



The Nebraska State Historical Society in 1958

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Article Summary: Membership reached an all-time high in 1958, and library collections continued to grow. This article summarizes the significant improvements in all areas during the five-year period after the move of the Historical Society to its new location at 1500 R Street, Lincoln.

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: a seasonal display in the museum (dolls, teddy bears); field party excavating horse skull in Oto storage pit; Charles Ward at work in the Society's bindery; Young Latvians performing folk dances on "Yesterday in Nebraska," the Society's TV program

THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1958

BY W. D. AESCHBACHER

DURING 1958 a number of changes and improvements in the program of your State Historical Society have been worked out within the general pattern of operation established since the Society moved to its new quarters five years ago. We were able to effect these only through the whole hearted co-operation and assistance of the staff members involved. The Executive Board has been a constant source of support and strength to the Society. In particular, your President, Dr. J. L. Sellers, has unselfishly devoted many hours to the consideration of Society business at the call of the Secretary.

Membership has reached an all time high, reflecting increasing awareness of the Society and interest in the state's history. In September a new and valuable publication, *Index Guide to the Publications*, compiled by Dr. John B. White, our Librarian, became available. Designated as

Dr. W. D. Aeschbacher is Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This report was presented in part at the 80th annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln, September 27, 1958.

Volume 24 of our *Publications* series, this is the first addition to our *Publications* since 1956. Additional publications are in more immediate prospect now than at any time in the past several years. A fine annual meeting last September was followed by another excellent meeting last May in Fairbury. The enthusiasm and attendance at Society meetings indicate increased interest and activity among Society members.

Progress has been made towards reaching an agreement with the State Highway Department on notifying the Society of the discovery of archeological remains during highway construction work and for the use of federal funds for archeological salvage work on federal highway right of ways after such remains are discovered. The Society has been able to expand its acquisition of microfilm of vitally important daily papers in the state. A number of local societies have taken action to incorporate and have become more active in their programs. All of these things are indications of increased Society vitality and of increased historical interest in the state for which the State Society can take a share of the credit.

The membership as of August 31 was 2,524. This shows an addition of 409 new members and a net increase of 182 in the last year. It is the highest total membership the Society has had, surpassing the 2,373 reached in the territorial centennial year of 1954.

Nebraska History magazine continued to bring its readers a variety of historical fare, with contributions from the Society staff and from persons connected with sixteen other educational institutions. In the June 1958 issue and again in the September 1958 issue of the magazine, staff members—Donald F. Danker working with the Frank North diary, and Roger T. Grange, Jr. compiling a history of Fort Robinson—wrote articles which went beyond the normal scope of our magazine. They took material that needed to be made available for Nebraska readers and presented it in suitable form. Since we anticipate that both of these articles will have a considerable and continuing

demand, additional copies were printed, or reprinted, bound in a different cover, and these are available at the Lincoln and Fort Robinson sales desks. The publication of the *Index-Guide*, compiled by Dr. White, has been mentioned previously. Listed as No. 24 in our *Publication Series*, this will be a tremendously valuable tool for scholars working on the history of Nebraska and the region. The other publications of the Society have been the *Historical News Letter*, now in its eleventh year, and the column *Out of Old Nebraska*, which has appeared weekly since 1946.

During the year staff members made appearances for the Society before forty-five Nebraska audiences, presenting historical programs of various kinds. These were made in twenty-four towns and cities over the state. Mr. Kivett made four of these appearances, Dr. White made six, Mrs. Winkelman two, Dr. Danker nine, Mr. Grange two, and I made twenty-two. In addition, Dr. Danker made five field trips specifically to gather information and to collect materials for the Library and Museum. Mr. Kivett, Mr. Grange, and I, were also involved in field trips, both in connection with speaking engagements and solely for this purpose.

Twenty-five programs were presented in our television series over KUON. The Society reached a Nebraska audience in several other ways. Mr. Kivett participated in a program sponsored by the Greater Omaha Historical Society over WOW-TV. Miss Johnson also presented a program over WOW-TV that had previously been presented on KUON. Mr. Grange gave thirty-one (five-minute) programs on station KCSR representing the Fort Robinson Museum.

