



## The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1957

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Chart: Library inventory



(Photo, 1953, courtesy **The Lincoln Star**)

Arthur Carmody

President, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1955-1957



James L. Sellers  
Incoming President, Nebraska State Historical Society

# THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## IN 1957

BY WILLIAM D. AESCHBACHER

**I**N Nebraska, as in the nation, 1957 has seen a continued increase in interest in our past. This increased interest is especially apparent as people get to the specific, the individual, the local, and identify themselves with it. The Nebraska State Historical Society has been affected by this increasing interest, partly as a beneficiary, partly in furnishing leadership, guidance and stimulation to the growth of interest. The success of the Society in providing leadership and services necessary to meet expanding opportunities and to fulfill its responsibility to develop this growth in interest in our heritage rests to a large degree on the support of its membership, particularly as this is expressed through the able service of its Executive Board. In particular, I must express my appreciation and gratitude to the Society's President, Arthur Carmody, for his con-

*Dr. William D. Aeschbacher is Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This report was presented in part at the 79th annual meeting of the Society at Lincoln, 28 September 1957.*

stant support and advice. Also, I would be indeed derelict not to mention the continued unselfish service of James E. Lawrence and the great loss suffered by the Society and the community at large in his recent death. Finally, any accomplishments that this report may reflect are due in great part to the continued effective service of my very capable and loyal staff.

For the biennium beginning July 1, 1957 and ending June 30, 1959 the State Legislature appropriated \$245,000 for the Society, and reappropriated an unexpended balance of \$11,489.31, for a total appropriation of \$256,489.31. In addition, the sum of \$27,000 plus an unexpended balance of \$3,081.40 was appropriated for the Fort Robinson Museum. The appropriation for each fund is slightly less than we had available for the biennium just past. The curtailment of funds will prevent any considerable expansion of the Society's program, but the existing program can be carried on, and certain improvements and expansion can be made in that program.

A major responsibility of the Society this year has been helping to entertain a concentration of meetings in Lincoln of national and regional professional organizations. These included the Mountain Plains Museum Conference in October, the Plains Conference for Archeology in November and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the American Association of Museums in May.

The preparation for these meetings involved a great deal of time and planning by the staff, since the meetings were in effect a measure of the quality of our work. During the course of the conventions, representatives from historical societies and museums from all over the country visited our building and inspected the Museum, Library, and other facilities.

It was a source of great satisfaction to me and to the staff members directly responsible, to hear the uniformly complimentary remarks on the appearance of the building, on the Museum exhibits and organization, on the Library's

resources and efficiency, and on the scope and effectiveness of our educational program. Since the meetings we have received evidences of the sincerity of these compliments in the large number of requests that have been received for information as to how we carry on different parts of our program. There have been numerous requests for sets of pictures of our Museum exhibits and for sets of our available educational materials from the people who saw our establishment during these meetings. At least two institutions were so impressed that they sent personnel on a special trip to visit our Museum and see our techniques.

It was an especial satisfaction to help entertain the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in our new building. The Mississippi Valley Historical Association was begun under the leadership of Clarence S. Paine when he was Superintendent of this Society. It has always had a close connection with the Nebraska State Historical Society. This has been manifest in the individuals holding office in the Association, in the fact that the Association has met in Lincoln periodically, and in the present relationship whereby the Director of the Society is Secretary-Treasurer of the Association. The opportunity to show our new building to this old friend among historical groups was a happy occasion.

In the recent session of the legislature several bills were passed that were of particular interest to the Society and to its members. One was a bill to establish a historic markers committee. This bill provided for a three-man committee consisting of the State Engineer, the Director of the Nebraska Resources Division, and the Director of the State Historical Society to set up a program of highway markers. The provisions of the bill are in general conformity with proposals of the historical society previously reported, except that the committee is substituted for the commission that had been recommended.

