historical sites and memorials." Mr. Paine said in 1907, "There have of late years been organized many county historical societies, and numerous local associations of old settlers. Your Secretary believes that it should be the policy of this Society to encourage these local societies, establish and maintain the closest relations possible with them, and that some permanent form of affiliation should be planned. It is recommended also that officers of this Society and members of the office staff be sent to represent the Society at all public gatherings of pioneers; to deliver addresses whenever invitations may be received, and to do everything possible to bind these organizations to the state society."

These four items: housing, field representatives, historical markers, and local societies attracted my attention because in 1956 the Society faces these same problems and must still work towards better solutions for each of them.

The biggest single development of the year has been the

opening of the Fort Robinson Museum. It was dedicated at the annual spring meeting, and western Nebraska turned out most enthusiastically with a crowd of about 7,500. The reaction to the Museum through the summer has been very encouraging. We have had over 10,000 visitors, and it appears that the Fort Robinson venture has made an important addition to historical awareness and appreciation in the western part of the state. In relation to our work at Fort Robinson, the Society has been gratified at the wholehearted co-operation of the Crawford Chamber of Commerce and other western Nebraska civic groups and civic leaders.

In many of our usual activities this has been a year of consolidating gains of the last few years rather than a year of spectacular growth. The Museum was visited by 79,972 people, a slight drop from previous years. This had been anticipated as the novelty of the new building wore off. Membership in the Society has remained about constant at 2,342 after a very rapid increase from the 1,171 of 1946 to the high of 2,373 in 1954. The State Fair exhibit attracted 15,556.

In some respects it was a year of fulfillment of long term planning. Dr. Olson saw ten years of work reach fruition when Chimney Rock was dedicated as a National Historic Site on August 22. As proud possessors of a new building the Society has been able to fulfill obligations to entertain meetings of national and regional societies with which it is associated. It has arranged to act as host or to co-operate in the entertaining of conferences of the Mountain-Plains Museums, the American Association of Museums, and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association during the next eight months.

An increasingly important phase of historical work, and work in which the Society is vitally interested, is the formation of county or regional historical societies. During the year five local societies were actively begun in the state, and interest in at least three more societies has been indicated.

During the course of the year the staff has represented the Society in various ways. Staff members made sixty appearances in the state presenting programs for the Society. Dr. Olson made thirty-one of these appearances, and I had made two as of September 1. Other programs were presented by Mr. Kivett, seven; Mr. Grange, five; Mrs. Winkelman, three; Miss Johnson, two; Mr. Price, two; Dr. White, one; and Dr. Danker, nine. In addition, various members of the staff have represented the Society at meetings of the American Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Mountain-Plains Museum Conference, the American Museum Conference, the Plains Conference for American Archeology, the American Library Association, and the American Interprofessional Institute. Mr. Kivett presented a paper at the Mountain-Plains Museum Conference in Fort Worth, and Dr. White participated in the program of the American Interprofessional Institute at St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Olson continued to serve as Director of the American Association for State and Local History, and he and I have served as Secretary-Treasurer of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association.

As of September 1 the staff of the Society consisted of twenty-one permanent employees, including seven who were on a part-time basis and ten temporary employees.

The publication program has proceeded very satisfactorily. Volume 23 in Nebraska State Historical Society Publications, John B. White's *Published Sources on Territorial Nebraska*, has been released. *The Northwest Gun*, by Charles E. Hanson, Jr., Number 2 of *Publications in Anthropology*, has also been published. Both of these works have received an enthusiastic acceptance. They maintain and enhance the high standards of quality exhibited in our publication series.

Nebraska History, now in its thirty-seventh year of publication, has continued to be a historical journal of recognized quality. Subjects ranging from the Indians and

the early military frontier through politics and reminiscences, to the effect of the automobile, have been dealt with by contributors representing the Society staff, Butler University, Doane College, Georgia Institute of Technology, Kansas State College, Kearney State Teachers College, Michigan State Normal, Murray State College, *The Nebraska Farmer*, the National Park Service, Northwestern University, San Jose State College, the United States Naval Academy, the Universities of California, Florida, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, Wayne State Teachers College, and the Wisconsin State Historical Society. The other publications of the Society have also continued. *The Historical News Letter* is now in its ninth year. The weekly column *Out of Old Nebraska* is well into its tenth year. In addition to these publications of the Society, Mrs. Elizabeth Radtke, newspaper librarian, continues to prepare a regular column dealing with old Nebraska newspapers for *The Nebraska Newspaper*, the publication of the Nebraska Press Association. Miss Berry, Mrs. Winkelman, and Dr. Danker have also contributed historical articles to other publications.

