



Back to Normal

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Article Summary: "Back to Normal" was the slogan in 1920, following the Armistice that ended World War I. But farm prices went lower, the demand for labor declined, wages diminished, banks failed, and more and more people left the state. This article is an in-depth study of this period in Nebraska, covering the flu epidemic, increases in the cost of living during the war, buyer strikes, the boom and bust in the potash industry, overexpansion in some businesses, and the 1919 Court House Riot in Omaha.

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Photographs / Images: postal delivery man wearing mask during flu epidemic; two Guy R Spencer cartoons lampooning the cost of living [*Omaha World Herald*, 1918]; potash plant at Hoffland in 1917 and 1951; American Potash Company at Antioch early and the site about 1951; exterior of Douglas County Courthouse showing damage done by mob riot of 1919 and office of the Douglas County clerk after riot of 1919 [both courtesy of *Omaha World Herald*]

BACK TO NORMAL

BY R. E. DALE

AFTER the armistice was signed, November 11, 1918, the attention of the people of Nebraska turned to problems nearer home. The state was in the grip of one of the worst epidemics in its history. A severe outbreak of influenza resulted in schools being closed and all public meetings forbidden.¹ Often a whole family was ill at the same time and, with the serious shortage of physicians and nurses, the sick seldom received proper care. In Omaha alone there were 974 deaths from "flu" between

¹ *Holt County Independent* (O'Neill, Nebraska), October 25, 1918, p. 1, col. 4; November 1, 1918, p. 2; November 15, 1918, p. 2; December 27, 1918, pp. 4, 5; *West Point Republican* (West Point, Nebraska), November 22, 1918, p. 7, cols. 3, 4. In the 1870's there was at least one serious epidemic of diphtheria in the state with a heavy loss of life especially among children.

R. E. Dale is a member of the staff of the Nebraska State Historical Society Library. A retired school administrator, Mr. Dale writes of life in the 1920's from his own personal experience in a number of Nebraska communities, documenting his observations by a detailed study of contemporary newspapers.

October 5 and December 31.² During January 1919, the epidemic abated, although there were short outbreaks of the disease in some communities for several weeks.³

There was a severe disruption of life in the state during the epidemic. Schools were quite generally closed, and there were no public meetings of any kind. There was nothing of a holiday season in the closing days of 1918. No Christmas entertainments were held, and local merchants sustained heavy losses from the severe slump in trade during the last six weeks of the year.⁴ When the epidemic waned in January and life became normal again, it was as if people had awakened from a bad dream. Only then did they realize that the war had really ended.

To many people in the state the most important problem at the close of the war was the rising cost of living. Persons having fixed incomes, such as public officials and employees, were hurt worst, but scarcely better off were clerks, stenographers, and many workingmen. All found it difficult, if not impossible, to meet rising living costs. Some did receive small increases in pay, but seldom more than 10 percent to 20 percent. The cost of living had risen steadily since 1914 until by January 1919, it had almost doubled. Farmers, too, grumbled about the cost of what they had to buy, although the price of farm products had advanced faster than the cost of living.⁵

Many factors affected prices — locality, time of the year and quality of goods. The following table gives a comprehensive view of agricultural prices in the United States during the war and immediately afterwards, based

² *Ravenna News* (Ravenna, Nebraska), January 10, 1919, p. 7, col. 4; *West Point Republican*, December 20, 1918, p. 6, col. 3; January 3, 1919, p. 7, cols. 4, 5; February 7, 1919, p. 2, col. 5. Citations from local papers are usually taken from columns summarizing state-wide news.

³ *West Point Republican*, March 28, 1919, p. 2, col. 5; April 4, 1919, p. 8, col. 3; April 18, 1919, p. 8, col. 4.

⁴ *Ravenna News*, January 10, 1919, p. 7, cols. 3, 4; *West Point Republican*, January 10, 1919, p. 6, col. 4.

⁵ *Literary Digest*, March 29, 1919, p. 150; March 12, 1921, p. 89.

on the average price of February 1 for the five years, 1910-1914, par being 100.

WHOLESALE PRICES AS OF FEBRUARY 1⁶

	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
Cotton	65	91	112	238	204	229	108
Wheat	156	133	161	218	234	234	146
Corn	136	131	158	206	193	224	106
Hogs	89	101	154	212	225	203	131
Cattle	137	147	165	210	334	299	143

What the farmer received for his produce during this period may be seen by a review of the local market at Ravenna, Nebraska, prices given every six months.

The table on page 182 shows that farm prices through July 1916 were subject to such fluctuations as might be expected from one year to another. Only the hog market was higher than normal. July 1916, then, can be used as a base for comparing farm prices. It is interesting to note that the price of wheat had doubled by January 1917, increased two and one-half times by January 1919, almost trebled by January 1920, and in June 1921, was still nearly 50 percent above the 1916 price. Corn, from July 1917, to June 1920, was double the 1916 price or better, but by June 1921, it had dropped to a little more than half the 1916 price. Butterfat did not rise so rapidly, but most of the time between March 1919, and June 1920, the price was double that of 1916.

Some idea of the cost of living in Nebraska may be gained by comparing the prices of a few grocery items, quoted by the Farmers' Union State Exchange, located in Omaha.

⁶ *Ibid*, March 12, 1921, p. 89.

RAVENNA (NEBRASKA) MARKET PRICES, 1914-1921 ⁷

	Jan. 2 1914	Jan. 1 1915	July 2 1915	Jan. 7 1916	July 6 1916	Jan. 4 1917	July 5 1917	Jan. 4 1918	July 3 1918	Jan. 2 1919	June 27 1919	Jan. 1 1920	June 24 1920	Jan. 6 1921	June 9 1921
Wheat	.71	1.08	1.10	.99	.86	1.75	2.05	2.00	2.00	2.15	2.25	2.49	2.53	1.50	1.28
Corn	.65	.55	.60	.55	.64	.80	1.58	1.27	1.35	1.45	1.62	1.27	1.53	.44	.34
Butterfat	.32	.32½	.25	.30	.27	.38	.40	.52	.45	.72	.54	.69	.55	.46	.23
Eggs	.30	.25	.12	.22	.17	.30	.24	.37	.27	.45	.31	.60	.26	.43	.15
Hens	.09	.08	.09	.09	.11	.12	.14	.17	.19	.18	.20	.17	.22	.22	.15
Hogs			6.70	6.00	8.80	9.00	14.00	15.50		16.25	19.50	13.00	14.50	8.25	

⁷ Prices quoted from *Ravenna News*.

WHOLESALE GROCERY PRICES (OMAHA) ⁸

	May 1917	Aug. 1917	Nov. 1917	Feb. 1918	May 1918	Aug. 1918	Nov. 1918	Feb. 1919
*Flour, cwt.	\$7.00	\$6.20	\$5.35	\$5.40	\$5.20	\$5.75	\$5.75	\$5.75
*Cheese, lb.	.30	.28	.31	.29	.265	.28	.38	.40
*Beans, navy, lb.		.20	.16	.15	.15	.14	.12	.11
*Corn, doz. cans				1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.65
Coffee, Santos. lb.		.22	.22	.22	.22	.22	.24	.30
Soap, per 100 (White Russian)				4.60	4.90	5.15	5.35	5.90

	May 1919	Aug. 1919	Nov. 1919	Feb. 1920	May 1920	Aug. 1920	Nov. 1920	Feb. 1921
*Flour, cwt.	\$5.60	\$5.80	\$5.60	\$7.20	\$7.20	\$8.00	\$6.50	\$5.00
*Cheese, lb.	.35	.36	.35	.37	.37	.37	.37	.32
*Beans, navy, lb.	.09	.09	.11	.12	.10	.12	.10	.065
*Corn, doz. cans	1.60	1.60	1.80	1.60	1.60	1.60	1.60	1.60
Coffee, Santos, lb.	.32	.43	.43	.47	.47	.47	.36	.28
Soap, per 100 (White Russian)	5.15	5.75	6.65	6.75	6.75	6.35	6.35	

*Controlled by licensing regulations until January 1919.