Two other bills were passed at the request of local historical societies to gain permission for establishing a

more definite base of financial support, especially for the founding of local museums. One of the bills was designed for the use of a historical society, operating under its present organization. Under this bill, a tax fund would be controlled by the local society and used for the purposes its directors indicated. The other bill was designed to set up a municipal or county museum in a county or town controlled by the voters of the area through a museum board. A number of societies have asked for advice from the State Historical Society as to which bill they should utilize in seeking financial support for expanding their activities to include establishing a museum. In every case where this has not already been done, local societies are being advised to take two necessary preliminary steps. The society should incorporate as a nonprofit corporation and should file its corporation papers. It should also request federal tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service, both for its own protection and for the benefit of members or friends of the society who may contemplate gifts or endowments for the society. I have found it impossible to give any blanket advice on which law may be the more suitable. The processes for getting the law adopted, and the functioning of the laws are quite different. I am glad to discuss the possible use and effect of these laws with the representatives of any community interested. One law will be more advantageous under some conditions, and the other one will be superior in other situations.

Membership of the Society now stands at 2,342. Two hundred and eighteen new members joined during the year. Ways of increasing membership are being explored to build further on the spectacular increase experienced at the time of the Territorial Centennial.

For the first time since the first year in the new building, the number of Museum visitors has increased. This year we had 81,814 visitors as compared with 79,972 last year, which represents an increase of almost two thousand. A decrease in attendance for a few years after the building was opened was expected, but we are very

happy to reverse the trend. Promotion of the Museum in the form of informational brochures distributed through various available channels has been a factor in the increasing interest and the number of visitors. Brochures were prepared and used for the Museum here and the Museum at Fort Robinson. To meet a constant request at the sales desk, we have also prepared a souvenir booklet on the Museum. It is now in the hands of the printer, and we hope to have it for distribution in the near future.

During the year increased emphasis has been placed on adding to our archival collecting, particularly our public records. Inquiries were sent to the various state offices and to the county boards, pointing out the Society's function and responsibility in this matter, and inquiring about materials that should properly be examined with the view of placing them in our archives. There has been some response from state offices, and we have been able to obtain county records in a few cases. Our activity in county record gathering has so far been limited to records from only a few counties. Other contacts have been made, however, and it is our plan to acquire enough county records so that we can more successfully evaluate them and establish more definite procedures as to what we will and what we will not attempt to preserve in this field.

We have also gained a number of valuable collections of personal papers. In active attempts to acquire additional collections of a personal nature, the Norden Club project was again most important. Dr. Danker made several trips on this project and collected items of several kinds, including a number of tape recorded interviews.

The staff has represented the Society before many groups in the state, making fifty-seven appearances. These included eleven by Dr. Danker; nine by Mr. Grange; one by Miss Johnson; two by Mr. Kivett; one by Dr. White; four by Mrs. Winkelman; and twenty-nine by me.

Dr. White was elected Vice-President and President-elect of the Nebraska Library Association. Mr. Kivett acted



as chairman of the Mountain Plains Museum Conference when it met in Lincoln. The Society was represented at meetings of the American Historical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the American Library Association, and the dedication of the Harry S. Truman Library, besides at the Lincoln meetings of the Mountain Plains Museum Conference, the Plains Conference for Archeology, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the American Association of Museums. Mrs. Winkelman presented a paper at the meeting of the American Association for State and Local History, and Dr. White and I gave papers at the American Association of Museums meeting. I continued to serve as Secretary-Treasurer of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and was selected for membership on the Board of Directors of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute. Dr. J. L. Sellers, President of the Society, is the representative of the University of Nebraska on that Board. As of September 1 there were twenty-six permanent employees on the Society staff, including seven part-time and five temporary employees.

The thirty-eighth year of publication found *Nebraska History* bringing its readers a varied menu of historical material. Contributors were from the Society staff and twenty-one educational institutions, historical societies, and publishing houses. The material in the magazine covered subjects ranging from Fort Atkinson and articles on Indian history to the automobile and an article on the 1920's. The other publications of the Society have been the *Historical News Letter* and the weekly column *Out of Old Nebraska*.

The activity of the Society in the field of television was hampered by the curtailment of activities on KUON, the University's station, while it prepared to move into its own studios. A television series is now being planned to start in November. Mrs. Winkelman served as consultant for a group of University speech students who prepared a series of radio documentary scripts entitled "Is this

Your Town?" The series of eleven programs was carried by five radio stations in the state.

More detailed reports on the activity of the three divisions of the Society follow. Under the leadership of Dr. White, Mr. Kivett, and Mrs. Winkelman, these departments have continued to maintain their high standards of service.