The Society continued to participate in the television programming of KUON-TV with weekly half-hour programs entitled "Yesterday in Nebraska." The "Great Plains Trilogy" continues to be used by television stations, and individual reels are in demand as film programs for a variety of school and club activities. Also, the radio programs prepared under the direction of Mrs. Winkelman and maintained by the University's Bureau of Audio Visual Instruction are obtainable and used for educational activities. Nearing completion is a new project, the production of a filmstrip entitled "Your Class Visits a Museum." It is intended for teacher training and to assist teachers in planning and executing field trips and in using museums to the fullest extent. The filmstrip and accompanying manual prepared by the University of Nebraska Photographic Productions and the Bureau of Audio Visual Instruction and the State Historical Society will be completed in the near future. It is expected to have national distribution and so will bring

our building before a national audience, as much of it was filmed in the Society building.

The three divisions of the Society under the direction of Mr. Kivett, Dr. White, and Mrs. Winkelman respectively have continued to function most effectively through the year. The outstanding work of these supervisors and their very able staffs is essential to maintain the Society's high standards of excellence.

THE MUSEUM

The expansion of Museum activities to include Fort Robinson was by all odds the largest project of the Museum's year. To get the new Museum in readiness for opening, thirty-seven displays were constructed depicting the prehistory of Western Nebraska, illustrating the life of the Dakota-Sioux Indians, and describing the white settlement and the recent activities at the Fort.

Although this was a large addition to the work load of the staff we continued to make changes and improvements in the Lincoln Museum. A new display section called "Collector's Lane" was opened in the basement corridor. Ten display cases here are utilized for temporary displays of outstanding collections of such things as buttons, guns, coins, pewter, glassware, dolls, lighting equipment, and other items to supplement the story of Nebraska and to stimulate interest in and exhibit collections of different kinds. Some of the collections displayed were loaned temporarily for this purpose, and others were made up from collections previously donated to the Museum.

Another new section of the Museum is a display case on the second floor corridor called "People in the Nebraska Story." This frequently changed display features persons

who have made important contributions to the development of Nebraska.

In addition to these new display techniques the Museum continued its policy of changing displays so that visiting the Museum is a constantly new experience. More than forty separate units were changed in the Museum displays during the year. In addition to these changes special exhibits were made for temporary use in the University of Nebraska Student Union. Materials or displays were also provided for the commemoration of various historical events in different locations in Nebraska. Loan collections of archeological materials were also made available to a number of museums in the region, among them Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; the Colorado Historical Society and the Denver Natural History Museum, Denver; and the Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.

Through the co-operation of the State Fair Board the Society placed its third annual display on exhibition at the State Fair. There were six units in the display this year, depicting frontier fashions, political campaigns of the past, agricultural tools, a sod house interior, and Nebraska Indians. The sixth unit was a reconstruction of a general store. The store was made possible by donations from Goehner Brothers' store, a pioneer business in Seward.

There were 159 separate donations of Museum articles during the year, including thousands of items. Additional donations were received at Fort Robinson. These materials form a storehouse from which items may be used for study or display, and we constantly need and invite donations and additions to the collection.

Archeological work continues to be one of the most important functions of the Museum. The work at Fort

Atkinson this summer, on a site occupied by the United States Army from 1820-1827, was a different kind of operation than we have carried out heretofore. The site, located in Washington County near the present town of Fort Calhoun, has long been recognized as important historically. The Fort area has been or is at present under cultivation. When settlers came to the area after 1854 there were remains of the Fort in the form of brick basements readily visible. Many of the settlers utilized bricks to build their own structures, and the remains of the Fort disappeared.

A detailed plan of the Fort showing the location of the outlying buildings has not been located, but through the co-operation of the Beales family, owners of the site, we were able to excavate in areas that were not covered by crops. Four different structures were excavated, one apparently a storehouse on the bluffs' edge, a second that was evidently a log building that had been chinked with lime and covered with siding. This building had a basement that contained the bricks of a fireplace which stood on a ledge outside the south wall. A third structure south of the fortified area had been a temporary building with log foundations. Perhaps the most interesting of the structures was a brick-walled basement located near the southeast corner of the original fortified wall. The walls were still standing below plow level to a height of three or four feet. The basement walls were four bricks wide, and the clay floor was covered with lime plaster from the walls of the building above. The lime for the plaster had been burned in kilns by the soldiers.