Members of the staff represented the Society at a number of national and regional meetings, including the American Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the American Museum Association, the Mountain Plains Museum Conference, the Midwest Museums Conference, the Society for American Archeologists,

the Plains Archeological Conference, the American Anthropological Association, the Mountain Plains Library Association, and the Society for American Archivists. Mrs. Winkelman participated in a panel on the program of the American Association for State and Local History last October; Mr. Grange presented a paper at the Mountain-Plains Museum Conference; Mr. Kivett presented papers at the joint meeting of the Plains Archeological Conference and the American Indian Ethnohistoric Conference, the Society for American Archeology meeting, and the Midwest Museums Conference, and I presided at a session of the American Association for State and Local History.

Aside from these meetings the Society staff also participated in other significant activities. Mr. Kivett attended a conference to study highway salvage problems as representative of the American Association for State and Local History. Dr. White has served as President of the Nebraska Library Association through the year and attended a workshop for state archivists. I have continued to serve as Secretary-Treasurer of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, on the Board of Directors of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute, and I am serving on the Nebraska Pony Express Centennial Committee and on the Civil War Centennial Commission Advisory Council.

The Society staff has remained at the same size, with twenty-six permanent employees, seven of whom are on a part-time basis. We had nine part-time employees working on an hourly basis on September 1.

More detailed reports of the three divisions of the Society, which render outstanding service under the competent leadership of Mr. Kivett, Dr. White, and Mrs. Winkelman, follow:

THE MUSEUM

The Museum operates with display responsibilities in three locations, the Society building, the Fort Robinson Museum, and our exhibit at the State Fair. Over 112,000 per-

sons visited these three areas, with marked increases in attendance at the State Fair and at Fort Robinson. In the building we had an attendance of 77,388 persons during the year.

A major exhibit project of the year was the expansion and completion of displays at the Fort Robinson Museum. Roger T. Grange, Jr., Curator of the Fort Robinson Museum, transferred to Lincoln during the winter months to work with the Lincoln staff in making exhibits for six new cases and in replacing or revising other displays. Over thirty outdoor interpretive wood signs were placed on the Fort Robinson grounds and other signs were constructed to mark more adequately the location of the Museum. A new period room depicting the Red Cloud Agency was also completed.

In addition, twenty-five cases or period settings were changed in the Lincoln Museum. A special exhibit in the second floor corridor during the winter was entitled "Heirlooms of the Past" and featured woven coverlets with spinning wheels and other tools for the making of the coverlets. Special exhibits were also constructed for the Christmas season. The State Fair exhibits included five period settings: a cowboy bunkhouse, the chemise of the 1920's and the 1950's, a millinery shop, an agricultural display, and washing equipment of yesteryear featuring a large cold mangle, hand-fashioned of wood.

One of the basic functions of the Museum is the preservation of the material objects used by the people of Nebraska and the Plains. The major source of materials continues to be the donations of interested individuals. During the past year 167 different donors provided items at the Lincoln Museum and at Fort Robinson. A lack of space for storage and display of large items such as farm equipment remains a serious problem. The tendency of museums to exhibit only the rare and unusual objects as their collections grow is being resisted in our displays, and our intention in developing our collections and in constructing exhibits is that the children of today and their descendants

will not be given the impression that Nebraska pioneers dined only from fine English china.

Research has continued during the year to further identify and document museum materials relevant to the white man in Nebraska. Research work in the archeological section of the Museum has continued also. One laboratory report dealing with archeological excavations in South Dakota was completed and submitted to the United States National Park Service. Work, which was done in co-operation with the National Park Service in 1951 and 1952, provided the materials for this report.

A problem in our archeological program is the backlog of reports that remain to be written. Much of the field work of the 1930's, a period when extensive work was carried on with the aid of federal relief workers, has not been adequately reported. For example, the Society's collections include a major part of all early Pawnee materials collected, but this collection has not been adequately studied and reported upon.

The field research program of the Society, started more than fifty years ago, partly as a result of the interest of J. Sterling Morton, was continued. The primary project of the season was a survey of proposed areas of the Interstate Highway between Omaha and Lincoln. A number of archeological finds were investigated by the Society. Two Indian burials in Red Willow County were exposed by road building activity. Associated materials suggest relationship of these remains to the Hopewell complex, not commonly known in Nebraska. Road building activity near Saltillo, Lancaster County, disturbed some burials. Investigation found the bodies to be those of whites, buried in wooden coffins secured by square nails. The grave pit had been filled with limestone slabs, and it seems likely that the burials may have been those of early trail travelers. Other occurrences of human remains were reported to us and investigated. A burial in the Fort Atkinson cemetery area, which now lies in a cultivated field, was uncovered and reported. It is believed that this burial may be that of Lt.