## THE MUSEUM

The year was one of heavy activity for the Museum. The coming to Lincoln of numbers of museum people in connection with the museum conferences held here put the museum on exhibition and called for increased attention to housekeeping activities, as well as giving the staff additional responsibilities as hosts.

A number of special displays were on exhibit during the year. Among these were the portraits of the Governors' wives and the silver service from the U. S. S. "Nebraska" on loan to the Society during the construction of the new Governor's mansion. In July a display of western paintings featuring the paintings of Edwin Fulwider that were used to illustrate an article about Fort Robinson were loaned to the Society by the Ford Motor Company. During national coin week displays of two cases of coins from the collection of Mr. Elmer Nelson of Lincoln were exhibited.

Forty-two units of displays were changed in the Museum, with the construction of the Peter Sarpy trading post interior being the largest new display. Six new displays were prepared for the State Fair exhibit. In addition, the Museum prepared six display units for the Ashland Centennial.

A total of 188 donations were received here and at Fort Robinson. The items accepted add to our valuable backlog for the construction of future exhibits and for

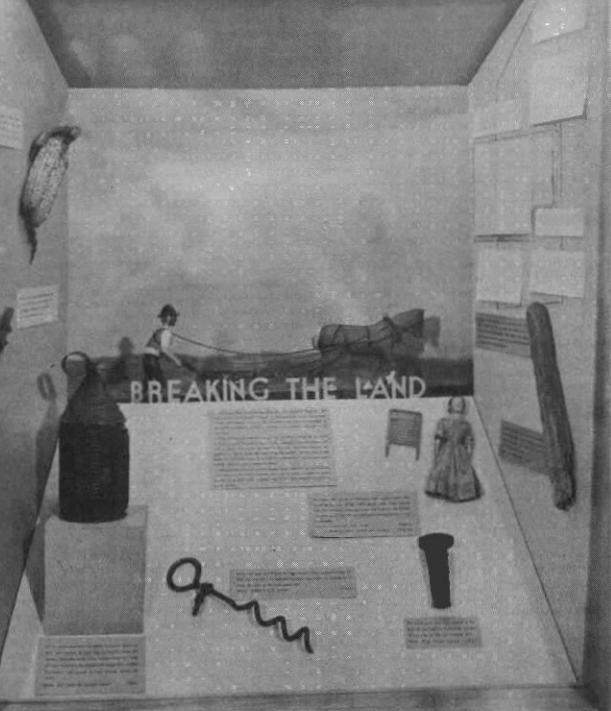
study, although most of them will not be used for immediate display. A lack of storage space for large items remains a problem for the Museum.

The current interest in local museum activity is ever apparent, and an important part of the Museum's activity has been frequent consultation with local groups regarding their museum plans.

Archeological research continued to be an important function of the Museum. During the summer Mr. Kivett carried on excavations at a site near Oakland. The site included four living levels which suggest a single group or closely related groups of people. These people lacked pottery, and the tools and food remains suggest that they depended on hunting and gathering wild plants for a food supply. Bison remains made up the greatest bulk of the animal remains. There were also fish, turtle and fresh water mussel remains. Final dates for the site await charcoal tests and other data, but estimates on the age of the sites have ranged up to 2,500 years. We have little other evidence of human habitation in eastern Nebraska over one thousand to fifteen hundred years old. Evidence of the earlier cultures has been found more commonly in western Nebraska. It appears that this site will help to fill in the record of the early inhabitants in eastern Nebraska.

The destruction of archeological sites, actual and potential, is an increasing concern of the Society. A number of new activities, among them agricultural practices in terracing and in leveling fields for irrigation, the expansion of building activities around urban centers, flood control projects and road building change the surface of the land and destroy sites. In the past we have been able to co-operate with federal agencies to investigate potential sites in flood control projects before they were altered. There are a number of such sites still under consideration for further work in Nebraska.

Increased road building activity, especially the interstate highway program, has directed our interest to that field. An agreement with the state highway depart-



New Exhibits Greet the Visitor to the Museum.

Society's Field Party Excavates Site at Logan Creek, Burt County, Summer, 1957.