Garbage areas in the excavations yielded many specimens used by the soldiers. These included hand-blown bottles, dishes, buttons, military insignia, gun parts of different types, remains of saddles, fragments of clothing, locks and hinges, and some Indian trade goods. Tests north of the Fort also revealed the presence of a cemetery. The cemetery of the fort had not previously been located.

THE LIBRARY

The work of the Library continued much the same as in previous years. For a library to extend its area of service it is necessary to continually extend its collections. During the year we were able to add 3,765 volumes to our collections. Of them, 2,474 were acquired by gift, 175 by exchange, 203 by purchase, and 924 were added from our backlog. The Library is now able to keep its records of acquisitions current and is making good progress in processing masses of material collected and stored during years of inadequate space and insufficient personnel in our former quarters. There were 409 donors to the Library during the year.

In addition to the volumes referred to above, the Library continued to receive and catalogue other materials. In many respects the newspaper collection is our most valuable collection. As of August 31 we were receiving 299 newspapers compared to 312 in 1955, and 352 in 1946. As the tendency for considerable numbers of the newspapers in smaller communities to suspend publication or to merge with other papers continues, the old files of the defunct papers in the historical society become increasingly important. Along with the newspapers we were receiving 476 periodicals as of August 31. Two hundred and twenty-five of these were Nebraska titles; we received another 216 by gift or exchange; and we purchased 35 titles. Our picture collection received 805 additions during the year, including over 250 from the Vig archives. We also added 785 reels of microfilm.

LIBRARY HOLDINGS AUGUST 31, 1956

Category	1955	Additions	Total 1956
Volumes	30,815	3,765	34,580
Newspapers (Bound volumes)	20,514 ¹
Maps	738	203	941
Microfilm	2,614	785	3,399
Genealogical charts	8	1	9
Broadsides	29	27	56
Moving picture film	7	0	7
Pictures*	75,351	925	76,276
Phonodiscs	0	5	5

The bindery bound 385 books during the year and repaired 102 others. In addition, it made the boards for 205 newspaper titles for the permanent collections and bound 170 volumes of newspapers.

During the year 1770 persons visited the Library and were assisted by the Library staff. Almost five hundred of these persons had reference questions, many of them requiring a considerable amount of time to find the material requested. In addition, there were 370 inquiries received and answered by mail, and there were 113 telephone queries.

¹ With our present program of disposing of filmed volumes of newspapers we do not have a definite figure here. A major purpose of the microfilm program is to relieve the library of the problem of finding space for a continuing accretion of newspaper publications. The present policy of the library is to preserve the older papers that we have, to keep the bound copies of some of our more used papers, and to attempt to return the remainder of the microfilmed copies to the publisher or to interested persons in the originating community after microfilming is completed. As this program proceeds the number of bound volumes in our newspaper collection will diminish rather than grow as the number of microfilmed papers continues to increase.

* Based on 1950 estimate of 50,000.

Several Library projects were continued and developed to make information about Nebraska more accessible. The Nebraska Information Index, begun in 1950, has been continued. It continues to be a very helpful aid to the staff in answering queries, and its utility improves as the size of the index increases. The supplementary Nebraska Who's Who project is also continuing, although responses come in more slowly than they did during the project's first year.

Both the Archivist and the Librarian were engaged in field trips during the past year, gathering materials under the grant of the Norden Club. This grant is designed for gathering sources of the history of Scandinavians in Nebraska. This project has accounted for a considerable part of the archival material that we have gathered and catalogued in the past year, especially in the form of interviews.

THE DIVISION OF EDUCATION

The educational program in 1955-1956 continued to emphasize the educational resources of the Society and to render further service to schools and organizations throughout the state. Educational activities were offered which coordinated with the curricula of the schools and the interests and programs of women's clubs, extension clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and 4-H Clubs.

A new educational service during the past year was the Puppet Theatre. Hand puppets, constructed by Lincoln Junior League volunteer workers, were used to interpret the pioneers and Indians to children of the elementary grades. Three puppet plays were developed: "Lucy, the Story of a Doll Who Lived Long Ago," "The Little Indian Boy Who Wanted to be a Bear," and "The Father of Arbor Day." The puppet productions, given in the Society's auditorium, included a demonstration of Museum items which were related to the puppet play and a tour of relevant sections of the Museum. A total of thirty-eight puppet shows were given to a total of approximately 2,350 children. In addition, four puppet plays were presented on television on the Society's weekly TV program over KUON.