By January 1922 prices had dropped. Flour was \$3.80 per hundred pounds, American cheese, 27 cents a pound, and Santos coffee, 27 cents a pound. Canned corn had risen, however, to \$2.75 a dozen cans.

Food prices in Nebraska from 1914 through 1918 were well below the national average, advancing only 25 percent. This was due possibly to the fact that the consumer was nearer the point of production for most food items. This was especially true for milk, butter, and eggs, which in most families made up a considerable percent of the food budget. The price of potatoes, flour, and bread was also lower in Nebraska. ⁹

NATION-WIDE WHOLESALE PRICES AS OF FEBRUARY 1 ¹⁰

		1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
Food	Pork	100	106	141	242	196	202	155
	Lard	108	97	153	243	218	225	125
	Sugar	110	128	143	158	191	329	147
	Coffee	59	71	81	79	149	144	63
Fuel	Coal, bituminous	91	100	120	197	208	208	226

⁸ Prices quoted from *Nebraska Union Farmer* (Omaha). A list of representative staple articles was selected for comparison.

⁹ *Literary Digest*, November 23, 1918, p. 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1921, p. 89; March 19, 1921, p. 94.

The problems of agricultural areas were compounded because the decline of food prices did not precede but followed the decline in farm prices. While food prices remained above the prewar figure, farm prices dropped below prewar figures.

Over the entire country the cost of living had increased 66 percent during the war. Food, which took 43 percent of the family budget, had advanced 83 percent, and clothing which took 13 percent of the family budget, had advanced 93 percent.¹¹ During the war prices reached their highest point in July 1918. From then on for several months there was a slight decline, so that in March 1919 prices were 10 percent below the level of the previous July. Although prices then had reached their lowest point since November 1917, they were still 20 percent above March 1917, and almost double the prices of August 1914, when the war began in Europe. Most of the price changes between July 1918, and March 1919, were due to a decline in the price of textiles; there had been little change in the price of food or fuel.¹²

The indifference to prices shown by many buyers accounted in part for the high prices. This extravagance was shown by unprecedented sales of silk shirts to men and silk hose, petticoats, and underwear to women. Silk shirts in 1919 sold for \$12.00 or more, neckties for \$5.00, and a pair of silk stockings for \$6.00. Such prices were commonly paid by laborers, stenographers, and domestics. They often expressed dissatisfaction with the goods shown and demanded something more expensive. It seemed to make little difference how high a price was asked.¹³ Sales of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, January 25, 1919, p. 14.

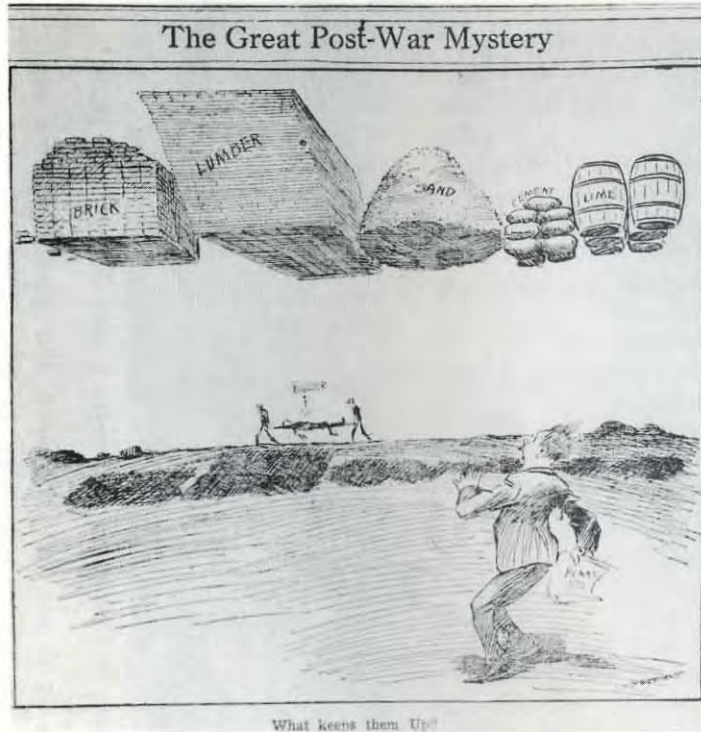
¹² *Ibid.*, March 29, 1919, p. 150; *West Point Republican*, October 17, 1919, p. 9, col. 2; October 31, 1919, p. 6, col. 2.

¹³ *Literary Digest*, August 30, 1919, pp. 14-15; January 30, 1920, pp. 67, 70. "A South Side merchant was up at the Omaha Chamber of Commerce for lunch. He was explaining the big sales he had at his store of \$16 silk shirts for men. He looked around the table to see if he could find a shirt to compare with the ones he sold, but he failed to find one. Of course not. You will find no members



(Photo by Underwood in *Literary Digest*, November 30, 1918)

The flu epidemic did not keep the postman from his appointed rounds.



(Omaha Morning World-Herald, March 22, 1919)



(Omaha Morning World-Herald, August 13, 1919)

Cartoonist Guy R. Spencer lampoons the cost of living.

jewelry increased 28 percent and furs 57 percent.¹⁴

By the summer of 1919, however, there was an increasing demand that the cost of living be lowered. The Department of Justice set up local fair-price committees similar to those which operated under the Food Administration during the war. Surpluses which had been acquired by the government for use of the Army and Navy were thrown on the market—cured meat, canned goods, blankets, shoes, and clothing.¹⁵ From time to time there had been rumors during the war that large quantities of food, such as meat, eggs, and canned goods were being held in cold storage by packers and speculators, especially in Chicago, in the hope of making a huge profit from the rise in prices. In the summer of 1919 these charges were renewed. After an investigation by Attorney-General Palmer, the government in August seized the hoarded goods and dumped them on the market to help force down prices.¹⁶ In Nebraska, Governor McKelvie ordered an investigation of the high cost of living. Hearings were held to investigate profiteering, hoarding, and similar practices. The Governor was dissatisfied with the results of the investigation and issued a statement declaring that the principal result of the agitation regarding the cost of living had been to reduce the price farmers received for their grain.¹⁷

During the fall and early winter of 1919 grumbling about high prices continued and buying slowed down. A

of the Sucker Club at the Chamber of Commerce eating lunch. The Suckers eat their lunch out of a bucket between their legs and pay \$16 for a shirt." (*Western Laborer* [Omaha], November 22, 1919, p. 1, col. 6; see also *Ibid.*, November 29, 1919, p. 1, col. 5.)

¹⁴ *Literary Digest*, December 27, 1919, p. 86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, September 20, 1919, p. 8; *Ravenna News*, September 5, 1919, p. 8, col. 7; September 12, 1919, p. 8, cols. 4, 5; September 19, 1919, p. 8, cols. 3, 4; October 3, 1919, p. 1, col. 7; October 10, 1919, p. 1, col. 1; *West Point Republican*, September 12, 1919, p. 5, col. 2; September 19, 1919, p. 5, col. 4. These surplus items were sold locally and on a country-wide basis.

¹⁶ *Literary Digest*, September 20, 1919, p. 8; *Ravenna News*, August 22, 1919, p. 8, col. 5.

¹⁷ *Ravenna News*, August 29, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; *West Point Republican*, September 5, 1919, p. 8, col. 5.

buyers' strike quickly developed that spread over the whole country. In December the Lincoln Woman's Club, with a membership of 1,700, decided to do something drastic about the cost of living. They entered into an agreement among themselves to boycott all high-priced foods, including butter and eggs.¹⁸ They were further encouraged when they heard that women in Illinois were also refusing to buy high-priced food, especially butter and eggs. By the latter part of December 2,000 Lincoln women were taking part in the boycott. As a result the price of eggs in Lincoln dropped from eighty-five cents to fifty-five cents a dozen and there was some decrease in the price of other staples.¹⁹ Encouraged by the decline in the price of food, the Lincoln Woman's Club decided to do something about the price of clothing. They agreed to make the dresses and hats of the previous year do until prices reached a more reasonable level.²⁰ To make home dressmaking more popular as a part of the drive to reduce prices, in January the Lincoln Woman's Club held a style show of made-over garments.²¹

The buyers' strike spread rapidly over Nebraska. Members of women's clubs from over the state at a meeting in Lincoln early in January made further plans to fight the high cost of living. In the state economy campaign Mrs. Charles G. Ryan of Grand Island took a leading part. She traveled over the state holding mass meetings with the intention of securing pledges from 250,000 housewives: to buy nothing at excessive prices; to keep a careful budget of household expenses; to buy only when necessary for service and economy; to aid other women in setting standards for careful conservation and economical buying.²² She sent a questionnaire to all parts of Nebraska. The

¹⁸ *Ravenna News*, December 19, 1919, p. 8, col. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, January 2, 1920, p. 8, col. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; p. 9, col. 4.