Gabriel Field who died in 1823 while serving on the Nebraska frontier.

The investigating of sites in the process of being destroyed is becoming an increasing problem, since we do not have adequate trained personnel to properly investigate all the sites about which we are notified.

During the summer we also carried on extensive test excavations at the reported historic Oto village site near the mouth of the Elkhorn River in Saunders County. It is believed that this village may have been occupied by the Oto from about 1775 to 1835 when Moses Merrill, an early missionary, persuaded the tribe to establish a village west of Bellevue. The tests this summer included excavations in houses, storage pits, and midden areas. It is expected that laboratory analysis of the specimens from the site will provide new information on the early material culture of the Oto.

THE LIBRARY

In the Library a number of developments of the year are designed to make information concerning the state's history more readily available. The most important is the publication of the *Index-Guide* to the *Publications*. This guide had been completed on cards for inclusion in our card index by the Librarian, and it was then decided to publish it to benefit a greater number of people. The index of the Plattsmouth *Nebraska Herald* 1865-1872, compiled by Mr. R. E. Dale, has been typed and is available in the Library. Mr. Dale has also completed indexing Andreas' *History of Nebraska*. The index is now being revised and compiled in book form for greater accessibility. It is proving a real boon because of the great amount of information on early Nebraska contained in this pioneer work.

In our newspaper department a major project has been undertaken in the filming of the back issues of the Lincoln newspapers through a co-operative arrangement

with the publishers. We are presently receiving 287 different newspapers in the library. During the past year we have been notified of the suspension of publication of nine papers in the state which we formerly received. As the tendency for newspapers to concentrate into larger units continues, the Society's back files of papers which have gone out of existence becomes increasingly important.

The reading room had 1,673 visitors, and 1,235 persons were assisted in the newspaper reading room for a total of 2,905 users. There were 495 mail queries and 118 telephone questions answered. Of the persons using the library in person, almost 1,000 had questions for the library staff and 343 of these required considerable research to find the answers. Orders totaling twelve reels of positive prints of microfilm were filled along with thirty-one contoura orders totaling 248 sheets and 410 facsimiles from microfilm. The increase in this kind of service is so great that it occupies an appreciable amount of staff time. Three hundred twenty photographs were loaned and over one hundred fifty photographic prints were sold. Among the publications acquiring our pictures for use were the *Album of American History*, the *Standard Encyclopedia*, *American Heritage*, and *Saturday Evening Post* as well as a number of trade periodicals and school text books. *The Lincoln State Journal* and the *Nebraska Farmer* have consulted our picture collections and other library facilities extensively in preparing for centennial editions in 1959. Among other users of our pictures was Mari Sandoz in her new book *The Cattlemen*. The University of Texas English Department purchased a number of Butcher photographs to use in an exhibit illustrating Hamlin Garland's *Main Travelled Roads*.

The library collections have continued to grow as shown by the following table:



Above—Holidays are Marked by Special Seasonal Displays in the Society's Museum.

Below—Member of Society's Field Party Excavates Horse Skull in Historic Oto Storage Pit.





Above—Staff Member Charles Ward at Work in the
Society's Bindery

An important step in the preservation of library materials is
the repair and binding of books and periodicals.

Below—Young Latvians Perform Folk Dances on the
Society's TV Program "Yesterday in Nebraska."



Category	1957	Additions	Total 1958
Volumes	35,828	1,078	36,906
Newspaper volumes.....	19,666	—714*	18,852
Maps	1,047	107	1,154
Microfilm	4,025	999	5,024
Pictures	60,541	1,325	61,866

* Number reduced by microfilm program.

During the year 397 donors, listed in the monthly *News Letter*, assisted in adding to our collections. Additions were also made from exchanges and purchase. In many cases important materials given us by donors are unobtainable from any other source. In other cases donors give the library material of considerable economic worth. A most important part of our collection is based on this expression of continuing interest by persons wishing to preserve the history of the state.

EDUCATION DIVISION

Again in 1957-58, after a season in which the Society did not have a television program because of construction of a new studio for station KUON, the Society's program "Yesterday in Nebraska" was on the air. Twenty-five programs were presented, designed primarily for a children's audience. Staff members, part-time employees, and volunteer workers prepared and gave the programs under the co-ordination of Mrs. Winkelman. In May the University of Nebraska Chapter of Alpha Epsilon Rho, national honorary radio-television fraternity, gave its "Best Show—1958" award to the Society's program.