We continued to offer special auditorium programs on specific topics which were designed to tie in with the work of the schools and various organizations. These programs consisted of a short informal talk, a demonstration of selected museum items, the showing of a film or filmstrip, and a guided tour of those sections of the Museum which were related to the topic under discussion. The following programs were offered: (Grades 1-6): "How the Indians of Nebraska Lived," "Indian Crafts," "Indian and Pioneer Houses," "Life in a Covered Wagon," "Life in a Sod House," "Highway to the West—Early Transportation," "Guns That Won the West" (for boys), and "The Story of Our Flag," (for Scout and Camp Fire groups); (Grades 7-12 and Adult Groups): "Fashion is a Mirror of History," "Recipes from a Sod House Kitchen," "Exploring the Past with Shovel and Trowel," and "Life in Pioneer Nebraska." A total of forty-eight programs were given and two TV performances.

We continued to offer three types of guided tours: (1) the general tour, (2) the Indian Gallery tour, and (3) the Pioneer Gallery tour. A total of 190 tours were given.

Continuing and increasing amounts of help from the Lincoln Junior League enabled us to carry on so extensive an educational program. Fourteen volunteer workers from the Junior League assisted us in a variety of ways—in constructing puppets, writing scripts for the puppet shows, painting scenery backdrops for the puppet shows, and in presenting the puppet plays. We were able to develop the puppet show program largely because of the assistance of the Junior League workers. In addition, League volunteers continued to assist in the auditorium programs, in guiding tours, and in other activities, as they had for the previous two years.

To encourage teachers and group leaders to make use of our educational services, a special brochure was prepared which described the various services which we offer and which included a reservation blank for a guided tour, an auditorium program, or a puppet show. Approximately 9,800 of these brochures were sent out to teachers, school officials, and club leaders.



Above—Archivist Donald F. Danker and student assistant Paul Riley examine old records acquired from the Department of Banking.

Below—On stage the puppet pioneer family prepares to leave by covered wagon for Nebraska. Mrs. Harold Bookstrom of the Lincoln Junior League holds a seventy-five-year-old doll alongside her puppet counterpart.





Above—State Fair Exhibit, 1956

Many of the items displayed in the old general store were donated by the Goehner Brothers of Seward, Nebraska.

Below—Opening Day at the Fort Robinson Museum,
June 3, 1956



Supplementary materials were also provided for teachers. Approximately 8,343 educational leaflets were distributed to teachers and other individuals, and the Director of Education answered approximately 142 letters asking for specific information about Nebraska.

Numerous organizations continued to make use of our auditorium and other facilities for holding meetings and institutes. The Annual Law Enforcement Institute met for the second consecutive year in the Society's auditorium during the week of June 11-15. We again co-operated with the Lincoln City Library in the presentation of the annual recognition programs for those children who completed the Library's Summer Reading Program. Approximately 250 children attended the programs in the Society's auditorium.

PROSPECTS FOR 1957

The year 1956 was a very successful one for the Society. It saw several projects completed and some new activity started. For the most part it was a year of consolidating the growth in membership and in activities of the Society that had occurred since the completion of the new building. Last year several programs for future action were suggested that still are not completed. These demand attention, and action in other directions is also necessary.

One project in process is the development of a marking program to effectively identify significant historical locations in Nebraska. Such a program is desirable for the information and interest of our citizens as they travel about over the state. It will also have a definite and very considerable economic benefit to the state. The nation and its citizens are becoming increasingly travel minded and history conscious. The effect of an adequate state program of marking and explaining historic locations in encouraging tourist travel and tourist stopovers is something that we need to bring to the attention of the state and its citizens.

Another program that was suggested last year and two years ago was a program of added activity in building up our Library and our Museum collections. In the 1955-57

budget we asked for funds to add to the staff a full-time field representative working through the state, encouraging the donation of appropriate items to the Historical Society and stimulating an interest in history in all parts of the state. This addition to our staff is still much needed. Such a representative cannot take the place of hundreds of interested Society members looking after the interests of the Society in relation to historical materials in their communities, but the staff representative can assist in problems of follow up and evaluation and transportation in relation to collections. He would also greatly help to stimulate historical interest in communities over the state.

It has also been pointed out that our collections could be very measurably enriched by the acquisition of microfilm copies of documents, important sources of Nebraska history, which are found only in the National Archives, the Library of Congress, or other depositories outside of the state. Such a program could be of great scope and great value. The cost of such a project, however, is such that it cannot be undertaken without specific subsidy. Such subsidization is a worthy project for interested Society members. It is also a project that many Nebraska industries might well be interested in carrying out.