²¹ *West Point Republican*, February 6, 1920, p. 8, col. 1.

²² *West Point Republican*, January 9, 1920, p. 2, col. 3; January 23, 1920, p. 6, col. 2; February 6, 1920, p. 8, cols. 1, 2; February 27, 1920, p. 3, cols. 1, 2; April 30, 1920, p. 3, col. 1.

answers received showed that there was a wide variation in prices in different parts of the state. The price of granulated sugar, for instance, varied from eighteen to twenty-three cents a pound.²³ Word was sent out for no one to buy potatoes while the price was high but to substitute hominy and beans.²⁴ In Omaha, home baking was encouraged.²⁵ Mrs. Ryan did not find the response to the economy campaign as strong as she had hoped. Still it was very impressive in many counties. In Hall County more than 30 percent of the housewives signed the pledge and the percentage was high in Butler, York, Merrick, Nance, Cedar, Rock, Madison, Custer, Lincoln, and Red Willow counties.²⁶

These voluntary efforts to control prices were not immediately effective, and prices remained high in many places during the early months of 1920. For instance, in January people in eastern Nebraska were paying twenty-two cents a pound for sugar, thanks to the sugar speculators, although the sugar factories at Scottsbluff and nearby towns were asking only \$13.00 a hundred for their products.²⁷ About March 1, licensing of the sale of sugar was again established in Nebraska to deal with scarcity and high prices. At about the same time the United States Department of Justice raided two warehouses in Omaha and seized 168,000 pounds of sugar. Indictments for hoarding were immediately brought against the owners.²⁸ Early in February the price of hogs dropped \$1.00 per hundred and flour \$1.25 a barrel.²⁹ Among the many articles on which prices were reduced were condensed milk, butter, and bread. For these reductions the organized women claimed the credit.³⁰

²³ *Ravenna News*, March 5, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, January 30, 1920, p. 8, col. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1920, p. 8, col. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1920, p. 8, cols. 4, 5; March 12, 1920, p. 8, col. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, January 9, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; May 14, 1920, p. 8, col. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; February 20, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, February 27, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

On the national scene the determined stand of the buying public was having its effect, and easterners continued their efforts to carry on a buyers' strike. Men refused to buy suits at prevailing prices and wore overalls as a sign of their revolt. Overalls were worn in offices, by college students, and even by wealthy men. In many places the women backed up the men by wearing gingham dresses.³¹ The movement spread over the country like wild fire. In Nebraska before the last of April, Overall Clubs had been formed in Omaha, Lincoln, Fremont, Norfolk, and many other communities. Because of their high price men in some communities refused to buy even overalls but wore patched clothing. These groups of men were sometimes called "Patch Clubs."³²

Prices finally broke. John Wanamaker became alarmed on account of the buyers' strike and suddenly on May 3 made a 20 percent price cut in his New York and Philadelphia stores.³³ Within a week throughout the East dry goods and clothing merchants were cutting their prices from 10 to 25 percent and even 50 percent. By order of the Federal Reserve Board, banks refused to extend jobbers' loans and they were forced to liquidate, often at a loss. Call money on Wall Street rose to 8 and 9 percent.³⁴ Money was tight all over the country³⁵ and before the last of May the wave of price cutting had extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Chicago jobbers were forced to restrict credit to their customers. Several big stores in Omaha cut prices. Manufacturers promised to reduce their prices. Up to this point, price cutting had largely affected ready-to-wear clothing, silks, and shoes, but the whole top-heavy price structure was shaken. The price of other items began to decline, and by the middle of May the price of lumber

³¹ *Literary Digest*, May 1, 1920, pp. 24-26.

³² *Ravenna News*, April 30, 1920, p. 8, cols. 3, 4.

³³ *New York Times*, May 3, 1920, p. 5, col. 4; May 5, 1920, p. 3, col. 1.

³⁴ *Literary Digest*, May 29, 1920, pp. 13-14.

³⁵ *West Point Republican*, June 4, 1920, p. 3, col. 1; August 6, 1920, p. 6, col. 1; August 20, 1920, p. 6, col. 1.

in Omaha had declined 8 to 10 percent.³⁶

By fall the price of food was declining. When the Nebraska Board of Control met in September to award contracts for supplies for state institutions, it found the prices for flour, meat, and other foodstuffs noticeably lower than they had been for some time.³⁷ By February 1921, the price of flour had declined to 63 percent of the price of the previous August, cheese to 86 percent, beans to 55 percent and coffee to 65 percent.³⁸

Before the end of the war an acute housing shortage had developed not only in Omaha and Lincoln but also in smaller cities and towns. In many cases a place to live could neither be rented nor purchased. At Norfolk many families had to store their goods and live in hotels and rooming houses.³⁹ In Omaha in September 1919 the rent of offices and apartments was raised 50 percent. Before this increase went into effect October 1, tenants began organizing to prevent an increase in rent.⁴⁰ In Lincoln early in 1920 there was a shortage of 1000 houses;⁴¹ in Omaha the shortage reached 2,500.⁴² With the price of building material declining there was hope that new houses might be built to relieve the shortage, and at Nebraska City a building and loan company began construction of fifty new houses.⁴³ At Hastings in January 1921 contractors and carpenters negotiated a new wage scale, with the carpenters accepting a reduction in pay.⁴⁴ By the spring of 1921 building costs in Omaha had been lowered 30 to 40 percent.⁴⁵

³⁶ *Ravenna News*, May 21, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; May 28, 1920, p. 8, col. 4, p. 9, col. 7; *West Point Republican*, May 28, 1920, p. 3, col. 1.

³⁷ *Ravenna News*, October 1, 1920, p. 7, col. 4.

³⁸ *Nebraska Union Farmer*.

³⁹ *Ravenna News*, March 14, 1919, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *West Point Republican*, September 12, 1919, p. 5, col. 1.

⁴¹ *Ravenna News*, March 12, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, June 3, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, January 30, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, January 21, 1921, p. 7, col. 4.

⁴⁵ *Holt County Independent*, January 7, 1921, p. 6, col. 5.

Along with the increase in farm prices during the war, there was also an increase in the price of farm land. This was especially the case in Cheyenne County and nearby counties, where grazing land had been purchased, broken out, and in its second year had produced a crop of wheat that sold for more than the land had cost. Much land changed hands from 1918 to 1920 at constantly increasing prices, the buyer often paying only a small percent of the purchase price. Frequently a part or all of the down payment was borrowed from one of the local banks. With such easy profits, it is understandable that men around Kimball, Sidney, and Chappell refused \$50 an acre for land that had cost them \$10 an acre.

The rise in land prices varied greatly in different parts of the state.⁴⁶ The rise in price was especially great in Saunders County where in January and February 1914, twenty farms containing a total of 1,330 acres had sold for an average price of \$114 an acre. In the corresponding months of 1920 twelve Saunders County farms containing 1,629 acres sold for an average price of \$234 an acre, an increase of more than 100 percent.⁴⁷ By August 1920, land prices were checked, especially where cash payment was necessary, for by that time the money market had become tight. In Hamilton County one of the best quarter sections in the county was offered at referee's sale in August. Only one bid was received and that for \$100 an acre.⁴⁸

Few states have been more dependent on coal than Nebraska, and so the state suffered severely from the coal strike of December 1919.⁴⁹ Hours of business were limited and industries closed. Schools were closed in many parts of the state, including Omaha, Lincoln, Nebraska City,

⁴⁶ *Ravenna News*, November 28, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; December 5, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; December 12, 1919, p. 8, cols. 4, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1920, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, August 27, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; September 10, 1920, p. 7, col. 3.