Above—Library staff members discuss microfilm program.  
Left to right, Dr. John B. White, Mrs. Mildred Kohler, and  
Mrs. Elizabeth S. Radtke.



Below—Peter LeClaire, Ponca leader, explains tribal  
customs to Cub Scouts.



ment for notification of highway building plans, co-operation in the preservation of materials, and financial assistance in carrying on salvage work in certain contingencies has been initiated. Unfortunately, the expansion of a program of highway salvage activity, either in surveying proposed routes for possible sites or in carrying on increased research activities, is hampered by lack of enough trained personnel on the Society's staff for a large increase in such activity.

The Fort Robinson Museum operated through its first full year. The Museum there is under the immediate supervision of Roger Grange, Jr. A total of 13,476 people visited the Museum during the year. The tourist visitors increased in number over the summer of 1956, and we expect more tourist visitors as the area is further developed and receives more publicity.

Through a weekly radio program over KCSR, Chadron, and appearances before a number of organized groups in western Nebraska, Mr. Grange is effectively presenting the Museum to the people of the area.

## THE LIBRARY

In the operation of the Library several changes in procedure have been effected. The most important dealt with a readjustment of activities of the Librarian and the Archivist. The Librarian has assumed direct control of the record making and arrangement of manuscripts and archives while the Archivist is devoting more attention to collecting archival materials and to answering queries made of the Society. In making this changeover, the record system which had been put into use in 1950 was replaced by a new system. Formerly the collections had been organized alphabetically, but the continuing expansion of the collections, and especially the acquisition of large collections made it increasingly difficult to plan space for future growth, and extensive shifting of collections was increa-

singly necessary. A numerical system was substituted, with each collection being identified by a number. The 358 collections in our archives are now catalogued and located according to this number system. Our record of archival holdings is up to date except that some of the record descriptions on collections are quite brief. A more detailed listing or cataloguing of these collections will await the completion of more pressing tasks.

A second major project has been the carrying out of an actual inventory of the picture collection, so that we have an accurate count of our photographs. We have a sizeable and long-standing backlog of uncatalogued pictures. Our procedure on current acquisitions is to catalogue those of most immediate use, and place those of less immediate connection with the state's history in the backlog for future processing. This appears to be the most effective program for making our picture collection as useful as possible.

The microfilming program has operated very well. An agreement was made with the *Nebraska Farmer* and that magazine was microfilmed with a generous subsidy from the publishers who acquired a microfilm copy for their file. As our microfilming progresses, we have been able to add additional files that we obtain by loan or gift from publishers or interested citizens. These are valuable additions to our newspaper collections, but we find that it slows our microfilming since mending the papers becomes an increasingly difficult task. These papers have not been bound in most cases and are apt to be torn and wrinkled, so that much work in mending and pressing is necessary before they can be microfilmed.

The library collections continued to grow. A total of 2,739 volumes was added to the catalogue, including nearly six hundred from the backlog. One hundred six maps were also added. We regularly received 299 Nebraska newspapers, 248 Nebraska periodicals and 259 periodicals published outside the state. Four thousand, six hundred

new prints and negatives were added to the picture collection, the largest portion of this being over 3,500 coming from Mr. Val Kuska in the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad collection. Six hundred twenty-six reels of microfilm were added to our microfilm library. The bindery bound 477 volumes and repaired 84 besides binding 121 volumes of newspapers and making covers for an additional 299 newspapers. These acquisitions leave the library with the following inventory:

Category	1956	Additions	Total 1957
Volumes	34,580	2,739	37,319
Newspaper vols.			19,666 (actual count)
Maps	941	106	1,047
Microfilm reels	3,399	626	4,025
Broadsides	56	2	58
Pictures		4,600	60,541 (actual count)

Library patrons in the reading room and newspaper room totaled 2,832. A large percentage of these visitors asked for assistance from the library staff to find material or information for them. Nearly two hundred and fifty of the questions were of a nature that took detailed searching to find the answers. Besides helping visitors in the building the library staff answered 128 telephone questions and 346 mail inquiries.

### DIVISION OF EDUCATION

Much of the activity of the Education Division was a continuation of programs started previously, but several new features were added. The puppet theatre continued to be a popular educational activity for elementary school children. Three plays were offered: "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." Forty-six puppet shows were presented to approximately 2,691 children. In addition a special TV puppet production was given for the Mountain-Plains Museum Conference.