The activity of the Society in placing a display at the State Fair each of the last three years is one of our most worthwhile activities. The display at the Fair, however, has tended to emphasize one of the shortcomings of our collections and has pointed to a real need for further action. At present the Society does not have, nor does it have space in our building to make an adequate collection of, old farm vehicles and implements. No other state agency is doing this collecting, and it is of the utmost importance that it be done. We need to work out a program for both storing and displaying early farm equipment and vehicles. All of the horse drawn equipment and much of the early mechanized machinery is becoming increasingly scarce and difficult to locate. We need to take action to enlarge our program in this direction.

The Society should embark on a larger program of publication. We should make available to Nebraskans and to the nation at large more of the best information and illustrations existent or that can be brought into existence concerning Nebraska. Such a program will not be self supporting at present publication prices, and this is a field in which the Society's Foundation program should be reactivated.

Another field of activity which should engage additional attention is the development of historical interest through local historical societies. The relationship of the State Society to such groups is not clearly defined. It is wise that there should be no official and rigid relationship. However, it is certain that a well-rounded historical program will not be carried out in the state if there are not vigorous and healthy local organizations. The State Society should maintain a cordial and continuing relationship with existing local groups, and it should render them every assistance possible in providing programs, helping them to develop their field of activity, counseling them on organizational problems and in every other way. We should also aggressively encourage communities to organize local societies, city, county, or regional.

We are proud of our picture collection, and it proves its value time after time as we are called upon for different items. The collection is limited, however, in pictures covering the period since World War I. We need the co-operation of our membership in building this part of our collection as rapidly as possible.

We must seriously consider the future development of our archeological program. In 1956 we carried on an investigation without the assistance of federal funds for the first time since before World War II. This program was decided upon because the pressure of urban development made it seem unwise to further delay work at the Fort Atkinson site. We hope to further the explorations at Fort Atkinson next season, and we hope that federal funds will be available to augment Society funds in this venture.

Through the last decade to a large degree the decision on when and where to carry on such exploration has not been our own. Most of our activity has been in Missouri River Basin projects upon sites destined for early destruction. Federal funds have usually been available to match Society funds in these projects, but the decision as to where to act has been out of our control. Our relationship with Missouri River Basin sites is not at an end, but other types of pressures are causing us to anticipate still more extensive calls upon us for archeological work on an emergency basis. The possibility of a sudden urban building surge or industrial development from Omaha caused us to press the Fort Atkinson project this year. The present federal highway building program, in particular the interstate highway building program, may put heavy pressure upon the Society for immediate archeological action elsewhere. Fortunately federal funds would probably be available for a considerable portion of such work, but the Society must survey the areas that will be destroyed and bear the responsibility of deciding where archeological work should be carried on. We must organize and staff the Society so that we can meet the responsibilities of investigating and preserving materials from sites that should be worked before they are destroyed by new development. Our program should also be expanded to the point where we can devote some portion of our energies to acting on our own volition—that is, investigating sites that we consider to have the most potential value, or that fit closely into our pattern of research—rather than devoting all of our resources to frantic emergency operations.

The activity at Fort Robinson needs to be expanded. It is very possible that our activity at Fort Robinson will add materially to creating a first-class tourist attraction and vacation resort at this very beautiful location. The activity of the Society at Fort Robinson at a minimum should be extended to include outdoor displays at the Red Cloud Agency and the location of the death of Crazy Horse. To carry out such a program we are asking for a biennial appropriation of about \$32,000. This is not quite 90 per-

cent of the appropriation for 1955-1957. The appropriation for the last biennium did not cover operating costs to any degree for the first year. It did provide for much of the rehabilitation of the building and for the construction of the present museum displays; however, there is a considerable amount of maintenance and repair and some construction of displays that cannot be finished this biennium and that needs to be done before we can consider Fort Robinson to be on a fully operating basis.

The activity of the Society at Lincoln will go forward on much the same basis as through the last biennium. There are a number of factors that increase our needs in various ways. Requests last biennium for additional professional personnel were rejected, but the expansion of our activities in effect and contemplated make these personnel even more necessary. We also need other personnel to assist in keeping our building operating and present functions in operation. The need for new personnel plus anticipated higher costs of goods and services cause our budget request to increase from the \$257,000 available last biennium to \$310,000, an increase of about 16 percent.