⁴⁹ *West Point Republican*, December 5, 1919, p. 4, col. 1; December 12, 1919, p. 6, col. 2.

Hastings, and Crete.⁵⁰ The University of Nebraska, having its winter supply of coal on hand remained open, but the administration was severely criticized for doing so. Everywhere customers were restricted in their buying.⁵¹ The government forbade the sale of coal to any industries except the most essential. The use of electricity and gas was restricted as much as possible, for at that time both were produced almost entirely from coal. The weather in November and December, 1919, was the most severe since 1886,⁵² so it is a wonder that there was not greater suffering. Where wood could be obtained it was used to supplement the short supply of coal, in Lincoln and Superior for instance. The town of DeWitt bought thirty acres of timber to be cut for fuel. The people of Hemingford hauled wood from Pine Ridge, thirty miles away.⁵³ Volunteers to work in the Kansas coal mines were called for. Many men, especially students, responded and were organized under the Adjutant General of the state.⁵⁴ The strike ended December 11, but conservation of fuel had to be continued for some time.⁵⁵ It was estimated that the loss to industry and business in Nebraska during the first two weeks of December through the shortage of fuel was 25 percent.⁵⁶

During this period the people of Nebraska felt a great urge to make public improvements. As the summer of 1919 opened, a great number of cities and villages, outside of Omaha and Lincoln, contracted for street paving or actually began work. In some cases only a block or two of paving was laid; in other cases the paving extended a mile or more. Hastings, Beatrice, and Norfolk as well as

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1919, p. 1, cols. 2, 4; December 12, 1919, p. 10, col. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, November 7, 1919, p. 3, col. 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, December 19, 1919, p. 4, col. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, December 19, 1919, p. 4, col. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1919, p. 10, col. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, December 26, 1919, p. 8, col. 1; *Nebraska City News* (Nebraska City, Nebraska), December 12, 1919, p. 1, col. 4.

⁵⁶ *West Point Republican*, December 19, 1919, p. 4, col. 1.

twenty other cities and villages began work that year.⁵⁷ At Hastings twenty-three miles of paving were laid,⁵⁸ at Geneva five and one half miles.⁵⁹ The paving of highways also received attention. Sections of the Lincoln Highway in Dodge, Hall, Dawson, and Lincoln counties were paved at a cost of \$615,000,⁶⁰ as well as three highways the length of Douglas County.⁶¹ In 1920 twenty-four cities and villages laid paving, many of them completing contracts made the previous year.⁶² In the latter part of 1920 the work of paving roads and streets declined rapidly. While there was considerable paving laid in 1921, mostly completing contracts,⁶³ the high cost and the difficulty of disposing of paving bonds put a stop to this improvement in most cities and villages.⁶⁴ In Dodge County a one million dollar project for highway improvement was abandoned, while at Randolph a mass meeting rejected all paving projects by a vote of seventy-five to fourteen.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ *Ravenna News*, June 6, 1919, p. 6, col. 4; June 13, 1919, p. 6, col. 4; July 4, 1919, p. 6, cols. 6, 7; July 18, 1919, p. 6, col. 5; August 22, p. 8, col. 4; August 29, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; September 5, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; September 19, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; September 26, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; October 3, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; October 17, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; October 24, 1919, p. 10, col. 4; November 21, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; November 28, p. 10, col. 4; December 12, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; *West Point Republican*, May 9, 1919, p. 1, cols. 1, 2; May 23, 1919, p. 2, cols. 4, 5; June 6, 1919, p. 7, cols. 5, 7.

⁵⁸ *West Point Republican*, October 23, 1919, p. 9, col. 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1919, p. 8, col. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, May 30, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; June 4, 1920, p. 3.

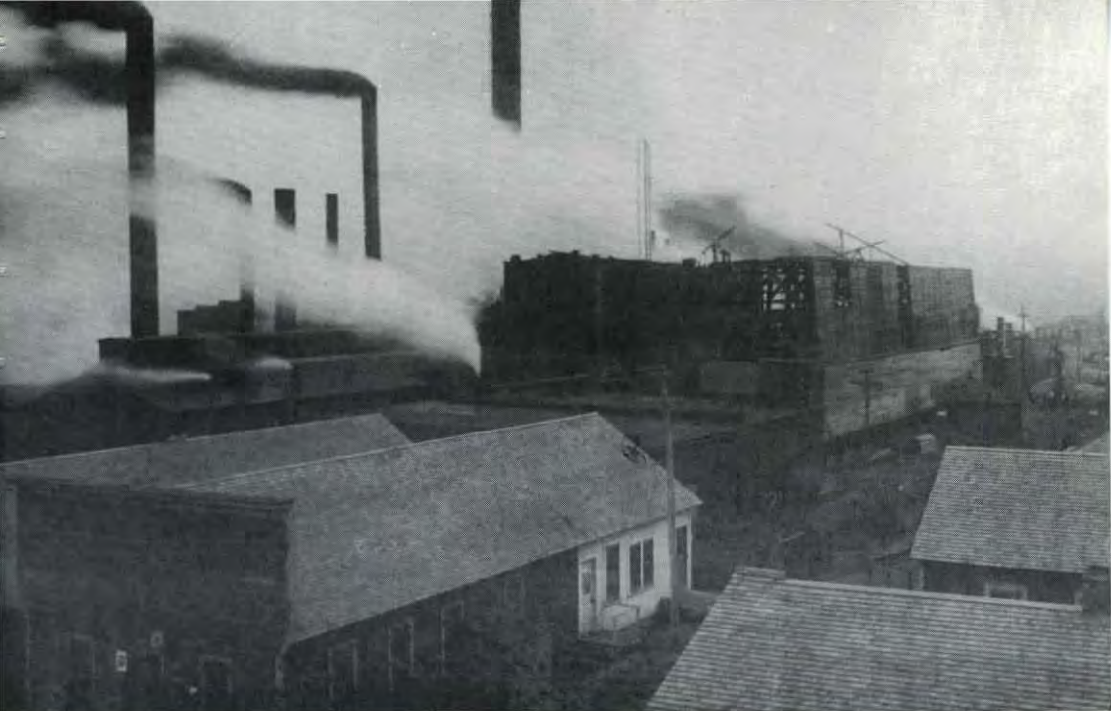
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1921, p. 2, col. 5; p. 6, col. 1.

⁶² *Ravenna News*, January 16, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; January 23, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; January 30, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; February 6, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; April 16, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; May 28, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; June 4, 1920, p. 8, cols. 4, 5; July 2, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; July 9, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; September 10, 1920, p. 7, cols. 3, 4; *West Point Republican*, January 23, 1920, p. 6, col. 1; June 4, 1920, p. 3, col. 2; July 2, 1920, p. 6, col. 2; July 30, 1920, p. 6, col. 1; September 3, 1920, p. 6, col. 1; September 10, 1920, p. 8, col. 1; October 8, 1920, p. 1, col. 6; *The Enterprise* (Blair, Nebraska), June 10, 1920, p. 6, col. 6.

⁶³ *Holt County Independent*, March 11, 1921, p. 2, col. 4; April 22, 1921, p. 2, col. 5; April 29, 1921, p. 2, col. 3; June 17, 1921, p. 2, col. 5; June 24, 1921, p. 2, col. 3; July 8, 1921, p. 6, col. 4; September 30, 1921, p. 6, col. 5; December 9, 1921, p. 2, col. 5; December 16, 1921, p. 2, col. 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, January 21, 1921, p. 2, cols. 5, 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, February 4, 1921, p. 2, col. 3.