In other programing the general pattern established through the last several years was followed. Auditorium programs, puppet shows, and guided tours were offered to groups coming to the Society building. Two new puppet

shows were developed: "The Pioneers' First Winter in Nebraska" and "The Pioneers' First Spring in Nebraska." Five different puppet shows were available for visitors and six different auditorium programs were prepared, one primarily for women's clubs, two for school groups, and three after-school programs for special groups such as Cub Scouts, Brownies, and Blue Birds. Two hundred and seventy-six tours, puppet shows, and programs were provided for different groups through the year.

The Society's auditorium and other facilities were used throughout the year by sixteen organizations for meetings and conferences. During the week of June 9-13 the Annual Law Enforcement Institute met in the Society's auditorium for the fourth consecutive year.

We continued to distribute our regular educational leaflets. Approximately ten thousand leaflets were distributed to teachers in Nebraska and throughout the United States. The Director of Education answered ninety-six letters asking for specific information about Nebraska.

Twenty members of the Lincoln Junior League gave us valuable volunteer assistance in our educational program. These volunteers worked at a variety of tasks, painting scenery, writing scripts, dressing puppets, and presenting plays in the puppet theatre. Volunteers also developed and presented auditorium programs, served as guides, helped in the production of the television programs, and assisted in the preparation of Museum exhibits and the rehabilitation of Museum objects.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Two years ago the report mentioned some specific problems that have concerned the Society through much of its existence. The encouragement of local historical societies and the need for an adequate program of historical markers are matters that have continually attracted the attention of the Society staff. Our program in both of

these areas has been strengthened, thanks, in part, to recent legislation.

In the report two years ago a third field of continuing concern was discussed, that of adequate field service. The need for more field service has often been voiced by the Society's Secretary since Clarence S. Paine expressed it more than fifty years ago. It continues to be the weakest part of our program. To strengthen this aspect of our work the Society asked in the budgets prepared in 1954 and 1956 for additional staff people to carry on field work, but these requests were not filled. The need has remained and has become even greater.

Our most pressing and critical need is for an additional archeologist. While two trained archeologists were on the staff for large portions of the time through the 1930's and immediately after World War II, we have had only one archeologist since 1949. Our chief archeologist has been the Director of the Museum, and in the last ten years increased emphasis upon the Museum has cut into the time which he can devote to archeology. This has been further aggravated by additional responsibilities for building operation devolving on him since we moved into the new building in 1953, and by additional responsibility for the Fort Robinson Museum since 1956. The amount of time that Mr. Kivett has free for archeological work has become less with each new responsibility. At the same time emergency archeological work caused by highway construction, conservation work and urban development, becomes more demanding every year. An important function of an additional archeologist on our staff would be to meet the need for a trained person to investigate archeological sites reported throughout the state that we are not now properly able to investigate. Such an archeologist would also help reduce the backlog of laboratory study and classification of the results of archeological field work that has been carried on by the Society, but which has not been completely evaluated and reported in the laboratory. The results of field work carried on with federal relief funds over twenty years

ago are still not fully reported. It is very necessary that these collections be studied and reported, thus making fruitful and effective the field work that has been done.

No less pressing is the need for an additional library cataloguer to take on some of the load of cataloguing now carried primarily by the Librarian. It has also been the aim of the Society, at least since it has been in the present building, to have a person who is in constant contact with our library collections who can devote a considerable portion of his time to work throughout the state. His task would be to help local historical organizations, to stimulate historical interest throughout the state, and, at the same time, to examine and solicit collections which will further fulfill our mission as the depository for public and private records of the state. The continuing growth of our library and its constantly expanding work load make it necessary to increase the staff in order that more time and attention can be given to this very important function.

Another long expressed need of the Society should be mentioned again. The committee appointed to make recommendations for the Territorial Centennial suggested that the Society should set aside \$1000 a year from 1954 to 1967, between the territorial and the state centennials, for research and publication of monographs on Nebraska's history. This program has not been implemented to the present, and the need for the Historical Society to properly prepare for the forthcoming state centennial by suitable publications is becoming an increasingly pressing problem.

To carry on the program of the Society for the next biennium at the present level, and to add an additional archeologist, a library cataloguer, and an additional artist, the Society is asking for an appropriation of \$312,000 for the Society and of \$29,000 for Fort Robinson. With this support we can confidently expect to continue the present work of the Society and to expand it in the critically needed areas indicated.