Special auditorium programs, consisting of a short informal talk on a specific topic, a demonstration of selected Museum items, the showing of a selected film, and a guided tour of the parts of the Museum pertaining to the topic studied were again offered. A new and popular program developed this past year was "Nebraska Folk Songs." This was presented by Roger Schroeder, University of Nebraska music student and guitarist. Each child was given a mimeographed sheet containing words to songs which either originated in Nebraska or were sung by Nebraska pioneers. Mr. Schroeder then introduced each song with a demonstration of Museum items associated with it and taught the children to sing the song.

A major educational project was a special afternoon program on Indians designed to co-ordinate with the Cub Scout theme for March. The program consisted of a short film, authentic Indian songs and dances by a Ponca Indian leader, Peter LeClaire, and a demonstration of Indian craft items selected from the Museum's collections. The program proved to be so popular that it was given nineteen times to a total of 1,820 Cub Scouts. Including the nineteen Indian programs, a total of sixty-six programs was given to about 3,400 people during the year. Guided tours were given to 121 groups in addition to the puppet shows and program activity.

The Society was again very ably helped by Lincoln Junior League volunteer workers. Seventeen League members helped produce the puppet shows, developed and presented auditorium programs, and served as guides.

A special brochure for teachers and group leaders was prepared, which described the educational services, and included a reservation blank for a guided tour, program,

or puppet show. Approximately 9,800 of these were distributed to teachers, school officials, and club leaders. During the spring months when traffic was heaviest in the Museum and when guide service could not always be provided, a special mimeographed booklet was prepared to assist teachers in planning a trip to the Museum and to help them take children through without a guide. The booklet stressed the educational objectives of a Museum visit and suggested rules of etiquette to be observed by groups in the Museum. Another aid provided to teachers and group leaders was a mimeographed questionnaire on the Museum. This questionnaire was distributed at the reception desk and filled out by the children while in the Museum. The questions asked about the exhibits provided specific objectives for the children in looking at the exhibits and were used as a basis for class discussion after the groups returned to their classrooms.

Increasing numbers of our regular educational leaflets were distributed. Over 19,000 of these leaflets were sent out to teachers.

The facilities of the building were used by various organizations throughout the year. The State Highway Institute held a series of three sessions in the Board Room in the spring, and the Law Enforcement Institute met in the Auditorium for five days in June, and a number of organizations held programs in the building.

### PROSPECTS FOR 1958

A glance at the 1956 report reveals that no project of a year ago has been finally completed. At the same time progress has been made towards attaining all of the ends indicated.

The year should see the first signs erected in the state's historical markers program. Funds are not available for a full-time field representative, but provisions for more field work are being made. Local historical societies continue to develop, and the State Society co-operates with

them in a variety of ways. Steps have been taken to work out a program of co-operation with highway authorities in relation to highway salvage.

The attempts that have been made during the last year to publicize the Society and particularly the Museum will be carried further and are expected to help building attendance and Society membership. The developing interest in history noted in the first paragraph of this report should be channeled into developing an interest in the Nebraska State Historical Society. The membership of the Society can and should be extended. In the last four months a few exploratory attempts to get new members through mail solicitation have been made. Society membership has remained fairly constant since the big gain in the centennial year, and increasing interest in history should again begin to be reflected by a growth in membership. In a very real sense, membership in the Nebraska State Historical Society is one of the best bargains available today. Members tell us this often. It is a responsibility of the Society to make more interested people aware of this bargain, and additional ways to spread this information will be put into effect.

While we are proud of the collections in our Library and Museum, there is great need for selective collecting to strengthen our holdings. The Society staff is always on the lookout for materials, and it can be aided immeasurably by the assistance and co-operation of our interested members. In particular, we need additional collections of private papers and additions to our photographic collection. The Museum is also in need of a variety of materials.

I am proud of the accomplishments of the Society during the past year. With confidence in a record of solid accomplishment and with the expectation of continued growth of interest in the history of Nebraska, the Nebraska State Historical Society is embarking on a new year with the expectation of continuing to serve the people of the state in keeping with the high standards maintained by the Society in the past.