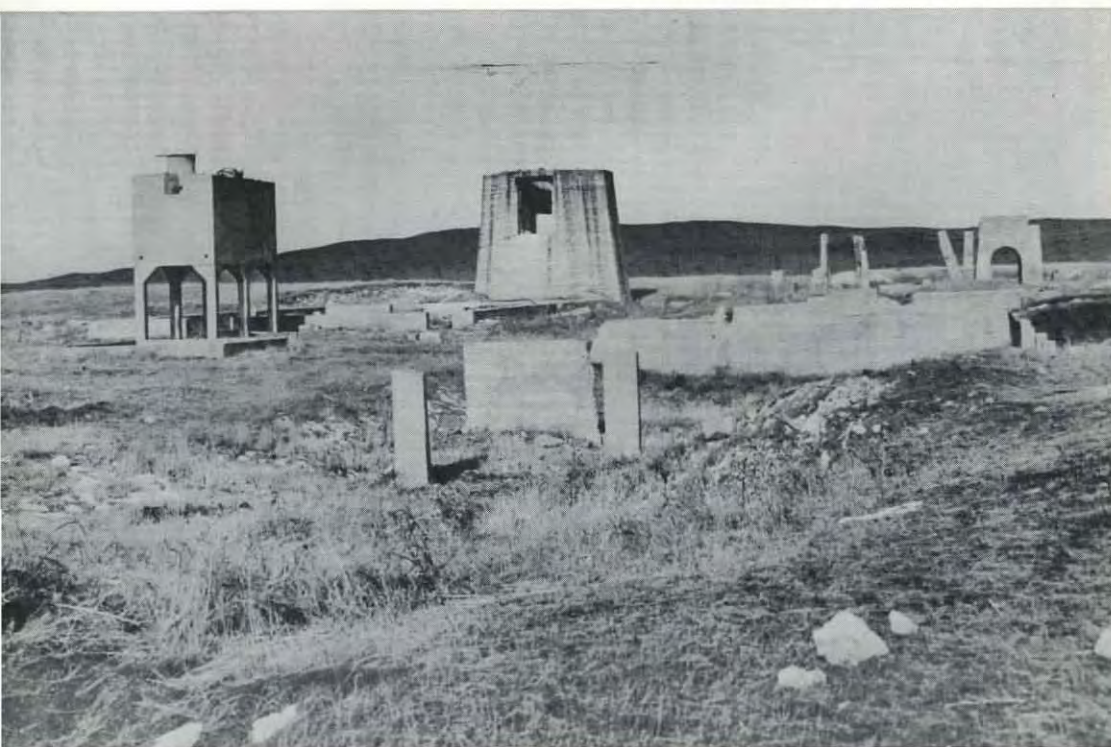


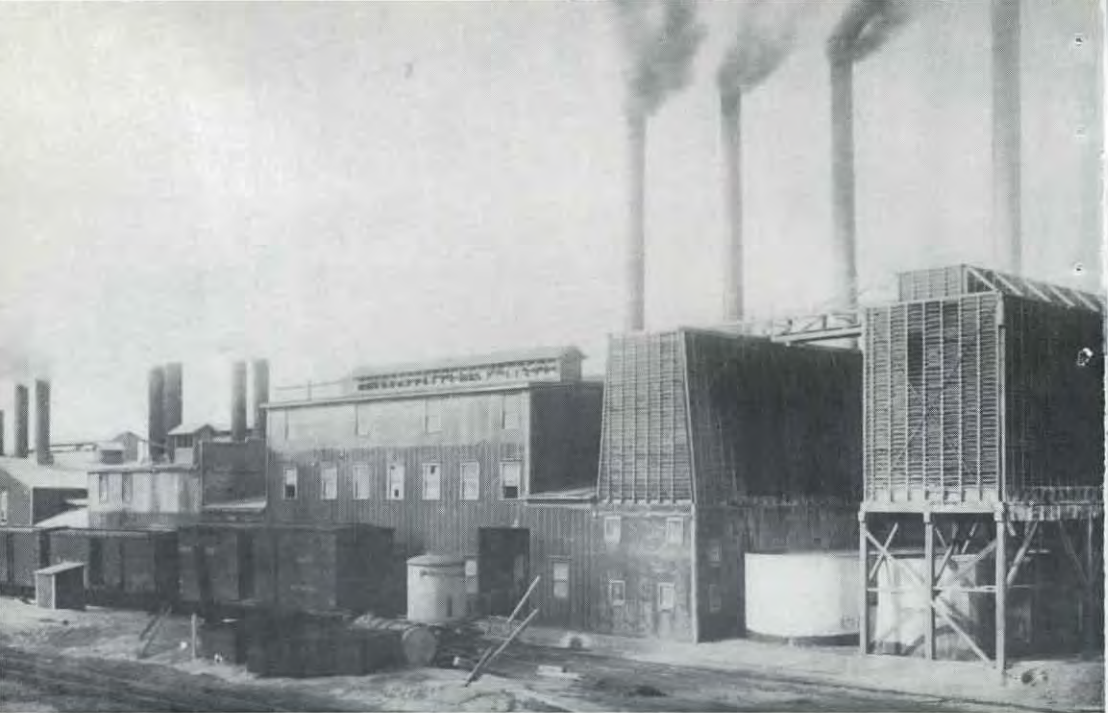
Above—Potash plant at Hoffland, about 1917

Boom and Bust in the Potash Industry

Below—Site of Hoffland plant, about 1951

(Photo, courtesy the Omaha **World-Herald**)





Above—American Potash Company at Antioch

Antioch's Prosperity Was Short-Lived.

Below—Site of Antioch plant, about 1951

(Photo, courtesy the Omaha **World-Herald**)



Other public improvements such as waterworks, sewers, and airfields also received attention.⁶⁶ The city of Omaha took over the local gas plant, paying \$5,000,000 for the property.⁶⁷ Many public school buildings were put up during this period. Some represented a public improvement too long delayed. Most of them were needed by the new consolidated school districts, more than one hundred of these districts having been formed in 1918 and 1919.⁶⁸ Many of these buildings represented an outlay of over \$100,000 for each.⁶⁹ Other improvements in which the public was more or less interested were new church buildings, moving picture theaters, auditoriums, and sale pavilions. When the crash of 1921 came, the construction of more than one magnificent hotel stopped, and some buildings remained unfinished for years.

There was spectacular development in certain private businesses which led to overexpansion and unwise investments. New industries were developed, and it was hoped that they would be of permanent benefit to the state. The most important infant industry and for a time the most profitable was the refining of potash. This industry was founded by two young chemists, John H. Show and Carl L. Modisett, who had the financial backing of T. E. Stevens of Omaha. They filed a mineral claim on Jesse Lake, thirteen miles east of Alliance, erected a solar tower, and in 1911 were ready for business. However, there was no market and the infant potash industry faced bankruptcy. When war broke out in 1914, the supply of potash which this country normally imported from Germany was shut off. With potash needed both for fertilizer and munitions, the one small plant at Jesse Lake could not supply the demand. The business expanded rapidly and a new plant was built at Hoffland with eight evaporators. In October

⁶⁶ *West Point Republican*, December 26, 1919, p. 6, col. 4; January 24, 1919, p. 5, col. 3; May 30, 1919, p. 8, col. 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, July 16, 1920, p. 7, col. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, May 16, 1919, p. 7, col. 5; September 12, 1919, p. 5, col. 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1920, p. 2, col. 1.

1917 it employed two hundred men and turned out two hundred tons of potash a day. The village of Hoffland sprang up, having at one time a population of five hundred. More than 4,000 wells were sunk into the bottom of Jesse Lake, and the plant also extracted potash from the water of other lakes. This plant produced potash worth \$12,000,000. In 1918 alone it paid out a half million dollars for freight charges and a million dollars to the government in income and excess profits taxes.⁷⁰

This apparent easy money prompted Ed Marks, an insurance salesman of Alliance who was familiar with the lakes of southern Sheridan County, to make a trip to Omaha. There he interested several men and organized the American Potash Company. The organization built a plant at Antioch and piped the water from a number of lakes owned by the brothers John and Herman Krause on their 30,000 acre ranch. The Alliance Potash Company, owned chiefly by the Krause brothers, built another plant at Antioch.⁷¹ T. B. Hord, an extensive cattle feeder, also took a million dollars worth of potash from a previously worthless lake on his 4,600 acre ranch.⁷² Before the beginning of 1919 potash was again being brought from Germany and the plants had shut down. Still the boom went on. In December 1918, the Omaha Potash and Refining Company, capitalized at \$1,000,000, began the erection of a \$5,000,000 plant at Lakeside, a few miles east of Antioch.⁷³ Rumors that there would be an embargo on German potash, until a peace treaty had been signed, en-

⁷⁰ *New York Times*, September 25, 1927, part viii, p. 24, col. 1; *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), October 28, 1917, p. 14 A.; *Scientific American*, CXVI, 167, 180. John H. Show (Class of 1906, University of Nebraska) was living in Canoga Park, California, in 1936. Carl L. Modisett was living in Denver in 1936. (*Directory of Alumni, 1873-1936, Bulletin of the University of Nebraska, Series XLII, Number 18* [May 29, 1937]).

⁷¹ *New York Times*, *loc. cit.*; *Nebraska State Journal*, (Lincoln), *loc. cit.*

⁷² *New York Times*, *loc. cit.*; *Nebraska State Journal*, *loc. cit.*; See also *West Point Republican*, December 27, 1918, p. 6, col. 4.

⁷³ *West Point Republican*, December 13, 1918, p. 6, col. 4.

couraged plans for several new potash plants.⁷⁴

By February 1919 the bottom had dropped out of the potash market; plants were closed; and several thousand men were thrown out of employment. At that time there were twenty-seven potash reduction plants in northwestern Nebraska, nine of them large ones. Stores began to close in the potash towns and people began to move away.⁷⁵ In spite of this, the American Potash Company, with two reduction plants, was organized in Lincoln with a capital of \$4,000,000.⁷⁶ In September 1919, the plants began to open again and by the first of January 1920, all but one were again in operation.⁷⁷ This activity lasted only a few months, and again the reduction plants closed down.⁷⁸ In January 1921, the American Potash Company was declared bankrupt by the federal court and a receiver appointed.⁷⁹ Later in the year the Alliance Potash Plant at Antioch, which had been built in 1917 at a cost of approximately \$600,000, was sold at sheriff's sale for \$32,000.⁸⁰ Some of the reduction plants remained standing until 1927 when they were sold for junk. As late as 1951 columns and walls of concrete and rusting piles of scrap were reminders of a once prosperous period, although Hoffland no longer existed and the population of Antioch had shrunk from four thousand to thirty persons.⁸¹

Some businesses, started in a small way during this period, have continued to develop and are important sources of income today. In 1917 there were few if any motor trucks in the state which were operated

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, December 20, 1918, p. 6, col. 4.

⁷⁵ *Ravenna News*, February 14, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; August 21, 1919, p. 9, col. 4; February 28, 1919, p. 3, col. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, May 23, 1919, p. 8, col. 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1919, p. 8, col. 3; November 7, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; January 9, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; *West Point Republican*, August 8, 1919, p. 2, col. 5.

⁷⁸ *West Point Republican*, June 4, 1920, p. 3, col. 3.

⁷⁹ *Friend Sentinel* (Friend, Nebraska), January 13, 1921, p. 2, col. 5.

⁸⁰ *Holt County Independent*, September 2, 1921, p. 2, col. 4.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, September 25, 1927, part viii, p. 24, col. 1; *Sunday World Herald* (Omaha), February 18, 1951, p. 8A.

by individuals or corporations conducting business outside of Omaha and Lincoln. Occasionally, one of these companies sent a truck out of the city for a distance of forty or fifty miles. The moving of household goods was perhaps the most important purpose of such trips, for these motor trucks, compared with railroad freight service, could do the work with half the handling and at a lower cost. Besides, a family did not have to wait several days for its goods.⁸² Early in 1919 there was considerable increase in trucking; smaller cities and villages were served by trucks from Omaha, Lincoln, and other larger places. This increase was due partly to a recent increase in freight rates and partly to the greater convenience of the direct deliveries which trucks made. Most of these trips were for short distances, rarely exceeding seventy-five miles.⁸³ Farmers, too, took up the use of trucks rapidly. Early in 1920 a government survey found 2,739 farmers in the state using trucks.⁸⁴ When in June 1920, a load of hogs was hauled by truck from Hampton to Omaha, a distance of 120 miles, it was a matter of state-wide news.⁸⁵

The chicken hatching business and the sale of baby chicks was another business which had its beginnings at about this time. State papers mention two early hatcheries, one at Superior and one in Howard County. The production of baby chicks increased steadily until in 1929 more than eight million were sold in Nebraska alone.⁸⁶ For a short

⁸² In June 1918 the author hired a Lincoln trucking company to move his household goods from Nehawka to Lincoln. It proved a difficult matter, for the roads were not good enough and the van and tires were not sturdy enough. When the family goods were again moved by the same company from Lincoln to Blue Springs in August 1921 there was not the slightest difficulty.

⁸³ *Ravenna News*, July 11, 1919, p. 6, col. 5; January 23, 1920, p. 8; *West Point Republican*, January 24, 1919, p. 5, col. 3; February 7, 1919, p. 2, col. 4; *Holt County Independent*, July 29, 1921, p. 6, col. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ravenna News*, March 12, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

⁸⁵ *West Point Republican*, July 2, 1920, p. 6, col. 3.

⁸⁶ *The Enterprise*, June 10, 1920, p. 6, col. 6; *Friend Sentinel*, February 10, 1921, p. 2, col. 4; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Agriculture*, IV, 687.

time sorghum mills reminiscent of pioneer days, increased.⁸⁷ Among other industries that started at this time were packing plants at Grand Island and Alliance,⁸⁸ a factory for canning carp at O'Neill,⁸⁹ cereal mills,⁹⁰ alfalfa mills, farmers' co-operative elevators, and fertilizer factories. Some of these enterprises are still in existence.

Some of the new companies, however, seem to have existed mainly for the purpose of selling stock. The Hebb Motors Company of Havelock succeeded in selling stock to the amount of \$3,250,000. With an indebtedness of nearly \$1,500,000, it was declared insolvent by the federal court and ordered sold. At auction the plant brought \$110,000. Not a penny was ever realized for the stock sold. In all, nearly \$5,000,000 vanished from the state in this crash.⁹¹ It left many of Lincoln's wealthy men financially ruined, and one Lincoln bank was so badly undermined that it was sold to a rival to save its assets. During 1919 and 1920 considerable stock was sold in the Lincoln Automobile and Tractor School. Early in 1922 a grand jury indicted two Lincoln men because of these sales, charging them with conspiracy and obtaining money under false pretenses.⁹²

During 1919 and 1920 stock salesmen were very plentiful in Nebraska. They seem to have found it easy to evade the "Blue Sky" laws, and farmers especially seemed eager to part with their money. Estimates as to the amount of money taken by these swindlers varied all the way from \$10,000,000 to \$90,000,000.⁹³ Probably it was nearer the

⁸⁷ *Ravenna News*, September 12, 1919, p. 8, col. 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1920, p. 7, col. 4; January 21, 1921, p. 7, col. 3; *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, (Alliance, Nebraska), March 15, 1921, p. 1, col. 1; April 22, 1921, p. 1, col. 1.

⁸⁹ *West Point Republican*, January 9, 1920, p. 2, col. 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1920, p. 6, col. 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1920, p. 6, col. 1; *Holt County Independent*, July 8, 1921, p. 6.

⁹² *Holt County Independent*, February 17, 1922, p. 6, col. 5.

⁹³ *Ravenna News*, May 16, 1919, p. 9, col. 4; December 19, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; June 11, 1920, p. 8, col. 5; August 27, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; *West Point Republican*, January 31, 1919, p. 6, col. 1.

latter figure. The farmers of Cheyenne County alone are said to have paid out nearly a million dollars for worthless stocks.⁹⁴

Scarcely better than the blue sky salesmen were the promoters of oil wells. These men came into a neighborhood and leased oil rights on much of the land in the vicinity. They then proceeded to collect money to finance the drilling, brought in a drilling rig, and began to sink a well. They were usually aided by a local committee, whose members had visions of sudden wealth. Indeed, sometimes the local enthusiasts did not wait for a promoter to come into the locality, but, self-deluded, they organized a committee, pledged money for drilling, and then contracted with some well driller to sink the well. The well drillers continued to work as long as the money came in, but when interest lagged and contributions ceased, they pulled up stakes and went to another locality where people were willing to pay good money to see them sink a well. Sometimes it was necessary to sink two wells in order to use up all the money that had been contributed. Of course no report of what was found was ever made to the people who paid for the drilling. If anyone received any benefit from these holes that were drilled here and there over the state it certainly was not the people who paid for the work. Some of the places where these test wells were sunk were Harrison, Potter, Lakeside, Riverton, Red Cloud, Chadron, Bassett, and Blue Springs.⁹⁵

By 1921 old established firms in the state were feeling financial pressure. Prices were uncertain and credit could scarcely be obtained. In August the Nye-Schneider-Fowler Elevator Company of Fremont, one of the largest grain buying corporations in the country, with nearly

⁹⁴ *Holt County Independent*, April 8, 1921, p. 6, col. 5.

⁹⁵ *Ravenna News*, April 11, 1919, p. 6, col. 7; April 18, 1919, p. 3, col. 4; May 23, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; October 10, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; February 27, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; August 20, 1920, p. 8, col. 4; November 5, 1920, p. 2, col. 4; *Holt County Independent*, May 27, 1921, p. 2, col. 6.

two hundred elevators at various shipping points in Nebraska and other states, found itself in financial difficulties. Creditors and stockholders worked together on a plan to carry on the business. The company was reorganized as the Nye-Schneider-Jenks Elevator Company and headquarters were moved from Fremont, where they had been since 1887, to Omaha. It was reported that the reorganized company received a loan of \$2,000,000 to enable it to carry on the business.⁹⁶

The Wells-Abbot-Nieman Milling Company of Schuyler was not so fortunate. It was the largest flour milling concern in Nebraska. The mills were built in 1903 at a cost of \$600,000 and employed 150 men. After a plan to reorganize the corporation failed, the company was declared bankrupt and was sold at receiver's sale late in 1921 for \$90,000, not enough to satisfy the creditors. So the stockholders received nothing. In March 1922, a group of Schuyler businessmen bought the company for \$250,000, so that the business might be carried on.⁹⁷

One of the most serious consequences of the war to the state as a whole, especially in a financial way, was the disruption of the banking business. Between 1907 and 1920 there had been only two failures of state banks in Nebraska, one each in 1914 and 1916. In the meantime the number of state banks had increased from 601 in November 1907, to 937 in November 1919; capital had increased from \$10,000,000 to \$25,000,000; total deposits from \$12,500,000 to \$134,000,000; loans had reached \$252,000,000, the highest in the history of the state banking department. In 1920 the chain of bank failures began, with five that year. The next year there were twenty-four,

⁹⁶ *Holt County Independent*, August 12, 1921, p. 6; September 2, 1921, p. 2, col. 4; September 23, p. 2, col. 6; February 10, 1922, p. 6, col. 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, August 12, 1921, p. 6, col. 4; September 9, 1921, p. 6, col. 6; September 30, 1921, p. 6, col. 5; October 14, 1921, p. 2, col. 5; December 2, 1921, p. 6, col. 4; April 7, 1922, p. 3, col. 3; *Schuyler Sun* (Schuyler, Nebraska), November 24, 1921, p. 1, col. 3; March 30, 1922, p. 1, col. 3; April 27, p. 1, col. 4.

and in 1922 there were twenty-one. On account of these failures the bank guarantee fund had paid out more than \$5,500,000, a sum equal to more than 20 percent of the capital of all the state banks. By this time losses had been so heavy and the state guaranty fund was so depleted that it was felt that something must be done to check the failures. It was believed that, if collections could be made on a sufficient number of loans, most of the state banks could be saved. The legislature, in a special session called by Governor McKelvie, authorized the formation of a Guaranty Fund Commission to operate insolvent banks. It was hoped that in this way the disaster would be checked. But these failures set off a chain reaction which eventually resulted in the repeal of the Guaranty Law and the reorganization of the state banking system.⁹⁸

Like everything else, labor suffered its setbacks from the depression. The shortage of labor so noticeable in 1919 and 1920 was soon a thing of the past. Railroads and other corporations laid off part of their help. In 1922 and 1923 the state suffered to some extent from strikes, especially the Burlington shopmen's strike. This strike was lost, however, for the labor market had become a buyers' market again.

Cultural as well as economic changes resulted from the war. One such change was the decreased use of foreign languages in Nebraska. Before the war was over all but three or four of the German language newspapers in the state had died, either because of boycotts of advertisers or because of pressure from the Council of Defense. During the war many attempts were made to prevent the speaking of German on the streets or over the telephone.⁹⁹ Although

⁹⁸ *Nebraska Blue Book*, 1924, p. 272; *Report of Bureau of Banking, Nebraska*, 1929, pp. XX-XXVIII; *Nebraska Blue Book*, 1936, p. 327; *The Hamilton County Republican-Register* (Aurora, Nebraska), March 21, 1930, p. 1, col. 3; p. 6, col. 5; *Harlan County Journal* (Alma, Nebraska), October 31, 1930, p. 7.

⁹⁹ *West Point Republican*, January 10, 1919, p. 6, col. 5; March 7, 1919, p. 3, col. 3; May 16, 1919, p. 7, col. 5.



(Photo, courtesy the Omaha *World-Herald*)

Exterior of Douglas County Court House, showing damage done by mob in riot of 1919



(Photo, courtesy the Omaha *World-Herald*)

The office of the Douglas County clerk was wrecked in riot of 1919.

the courts upheld the right of anyone who wished to use the German language, its use diminished rapidly.

From the days of Nebraska's earliest settlement politicians had capitalized on the foreign vote. Aliens who had taken out their first papers, which was simply a declaration of their intention to become citizens, were allowed to exercise all the rights of citizenship, even voting and holding office.¹⁰⁰ This situation was one of the causes of resentment toward the foreigner, a situation for which the alien was not to blame. In the fall of 1918 an amendment to the state constitution was adopted requiring that the right of suffrage be restricted to citizens, either native born or fully naturalized.¹⁰¹ There seems to be no record as to how many men lost the privilege of suffrage through this amendment, but it was estimated that there were 3,000 in Douglas County alone.¹⁰²

The Nebraska legislature in the spring of 1919 passed a series of Americanization laws. These laws denied aliens the right to vote in all elections, including school elections and school district meetings; denied aliens the right to hold any office or official position, either by election or appointment; provided that only citizens might teach in any school, public, private, or parochial; provided for the listing of all aliens in the state; required that official and legal notices be published in English language newspapers only; provided that all public meetings must be held in English, religious meetings and lodge meetings only excepted; forbade the use or teaching of any except the English language in any school below the ninth grade; provided for the

¹⁰⁰ At Nehawka in April 1918 a German-born merchant was a member of the school board, although he had taken out only his first papers. Attention was called to the situation when he had to register as an enemy alien. Other members of the school board suggested that his resignation would be accepted, and he resigned.

See also the case of I. J. Thompsen, county clerk of Kearney County in the *Minden Courier* (Minden, Nebraska), March 20, 1919, p. 5, col. 4; April 3, 1919, p. 1, col. 1; April 24, 1919, p. 10, cols. 2, 3, 4.

¹⁰¹ *West Point Republican*, November 29, 1918, p. 6, col. 5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, February 14, 1919, p. 3, col. 2

regulation of private, denominational and parochial schools, setting their standards, providing for their inspection and for the certification of their teachers.¹⁰³ The only one of these laws to which serious opposition developed was the so-called Siman Law, which prohibited the teaching of foreign languages in any school below the ninth grade. It was assailed by German Lutherans, Evangelical Lutherans, and Catholics. To make a test case Robert T. Meyer taught German half an hour a day to a boy in Zion parochial school in Hamilton County. He was fined twenty-five dollars and costs, and the case was appealed.¹⁰⁴ The Nebraska State Supreme Court upheld the decision of the lower court. However, on appeal, the United States Supreme Court, June 4, 1923, declared the Siman Law unconstitutional because it deprived a person of his liberty within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment. The decision was not unanimous as Judges Holmes and Sutherland dissented.¹⁰⁵

Although the defendants in the case had won the right to teach German, their cause was lost, for pro-German ideals disintegrated rapidly.¹⁰⁶ While probably more than 50 percent of the German Lutheran churches returned to the use of German as soon as the war was over,¹⁰⁷ some congregations opposed further use of the German language. At Fremont the Salem Lutheran Church voted unanimously to withdraw from the German-speaking synod and unite with the English-speaking synod.¹⁰⁸ The Turn-Verein, which had probably been more influential than the churches in holding immigrants to their German ways, declined rapidly. In 1920 the Fremont Turn-Verein

¹⁰³ *Western Laborer*, April 26, 1919, p. 1, col. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ravenna News*, May 16, 1919, p. 9, col. 4; September 19, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; July 9, 1920, p. 8, col. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *U. S. Supreme Court Reports*, CCLXII, 390-403, 412-413.

¹⁰⁶ *Ralph F. Bischoff, Nazi Conquest Through German Culture* (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 146-147, 152, 168.

¹⁰⁷ *West Point Republican*, February 7, 1919, p. 2, col. 4; February 28, 1919, p. 5, col. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1920, p. 6, col. 1.

disbanded and voted to sell their building.¹⁰⁹ In 1922 the Plattsmouth Turn-Verein, organized in 1887, disbanded.¹¹⁰ Many of these societies had disbanded during the war and were never revived.

One of the results of the agitation for Americanization was the increased interest in adult citizenship classes. A few of these classes were found in the state in 1917, but after the war ended they grew steadily.¹¹¹ The alien was no longer so shamefully neglected by the average citizen nor exploited politically to such an extent as he had previously been.

The problem of the returning soldier was not a new one in Nebraska. A large number of Mexican War veterans were among the first settlers in the territory in the 1850's. After the Civil War large numbers of veterans flocked to the state, and many communities were actually soldier colonies. Here the G. A. R. operated as a pressure group for the Republican party, until its power was shaken by the farmers' revolt in 1890. The organization of the American Legion in Nebraska began in the summer of 1919.¹¹² By September there were forty-eight posts in the state,¹¹³ and in October the Legion held its first state convention in Omaha.¹¹⁴ From the very first it acted as a pressure group. During the legislative session of 1919 it not only backed the Americanization bills, but demanded that they be passed.

A tendency to lawlessness, which had shown itself during the war years, continued into the period immediately following the war. The influx of Negro workers from the South to relieve the labor shortage during the war caused race tensions to develop. In Omaha laborers

¹⁰⁹ *Ravenna News*, April 16, 1920, p. 10, col. 5.

¹¹⁰ *Holt County Independent*, June 9, 1922, p. 6, col. 4.

¹¹¹ *Ravenna News*, November 14, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; March 12, 1920, p. 8, col. 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, August 1, 1919, p. 6, col. 5.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1919, p. 8, col. 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, October 24, 1919, p. 10, col. 5.

became hostile when Negroes were brought in to take the place of white men on strike,¹¹⁵ and there were frequent complaints of an increase of crimes by Negroes.¹¹⁶ Such tensions were new to Nebraska where a small Negro population had lived at peace with its white neighbors since territorial times.

Lawless elements in Omaha erupted in mob violence when on Sunday evening, September 28, 1919, a mob of several hundred men, with thousands more looking on, wrecked the million dollar Douglas County court house, destroyed valuable public records, attempted to hang Mayor Ed. P. Smith, and then vented its vengeance on a Negro suspect they had dragged from the jail. In the riot of destruction that followed, store fronts were smashed and guns and ammunition taken wherever found. The police were powerless. Troops were rushed to the city from Fort Crook and Fort Omaha and the city was placed under martial law.¹¹⁷ The blame for this riot was laid to the encouragement of mob spirit and lawlessness which had been manifest in the state during the whole war period and to the race tensions that had been built up in the city.¹¹⁸ It cost \$800,000.00 to repair the court house.¹¹⁹

For several years the mob spirit survived in the state and unpopular minorities suffered humiliation and injury. One of these was the Nonpartisan League, which had earned its unpopularity by criticizing the war. Speakers were mobbed, people in the audience slugged, and the meetings broken up. Although the members appealed to

¹¹⁵ *Nebraska City News*, October 3, 1919, p. 1, cols. 4, 5; *Western Laborer*, October 11, 1919, p. 1, col. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ravenna News*, March 28, 1919, p. 3, col. 3; August 15, 1919, p. 2, col. 5; October 3, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; October 17, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; May 14, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; *True Voice* (Omaha), October 3, 1919, p. 4, cols. 2, 3.

¹¹⁷ *True Voice*, October 3, 1919, p. 4, cols. 2, 3; *Nebraska City News*, October 3, 1919, p. 1, cols. 2, 4, 5, 7; *Scribner Rustler* (Scribner, Nebraska), October 3, 1919, p. 2, col. 1.

¹¹⁸ *Ravenna News*, November 28, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; *Nebraska Union Farmer*, October 8, 1919, p. 4, col. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Ravenna News*, September 17, 1920, p. 7, col. 4.

the Governor and courts for protection it did little good.¹²⁰ In the fall of 1920 Floyd Bollen, an independent candidate for attorney general, and Mrs. Marie Weeks, an independent candidate for Congress, both supported by the Non-partisan League, were egged when they attempted to speak at Wayne.¹²¹ Meanwhile a "witch hunt" on a national scale was being conducted, and anyone accused of belonging to the I. W. W. or of being a Communist stood a good chance of being jailed or deported.¹²² By the fall of 1921 units of the Ku Klux Klan were being organized in Nebraska.¹²³ During their campaign of organized hatred and blackmail they were credited with defeating some of the more useful officials in the state.

After the war Nebraska was politically conservative to an extreme. The constitutional convention, elected in 1919, was composed for the most part of men of high character and conservative political convictions. As a result the new constitution contained only those changes that experience had shown were absolutely necessary. In the elections of 1918 and 1920 the Democratic party was disastrously defeated in the state, although in 1922 the party began to return to favor and elected the governor and half the members of Congress, though losing the legislature.

This conservative tendency was shown when the state legislature in 1921 enacted and Governor McKelvie signed, a law to regulate picketing in Nebraska during strikes. Labor unions attacked the new law violently, referring to it as the Anti-Picketing Law. They circulated a petition for a referendum on the measure and were successful in

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, August 22, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; September 12, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; September 19, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; November 21, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; *West Point Republican*, April 25, 1919, p. 9, col. 3; April 9, 1920, p. 3, col. 2.

¹²¹ *West Point Republican*, September 10, 1920, p. 2, col. 2.

¹²² *Ravenna News*, August 8, 1919, p. 6; October 17, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; November 21, 1919, p. 8, col. 4; November 28, 1919, p. 8, col. 5; January 16, 1920, p. 8; May 12, 1922, p. 2.

¹²³ *Holt County Independent*, September 16, 1921, p. 6, col. 5.

securing sufficient signatures to place the measure on the ballot. This resulted in a suspension of the law until after the election in November 1922. The referendum vote on the Anti-Picketing Law was decisive, for it was approved by a majority of 45,682; in fact only fourteen counties failed to give it a majority. In the larger centers of population including Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, Hastings, Beatrice, Fremont, Kearney, Falls City, Fairbury, Scottsbluff, York and Nebraska City, it received a majority.¹²⁴ This law has since been a part of the permanent labor policy of the state.

"Back to Normal" was the slogan in 1920. Bring back the good old days! But the good old days did not return. Farm prices went lower and lower; the demand for labor became less and less and the wage offered was lower and lower; more and more banks failed, consuming whatever savings the people had; migration from the state increased, as people began to search for a place where living would be easier. "Back to Normal." There was no such thing. Times had changed. The future might not be the road to progress, but it would not be like the past.

¹²⁴ *The Enterprise*, December 14, 1922, p. 7, col. 5.